



SHOULD CHRISTIANS SUPPORT MARIJUANA USE?

*A biblical response to the question of
legalization and consumption*

In 2014, the Barna Research Group conducted a study on marijuana legalization, revealing a key divide: while a majority of Americans may support legalization when given only a binary choice, most Christians oppose both the use of marijuana for recreational purposes and its legalization. Christians' concerns centered on three primary risks—health consequences, impaired driving, and addiction.

Over the past decade, as more states have experimented with legalization, have Christian perspectives evolved? One notable shift is that these legal changes have compelled the church to engage the issue with greater moral clarity. As John Piper observes, when the government deems a behavior illegal, churches may assume that it is morally off-limits without fully exploring biblical reasoning:

“If the state has regarded something as wrong or illegal, then the church hasn't had to work very hard to teach any deep roots for the conviction or any thorough biblical argumentation or any conviction-strengthening inspiration, because everybody just assumes that the behavior is out of bounds.”

While laws may change, biblical principles remain constant. Though the Bible does not explicitly address marijuana, its teachings provide a moral framework for evaluating its use.

The policy debate surrounding marijuana is more complex than a simple choice between full legalization and absolute prohibition. For instance, should someone face imprisonment solely for smoking a joint? Opposing incarceration does not have to mean endorsing the commercial sale of marijuana for recreational use. However, the conversation is often framed as though only one path exists. This issue demands a more nuanced discussion—one that thoughtfully considers both legal complexities and moral convictions.

Marijuana: Potency (THC)

In talking about marijuana, the focus here is on Delta-9 THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the main psychoactive component found in the marijuana plant.

Marijuana has changed in recent years in large part due to an industry strengthening the intensity of its potency or THC content. The “Woodstock Weed” from the 1970s contained roughly 1–3% THC. And that was just smoking the dry marijuana flower - there wasn't a retail market for liquid concentrates because vaping marijuana wouldn't come into the US market until the mid-2000s.

Today, the potency of marijuana dry flower has increased exponentially, now between 18-23% THC on average. There has also been an explosion in the levels of manufactured THC products, which in today's retail market include vapes, extracts, edibles, and concentrates that can range upwards of 90% THC and come in a variety of fruity flavors.

This is the result of industrialized, chemically altered marijuana products where the retail market fueled the increase in potency, accelerated by states experimenting with legalization for both medicinal and recreational use.

"Marijuana has been proven to be addictive, has many side effects, and can be harmful." Franklin Graham

¹ *Legalize it? A Majority of Christians Say No to Recreational Pot*, Barna Research Group, May 12, 2014.

Marijuana: Impact

The reality of the rise in THC potency fueled by a commercial retail market has exacerbated a host of consequences with marijuana use.

1. Marijuana use is causing harm. “There are several risk factors and negative health outcomes associated with cannabis use.” (Center for Disease Control). Some examples of health harms include:

- THC causes interference with brain development. “The human brain continues developing through age 25. Thus, marijuana use during adolescence and young adulthood may affect this development and can lead to impaired learning and memory by impacting how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions.” American Addiction Centers
- A variety of mental health concerns are associated with marijuana use. “I took care of a 15-year-old with a suicide attempt and acute psychosis from high-potency [marijuana] products... This is typically not a reversible process.” Dr. Beth Ebel, American Academy of Pediatrics
- “[THC] can have significant health effects on infants exposed in utero, on children who ingest marijuana accidentally, and on adolescents who smoke marijuana regularly.” - Dr. Sheryl Ryan, PA Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics

2. Marijuana can be addictive. It’s settled science that marijuana has addictive qualities.

- “Contrary to popular belief, marijuana is addictive. Research shows that one-in-six people who start using the drug before the age of 18 can become addicted; one-in-ten adults who use the drug can become addicted.” - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Nearly a third of all users ages 18 and up have reported symptoms of cannabis use disorder. (NY Times, Columbia University)

- “It is physically and psychologically addictive.” Caron Treatment Centers

The dangers of abuse and addiction are known all too well by many families who have witnessed it first-hand.

