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"Mary Jane" Is Making a Comeback

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As of July 1, 2021, it is now legal to grow (4 plants), possess (up to 1 oz.; more than 1 oz. but less than a pound is a \$25 fine) and use (in private) marijuana and "gift" it to others. A plethora of other laws, restrictions and conditions are attached, the violation of which leads to escalating fines and charges including federal offenses.

But the real consequences are coming in 2024 when retail sales will become legalized. Since we have a Tobacco Hut 50 yards from our building, Mike McKinsey has researched what has happened in other areas close to marijuana retail outlets. Our parking lot is likely to become a marijuana hangout with all the loveliness that usually comes with druggies smoking dope.

This article does not address the political process and reasoning that has resulted in legalizing marijuana in Virginia (the first southern state to do so, it's proponents crow), though I would simply label it as deplorable and short-sighted. The more important issue is how many Christians will be persuaded to use the drug because of its ebbing social and legal stigma.

First, the various destructive and debilitating effects of marijuana cannot be ignored. Here is some basic information from the CDC website:

"Marijuana use directly affects brain function – specifically the parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning, attention, decision-making, coordination, emotions, and reaction time. "Recent marijuana use (within 24 hours) in youth and adults has an immediate impact on thinking, attention, memory, coordination, movement, and time perception. Marijuana affects brain development. Developing brains, such as those in babies, children, and teenagers, are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of marijuana and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) ... Using marijuana before age 18 may affect how the brain builds connections for functions like attention, memory, and learning ... [and the] effects may last a long time or even be permanent ...".

Further, "Marijuana can make the heart beat faster and can make blood pressure higher immediately after use. It could also lead to increased risk of stroke, heart disease, and other vascular diseases ... Marijuana smoke also delivers many of the same substances ... found in tobacco smoke – these substances are harmful to the lungs and cardiovascular system."

Regarding addiction to marijuana, the CDC states: "Some people who use marijuana will develop marijuana use disorder [i.e., addiction, jj], meaning that they are unable to stop using marijuana even though it's causing health and social problems ... One study estimated that approximately 3 in 10 people who use marijuana have marijuana use disorder."

As to the relative strength of THC in marijuana, the CDC notes: "Some [addicted] people may need to use more and more marijuana or greater concentrations of marijuana over time to experience a 'high.' The greater the amount of THC (the concentration or strength), the stronger the effects the marijuana may have on the brain. *The amount of THC in marijuana has increased over the past few decades* (emphasis jj). In a study of cannabis research ... the average delta-9 THC (the main form of THC in the cannabis plant) concentration almost doubled, from 9% in 2008 to 17% in 2017. *Products from dispensaries often offer much higher concentrations than seen in this study* (emphasis jj). In a study of products [from] online dispensaries in 3 states with legal non-medical adult marijuana use, the average THC concentration was 22%, with a range of 0% to 45%. In addition, some methods of using marijuana (for example, dabbing and vaping concentrates) may deliver very high levels of THC to the user."

In spite of the obvious issues related to ingesting or inhaling such drugs, why are people so drawn to marijuana? WEBMD, under the heading of "You Can Get High," says, "It's why most people try marijuana. The main

psychoactive ingredient, THC, stimulates the part of your brain that responds to pleasure, like food and sex. That unleashes a chemical called dopamine, which give you a euphoric, relaxed feeling.”

Our annual theme at Centreville in 2019 was “That Your Joy May Be Full.” In my research I never encountered a passage that equated joy with infusing your body/mind with drugs. To be fair, I would not assert that the Bible must specify every activity in which dopamine might be stimulated. No doubt, roller coasters, Hershey’s chocolate, bungee jumping and your team winning the national championship also release dopamine. But, seriously, should we place marijuana use in the same category as these?

Is it a Scriptural notion to turn to drugs to ease an anxious, fretful or stressed frame of mind? “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6). Note:

1) There are no destructive side-effects of prayer. It won’t warp your brain or impair driving; it is free; it is legal (at least for now); it is available anywhere. When Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed for preaching the gospel, they didn’t smoke a joint to manage their angst. Instead, “at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Ac 16:25). Believers lean on God and use their misfortunes to minister to others who are likewise in pain.

2) Was anyone under more stress than Jesus in Gethsemane, from which vantage point He could see “a great multitude with swords and clubs” crossing the Kidron Valley to arrest Him (Mt 26:47)? With His sweat “like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Lk 22:44), Jesus didn’t turn to drugs but prostrated Himself in prayer. Later, when His suffering was about to intensify, He *refused a drug* which might have dulled His pain (Mt 27:34). McNeile, however, offers this: “The refusal of the narcotic cannot have been for the sake of bearing additional physical pain, but because a voluntary death for others required full exercise of will and consciousness to the end” (*Matthew*, Pope 1017).

In a similar way, we are to serve God with clarity and self-control, and the idea of impairing ourselves with drugs for recreational euphoria is at odds with the frame of mind that produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

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