

CHRISTIAN USE OF MARIJUANA

(Church Doctrine report, A&P 2021, p. 290–91, 49)

On the account of legalization of marijuana, Overture No. 8, 2008 asks the church “to prepare a short statement expressing the church’s opposition to the recreational use of marijuana as harmful to individuals, society and inappropriate for Christians particularly regardless of its legalization, together with the affirmation of the medical use of marijuana for certain medical treatments.” In preparing a response, the committee came to decide that it would be more helpful if we broadened the scope from marijuana to cannabis and cannabinoid products. This thought was based on an observation that Canadian society is being opened to many cannabinoid products that are produced from wider sources including marijuana.

Statement on the Christian Use of Cannabis

Concerning the use of cannabis, we believe it is more helpful to provide questions for Christian discipleship rather than moral proscriptions on behaviour.

With the legalization of cannabis in Canada it is important to note that because an act is legal does not necessarily mean it is beneficial for anyone. Especially for youth and young adults under the age of 25, there is strong clinical evidence that cannabis can harm brain development.

There are different reasons for using cannabis. If cannabis has been prescribed by a physician, a non-inhaled form should be sought since smoking is a proven health risk. When taken as a therapeutically dispensed drug, cannabis is the same as any other prescribed medicine and should be taken as prescribed, with the necessary precautions to minimize risks associated with its consumption.

The Bible does not speak about cannabis directly. Nonetheless, other scriptural and theological references can be used to guide Christian discernment. The use of alcohol is the nearest parallel to cannabis in the Bible. They are similar as both are mind-altering substances that can impact the way we engage with each other and society. The intoxicating effects they can have, however, differ. At this point, researchers are still in the process of determining how to measure cannabis-induced impairment.

Christians have held fluctuating opinions about alcohol and have found in scripture both endorsements for prohibition (Ephesians 5:18) and for moderate drinking (1 Timothy 5:23), while also denouncing drunkenness. In 1976, the Committee on Church Doctrine reaffirmed a statement on alcohol that rested on the formula of Liberty, License and Love:

Liberty: the Christian is free to receive alcoholic beverages as a good gift of God to be used temperately and with thanksgiving.

License: the Christian is not free to be immoderate or drunken in the use of alcoholic beverages.

Love: the Christian must recognize that he (sic) is required to love himself and his neighbour as himself and therefore his freedom to use alcohol is restricted by the necessity of exercising responsibility to enhance as much as possible his own life and that of his neighbour.

We believe that Liberty, License and Love can also be used to guide a Christian’s use of cannabis. Christians have the free-will to receive cannabis as a good gift of God and use it temperately with thanksgiving. However, as Liberty, License and Love states, Christians are not free to be immoderate or negatively impaired. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul twice quotes the Corinthian slogan “all things are lawful for me” but adds the caveats that not all things are beneficial and not all things build up (1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23). Although an action or substance might be permissible – legally, morally, religiously – that does not mean it is helpful in our discipleship to Christ or in the building up of God’s Kingdom.

Christians who consider using cannabis must first ask themselves:

- Do my actions in consuming cannabis cause myself or others harm or risk of harm?
- When consuming cannabis, am I able to act in ways that reflect the character of Christ?
- When under the effects of cannabis, will I be able to continue to fulfill my calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

There will be instances when the answer to these questions may be “yes”, especially if cannabis has been prescribed for health reasons. While each situation must be discerned prayerfully, it may be harder to say “yes” in the case of

casual, recreational use. We express our disapproval of cannabis use among young people under the age of 25 because cannabis causes harm to both their brain development and Christian discipleship. For all others, we would say, in accordance with the statement on alcohol: Christians must recognize that we are required to love God, ourselves and our neighbour as ourselves and therefore our freedom to use cannabis is restricted by the necessity of exercising responsibility to demonstrate that love in our choices and actions.

We recognize that, at this time, it is too soon to know the full impacts of the legalization of cannabis. Nonetheless, adhering to Christ's command to love will guide us through the moral ambiguities to come. And we remind the Church to love one another, particularly those who will come to differing conclusions about cannabis. The gospel is preached, not by pointing fingers but by lending a hand. We trust each Christian to make their decisions about cannabis prayerfully, guided by the Holy Spirit and with the aim of furthering God's mission.