- **“He will never recover. Our family is broken, and we will never be made whole.”** Colorado Democratic State Rep. Judy Amabile about how marijuana ruined her son's life. “We couldn't stop the use. Everywhere he went, this product was available and in greater and greater concentrations and potency. After his first psychotic break, we sent him to a hospital where he spent six weeks, and it cost us \$60,000. And it didn't fix it. They couldn't fix it.”
- **“This took my child.”** Laura Stack’s son was addicted to high-potency marijuana, which led to his death from jumping off a six-story building. “I just have so many regrets. And so much I didn’t know. So much we could have done if we'd have known.”
- **“If he had never started using cannabis, he might still be here.”** Kristin Gilliland, a neurosurgeon whose son started using marijuana at 14, was diagnosed with schizophrenia and died of a drug overdose at age 22.

3. Marijuana can be intoxicating. The intention of using marijuana is to achieve some level of impact on your physical and mental control. A one-time use of marijuana can lead to harmful consequences, and the risks increase depending on the age of the user and the potency of the product.

- “Acute marijuana intoxication occurs when a person experiences immediate adverse effects from marijuana. This typically occurs after smoking or ingesting marijuana products, and can occur at all ages, and to naïve and chronic users.” - Children’s Hospital Colorado
- “Weed-induced psychosis” - a loss of touch with reality - is now being used in the criminal justice system as a categorical reason for the conviction

of horrible crimes. “I wish I had known more about the dangers of marijuana. Had I known, I would never have smoked it that night or at all.” Bryn Spejcher, who was convicted of involuntary manslaughter as a result of what a psychologist concluded was having “lost touch with reality due to highly potent marijuana.”

Marijuana: A Biblical Perspective

Three Biblical principles can help determine a proper perspective on marijuana use and its legal status.

1. The Bible states opposition to intoxication.

- *Oppose drunkenness* (Rom 13:13)

The Bible offers a reason why we oppose drunkenness. As a Christian, your body is sacred as the Holy Spirit lives within you - a temple for God to dwell in (1 Cor 6:19-20). The scriptures give warning that the unrighteous - including drunkards - will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21, 1 Cor 6:10).

“There is nothing in scripture to justify trying to escape reality.” Al Mohler

Biblical references to drunkenness draw attention to the use of wine and alcohol. Admittedly, marijuana is not directly referenced in Scripture. While we should not simply take verses on alcoholism and insert marijuana, you can look to the basis of why

drunkenness is wrong and find application to marijuana use.

When you use marijuana, it will have some level of influence on your physical and mental control. And yes, especially using the industrialized manufactured marijuana of today, marijuana use can be addictive and intoxicating.

“Ultimately my body is not my own and I want to be a good steward of what God has given me... We know that God’s design is for our best as well so as we take good care of ourselves we can also trust that this is in our best interests.” - Dr. Eric Hussar

Galatians 5 states how being filled with the Spirit leads to more self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Marijuana use, particularly with higher THC potency products, leads to a significant “high” and a degree of intoxication.

“God forbids drunkenness because it diminishes physical control, it diminishes our cognitive abilities, and it diminishes our judgment. A THC high does all three of those things. We don’t have to make the case to replace all references to alcohol with pot and just read the prohibitions off. I think we can make a more rigorous case and say, ‘Why is drunkenness wrong?’ and what we find is the same things happen when a person is high on THC.” - Todd Miles ²

2. The Bible calls us to be of sound mind.

- *Be sober-minded* (1 Peter 5:8)

There is encouragement in the Scriptures toward clear thinking and refraining from substances that can cloud your judgment. Christians are called to be mature thinkers (1 Cor 14:20).

² *Cannabis and the Christian: What the Bible Says about Marijuana*, Todd Miles,

“Marijuana can be an escape. It can become a psychological crutch. And marijuana use as an escape can bring us further away from relying upon and trusting in God who can meet all of our needs.” Sean McDowell

At the creation of the earth, God brought forth all plants and vegetation. While a plant can serve various purposes, they can also cause harm, such as poison ivy. If a child is outside and asks, “Can I eat it?” you’ll want to know what ‘it’ is. Is it a handful of strawberries from your garden or is it a handful of poisonous pokeberries from the woods?

Marijuana has become more than just a plant. Today’s industry has genetically modified products with chemists trying to create as potent marijuana products as possible. The higher the potency, the greater the capacity to experience a stronger “high” and cloud judgment.

“You can’t have a joint without having your mind altered.” John MacArthur

In 1 Corinthians 14, God calls us not to be children in our thinking. No specific age parameters are given in this call for mature thinkers.

