

Should Christians Support The Legalization of Marijuana?

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The name marijuana is a Mexican slang for cannabis. It is a combination of two Spanish names *Maria* (Mary) and *Juana* (Jane). There are as many as 200 slang terms used for marijuana? Some of the more common names used are ganja, pot, cannabis, weed, grass, herb, hash and Mary Jane.

The call to legalize marijuana is coming from multiple corners and the voices are becoming increasingly strident. The reasons being advanced for its legalization need to be carefully examined:

1. God made the various seeds and herbs (cannabis included) for use for food, medicine and enjoyment (Gen. 1:12, 29-31)

The world of nature has undergone some radical changes since the original creation recorded in Genesis chapter one. Not all seeds or herbs are edible. Some are downright poisonous (e.g. some varieties of mushroom). We must exercise wisdom and discernment in the seeds / plants we use and how we use them.

Further, we should not assume that a herb is useful only if it can be ingested or smoked. For example, the hemp plant which is genetically related to marijuana is extremely useful and has been used to make clothing, rope, sails etc.



2. The priests in the Old Testament used marijuana

There is the view that the Hebrew word *qaneh-bosem* translated “sweet calamus” in Exodus 30:23 (KJV) refer to marijuana, or, more specifically, hemp. The word *qaneh* means a stalk, a reed, or a water-plant and the word *bosem* means “sweet smelling”. Sometimes the two words together are translated “aromatic cane,” “scented cane,” or “sweet-smelling cane,” or “fragrant calamus.” The word *cannabis* comes from the Greek word *kannabis*. There is no compelling reason to believe that there is any connection between the Hebrew word *qaneh-bosem* and the Greek word *kannabis*. This is further supported by the clear Scriptural teaching that those coming into the presence of the Lord must be sober, not drunk or high. In Leviticus 10:9 the following commandment was given to Aaron, the High Priest, and his successors: “Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.”

3. Marijuana has tremendous medicinal properties

The medicinal benefits of marijuana need to be explored. If mankind can benefit in some way, then, why not? But even in such cases dosage needs to be measured or controlled by the medical profession to avoid the abuse that can easily take place through self-medication. We must not ignore the reality that some of those who push for the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes have a non-medical agenda in mind. Their real aim is to break down the social and political resistance to marijuana in general so that people become more open to its recreational use.

Significantly, marijuana was used as a medicinal drug by the Chinese as early as 2737 B.C. The then Emperor Shen Nung also known as *The Father of Chinese Medicine* wrote of its use in the treatment of rheumatism, malaria, gout, and other physical complaints. The socio-economic fall out from drugs in general and marijuana in particular, forced the Chinese government to ban marijuana use in 1985. A wise move indeed that undoubtedly is a factor in China's growth as an economic super power today.

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4. Since alcohol has been legalized marijuana should be too

Let us note also that approximately 25 per cent of deaths worldwide are attributable to alcohol. According to the World Health Organization, alcohol contributes to more than 200 diseases and injury-related illnesses. One can therefore argue if you have let one genie (alcohol) out of the bottle and it has created such havoc why should you proceed to let out a second one(marijuana)? It is important to keep in mind that marijuana is a gateway drug which often enough leads to the use of other harder drugs. Over 9 per cent of marijuana users will become addicted. The nation has to bear much of the cost of dealing with problems of drug addiction. As a small, developing nation with limited resources, are we willing to pay that price?

The church must wake up, become more informed, and make its voice heard on this important social issue.