While one’s age can be a factor in the severity of marijuana’s impact on the user, it can harm anyone. There is evidence on the health effects of marijuana use on older adults that suggests a greater frequency of mental health issues, as well as cognitive impairment and accidents.

“In Romans 12:2, we are given the appeal not to conform to the world but to be transformed

by renewing our minds. While not explicitly mentioning marijuana, it is essential to keep in mind that drug use will impair one’s ability to determine what is morally right and pleasing to God.” - Virgil Walker

“Don’t become an experienced sinner to learn the folly of sin. Be willing to be an inexperienced baby when it comes to sharing in mind-clouding drugs. Be ruthlessly clear-headed. Let the herd stampede over the cliff without you. Use your mind to warn them, not join them.” John Piper

3. The Bible calls us to love our neighbor.

- *Love does no wrong to a neighbor* (Romans 13:10a)

In the last twenty years, based on national survey data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the use of marijuana has doubled and the daily use of marijuana has quadrupled. Daily use is an indicator of marijuana addiction, and this high frequency of marijuana use has now overtaken daily alcohol use in the United States and done so at an alarming rate.³

Marijuana use is at an all-time high, and condoning its use has led to legalizing an industry commercializing high-potency marijuana products that have exacerbated many societal harms.

“Society should not condone harmful behaviors including the promotion and use of hallucinogenic, potentially addicting drugs,

³ Daily marijuana use outpaces daily drinking in the US, a new study says, Associated Press, May 22, 2024.

like marijuana. Scripture cautions us to not be mastered by anything (1 Cor. 6:12), for when anything or person other than God is master, we are guilty of idolatry (Deut. 20:3) in not loving God with all of our heart, mind, body, and soul (Mark 12:29-30).” Christian Medical and Dental Association

The personal use of marijuana can impact others in a variety of ways:

- **Safety Risks:** Groups like the American Automobile Association (AAA) and law enforcement agencies like the Fraternal Order of Police and PA Chiefs of Police Association oppose marijuana legalization for recreational use due to various factors including evidence in states experimenting with this policy experiencing more DUIs, more traffic accidents & fatalities, and more workplace positivity rates for marijuana.
 - “Intoxicating cannabis products, including marijuana, can have a major impact on safety at work and have been proven to slow reaction time, impact memory and impair skills essential to driving. State legalization of the drug creates new challenges for employers.” - National Safety Council
 - Based on evidence in other states and data from the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety, Pennsylvania could expect **over 40 more traffic fatalities and over 1,000 more accidents every year** if marijuana is legalized for recreational use. In addition to the loss of life, the average cost of a fatal traffic accident in PA is \$14 million.
 - Workplace safety is also at risk. Quest Diagnostics found that marijuana positivity for drug tests increased 2.5 times in states where marijuana was legalized for non-medical sales. “Increases in positivity rates for marijuana in the general U.S. workforce were most striking in states that

have enacted recreational use statutes since 2016.”

- **Rise in Youth Use:** A 2023 study by Temple University found that adolescent and young adult use of marijuana increased after marijuana legalization for recreational use.
 - “More frequent use of marijuana that is many times as potent as strains common three decades ago is leading to more psychotic episodes, according to doctors and recent research.” More Teens Who Use Marijuana Are Suffering From Psychosis, Wall Street Journal
 - Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent for Detroit Public Schools Community District (Michigan’s largest school district): “Since the legalization of marijuana, our District has observed a distressing escalation in drug-related infractions.” From 2019 to 2021, their district recorded 289 drug-related incidents. It surged to 1,735 between 2021 and 2023. In the first four months of 2024, they experienced 745 infractions.
- **Harm in the womb:** Medical groups agree that there is a significant risk to pregnant mothers and their preborn children when using marijuana. These risks include low birth weight and stillbirth.

Along with health harms, you could also draw attention to the impact marijuana use may have on witnessing to others, as it may inhibit the ability to give a defense for Christ (1 Peter 3:15).

“[I] believe many Christians who are concerned with loving their neighbor (Mark 12:31) will change their opinion based on the evidence. If we truly 'seek the welfare of the city where [God has sent us] into exile' (Jer. 29:7), we'll continue to oppose the legalization—and normalization—of this dangerous drug.”
- Joe Carter

Marijuana: Federal vs State

A straightforward reason to oppose marijuana use can simply be because it's illegal. No matter what state you're from, you could argue that marijuana is currently classified as an illegal drug by federal law. "State authority has bounds because federal law is the highest law in the United States," says Melvin L. Otey.

Current Pennsylvania law permits the use of marijuana for medicinal use despite marijuana being federally classified as a Schedule 1 illegal drug. The legal status of marijuana presents a variety of questions to Christians: Should a Christian residing in PA be free to use marijuana for medicinal purposes? When visiting a state experimenting with the legal use of marijuana for recreational use, like New Jersey, should Christians be welcome to use marijuana for any purpose?

Let's take a closer look.

Marijuana: FAQs

The Barna Research group's study on marijuana led to finding three top reasons given in favor of marijuana legalization:

- 1) Good for the economy,
- 2) Not worse than alcohol or tobacco, and,
- 3) Medical benefits.

Here's a response to consider to each of these reasons.

1. Are the costs greater than any projected revenue?

The evidence from states experimenting with marijuana legalization shows Pennsylvania roads and workplaces would be more dangerous and more young people would be at higher risk of drug addiction by moving to the retail recreational use market.

Anti-Success: In Colorado, one estimate shows a \$4.50 cost for every dollar in tax revenue from the retail sale of marijuana. (*Economic and Social Costs of Legalized Marijuana, Centennial Institute*) These costs are seen in health care, traffic, crime, housing, education, workplace safety, and homelessness.

"For Pennsylvania, any short-term revenue increase will be swallowed up by the serious long-term social and economic effects of legalization." - Dr. Tom Copeland, Centennial Institute

Anti-Science: The mountain of evidence showing significant health problems with marijuana use is why the consensus from mainstream health organizations is opposition to legalization for recreational purposes, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Medical Association,

American Psychiatric Association, American Society for Addiction Medicine, Association for Addiction Professionals, and the Christian Medical and Dental Association.

“Recreational marijuana use and legalization have profound social implications, including associated increases in the following: accidents and death, access to marijuana for minors, crime, drug use and abuse, black market activity, and environmental problems. Low-income populations may be affected at a higher incidence than others. The cost to society of recreational marijuana legalization is greater than tax revenues produced from its sales.” - Christian Medical and Dental Association

2. If we experiment with the recreational use of marijuana, where does it stop? Why not legalize all drugs?

The alcohol and tobacco industries have a history of targeting children with their products to create lifetime users. Both industries are investing millions in marijuana and using the same tactics to make more addicted weed users. As High Times shared, “Cannabis is the future while tobacco is increasingly a relic of the past.”

In 2020, voters in the state of Oregon passed a ballot measure that essentially legalized all drugs, including cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine. The plan was a disaster. One report found Oregon saw a 1500% rise in overdose deaths since the pandemic, the highest in the country. The many ensuing problems resulted in Oregon state policymakers rolling back the measure in 2024.

The push for legalizing other drugs continues in states experimenting with marijuana legalization. For example, in 2022, Colorado legalized psychedelic drugs (“magic mushrooms”).

The evidence around more drug use appears contrary to goals like engaged parenting, thriving workplaces, and gospel-spreading churches.

“Commercialized sale of what science proves to be a harmful and addictive drug should be opposed.” - Scott Bohn, PA Chiefs of Police Association

3. What if you are using marijuana with a medical card?

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul advises Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach and frequent ailments. Can the same be said of marijuana?

There are several factors to consider with marijuana use:

- There is no recommended dosage of marijuana for medicinal purposes. A doctor is not prescribing a dosage of marijuana in the same way you’re taking Advil for pain medication.
 - Pennsylvania permits doctors to approve tens of thousands of medical-use cards, making \$150-\$200 for each patient, allowing the cardholder to purchase whatever they want from a medical dispensary. This is a broken system that prioritizes profits over public health.
- There is no FDA-approved broad application for marijuana to treat an array of diseases or conditions. The FDA has approved one marijuana-derived drug product: Epidiolex (cannabidiol), and three synthetic marijuana-related drug products: Marinol (dronabinol), Syndros (dronabinol), and Cesamet (nabilone). There are no other marijuana-derived or cannabidiol (CBD) products that are FDA-approved, including no approved use to combat opioid addiction or to relieve depression and anxiety.

⁴ Some doctors issuing thousands of medical marijuana cards have disciplinary history involving drugs, WTAE, May 6, 2024.

- Medical programs are being abused due to areas reflecting a more recreational use market. The marijuana industry presents the same substances and products no matter the purpose of its use, whether it's medical or recreational. For example, here's a list of marijuana vapes at one medical dispensary in Pennsylvania: Brr Berry (72% THC), Lemon Scoop (81% THC), Strawberry Apple (77% THC), Watermelon (77% THC), Cherry Kryptonite (72% THC), Mac and Cheese (73% THC), Banana Muffins Nectar (73% THC), and Raspberry Rain (85% THC). These high-potency flavored products are neither FDA-approved nor medically necessary.
- There is no standard test or limit for marijuana intoxication.

There is a significant difference between a medical-use market and a recreational-use market. Parents have pointed to the “in-your-face” marijuana culture, with billboards and social media posts, that comes with legalizing today's industrialized, high-potency THC for recreational use - and setting the state up for more tax revenue by more addictive use. In a state experimenting with the recreational use of marijuana like Colorado, there are more pot shops than Starbucks and McDonalds combined.

In the New York Times article *As America's Marijuana Use Grows, So Do The Risks*, a result of the experiment with state marijuana laws is a burgeoning industry that uses “medical” to advance a business plan that reflects the recreational use of this drug:

“Lawmakers and voters began legalizing medical marijuana state by state in the 1990s... The commercial industry that followed touted its products as beneficial, while focusing not on developing marijuana's medical uses but on engineering a quicker, more intense high. The marijuana smoked in the 1990s, typically containing about 5 percent THC, was transformed. Companies turned out

inconspicuous vape pens, fast-acting edibles, pre-rolled joints infused with potency enhancers and concentrates with as much as 99 percent THC.”

Additional medical concerns remain on marijuana use, particularly on the long-term effects: “State legalization of 'medical marijuana' has not been accompanied by the rigorous scientific approval process with regulations for dosing, production, packaging and monitoring that have made FDA-approved medications safe and effective.” - Christian Medical & Dental Associations

“The use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense.” - Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2291

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If we love God and our neighbor, we should care about the laws and policies passed in our state and community. This compassion should flow into our influence on policymakers, many of whom may not have a proper understanding of what marijuana use can lead to.

Marijuana: Stories

“The legalization of recreational marijuana will **take a human toll** in Pennsylvania. We should never be willing to sell out lives in exchange for new tax dollars.” - **PA State Senator Scott Martin**

My son died of a drug overdose. His drug use started with marijuana. PA State Rep. Brian Smith

Before being elected to serve as a State Representative, Brian Smith’s rural PA community proved to be a great source of strength in his role as a father, leading his family through the great tragedy of losing a son to a drug overdose.

It started with his son’s habitual use of marijuana. Rep. Smith and his wife did what they could to stop him from using. When he turned 18, his son started using more drugs and eventually led to a fatal drug overdose.

On the policy question of legalization for recreational use, Rep. Smith is understandably a hard no. “There are many outcomes from the usage of marijuana that are not good. If people would just look at the information and understand that...It’s not worth the negatives.”

“The breakdown of families remains one of the most pressing challenges facing Black communities.” Judge Cheryl Allen, the first Black woman on the Pennsylvania Superior Court. She previously served on the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas and as a trial judge in both Family and Criminal Court.

“As a juvenile court judge, I saw how substance abuse was consistently the primary reason children entered the foster care system. Young

people who use marijuana are more likely to struggle academically, cognitively and socially. These impacts don't discriminate based on who sold the drugs.

Our legislators need to stop pretending that creating new categories of drug dealers — whether state-employed or private entrepreneurs — will somehow heal communities harmed by the war on drugs. Instead, we should focus on real solutions: strengthening families, improving education, expanding treatment options and creating genuine economic opportunities that don't depend on promoting addiction.

The truth is, no amount of tax revenue or business licenses can justify expanding an industry whose success relies on increasing drug dependency in our communities. Our government's role should be to help citizens thrive, not to profit from their addiction.”

Continue the conversation: Find help in engaging this discussion from the informational website TruthOnWeed.com.

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Additional Resources

- *Cannabis and the Christian: What the Bible Says about Marijuana*, Todd Miles
- *The Impact of THC on Our Children: A Parent's Worst Nightmare*, Laura Stack
- *Public Policy Statements on Marijuana*, Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA)



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