

Bio:

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Andy is a full time youth pastor of Kings Church Horsham where he is a regular speaker. Andy is passionate about seeing people come to know Jesus for themselves. He loves reading the bible and is committed to faithfully preaching the "whole council of God" even when it is unpopular in today's politically correct society.



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Is Smoking a Sin?

Examining the Bible for an Answer

Fundamental Assumptions

There are some basic assumptions that I am making about you the reader and your beliefs.

Assumption 1 – You love Jesus

My fundamental assumption is that you have committed your life to Jesus, you have asked him to forgive your sins, that you love him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength¹ and that it is your greatest desire to live your life for him, to please him by living a life worthy of his name, to fulfil his commands to you – To love God² & Love People³ and to go and share Jesus with everyone⁴ you can either in word or deed.

Assumption 2 – You believe in the inerrancy of the bible

I assume too that you believe that the bible is the inspired word of God and that it is, in its entirety, for our good, for our instruction, to help us live great lives for God⁵.

These assumptions allow us to read the bible and form our decisions on the basis of scripture. We can then avoid offence as we are simply professing the teaching of the bible and thus the word of God however “unpopular” that may be. We can avoid including our own personal preferences where the bible has clear instruction on what we must do even when that seems contrary to what we, or society and our culture, want.

Introduction

Smoking has, in recent years, become socially unacceptable primarily because of the health risks both to the smoker and those around them through passive smoking. These facts alone have caused many people, both Christians and non-Christians to quit.

In general I think that there is a sufficient weight of scientific evidence to tell us that smoking is addictive, that it contains a poisonous drug including nicotine⁶ and causes cancer. So much so that cigarettes in the UK, America and in most of the world carry a large warning, saying they KILL! This is because in the UK, smoking kills five times more people than road accidents, overdoses, murder, suicide and HIV all put together⁷. Regardless of the question of sin I would ask any Christ Follower – “Why would you want to?” Surely you can see that any pleasure derived from smoking is far outweighed by the risks.

That said Smoking is something that still attracts many young people and in the UK 20% of 15 year olds are regular smokers: 16% of boys and 24% of girls⁸. There are around 10 million smokers in the UK and is highest among 20-24 year olds.

Smoking is something is often openly disapproved of in the church but there is never a clear reason as to why – In my experience anyway. One is often quoted the scripture that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit⁹, and smoking is bad for you so there is your biblical reason, but in reality no real discussion is encouraged or even suggested.

It is my intention to investigate a little further this topic present some areas for thought and discussion.

I cannot find any specific passages of scripture that refer to smoking cigarettes directly and so I conclude that smoking is not explicitly sinful in that there is no direct commandment saying “thou shall not smoke”. However, I do believe the bible speaks to all aspects of life and so we need to dig a little deeper into the instructions of scripture to unearth God's heart and view on this topic. With these facts in mind we should begin to investigate what the bible says to determine if smoking is in itself sinful, or if there some other moral or biblical reason not to do it.

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Addiction

The Royal College of Physicians produced a report in 2002 stating “On present evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that nicotine delivered through tobacco smoke should be regarded as an addictive drug, and tobacco use as the means of self-administration”¹⁰ It is clear that prolonged smoking will result in addiction although the length of time for this to occur will depend on the individual. The fact however is that it WILL result in addiction.

The bible is clear that we are not mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 6:12 (English Standard Version)

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything.

I would also suggest that this does not simply apply to habitually smoking cigarettes. Addiction to anything be it food, pornography, drugs or caffeine. Whilst one could argue that it is saying that I can smoke, it is lawful for me, it would seem that its addictive nature would cause to be enslaved to it and therefore as a true Christ follower we must not be enslaved by anything.

Romans 6:16 (English Standard Version)

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

If we become addicted to anything, smoking, food, Caffeine, whatever it is then we are a slave to it.

2 Peter 2:19 (English Standard Version)

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

As a true Chris follower can you honestly say that as addict you are walking in obedience to the word of God and the example of Christ when you are mastered by something else? Is it glorifying to God when you are overcome and mastered by the addiction to nicotine?

1 Corinthians 10:31 (English Standard Version)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Addiction of any sort is not glorifying to God as we have allowed our body to be controlled by another master other than God through his Holy Spirit.

Deceit

Particularly with teenagers deceit often plays a big role in the smoking process although not always.

The bible tells us that anything not done in faith is sin¹¹. So are you smoking in faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for¹². Are you hoping this is not sinful, or are you sure of it? If you are sure of it then why would you conceal the fact that you are smoking from your parents, your friends or youth leaders?

The bible also tells us that we can be sure our sins will find us out¹³. If you feel uncomfortable when you are smoking, you are concerned that someone might see you then you need to consider why this is. It may be you think people will judge you or condemn you. I guess the question to ask yourself is: "Why is that"? I am not here to say how they "Should" respond, but it is worth considering that the reason they think as they do is because they believe smoking to be wrong and so, as with anything, we should at least examine why they might think that. Whilst their response may well be as ungodly as the thing they are condemning, there may be a kernel of truth in there somewhere.

Rebellion

Again with teenagers rebellion often plays a big role in the smoking process. However, rebellion is not limited to teenagers!

Rebellion is simply pride! It is the raising of oneself over parents, over authority and ultimately over God. Pride was the sin of the devil, the sin of Adam and is the sin of rebellion. Are you putting what you consider to be pleasure over the life God has given you? Have you ever considered that God created you for his pleasure¹⁴ not the other way around! We know that we need Gods grace in all of this. As I write this I am asking God to fill me with his grace that I might speak out the truth, yet reflect Gods grace towards you. However, the bible is clear that God will oppose the proud, but gives grace to the humble¹⁵. Can I suggest that you humble yourself as you read this, as you examine your bible and look for the truth in God's word because if I am right, and I believe I am, then you will need a truck load of God's grace to be released from this cigarette addiction.

Health

I believe that as a true Christ follower that we should avoid anything that deliberately brings unnecessary harm to our bodies.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (English Standard Version)

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

The bible clearly tells us to cleans our body from every defilement¹⁶. I believe given the scientific evidence against smoking that as Christ Followers we cannot be deliberately contaminating our body, killing it in fact, and at the same time think we are being holy and God like. Have you ever looked into what is in a cigarette? Or what the smoke that it creates contains:

The three main components of cigarette smoke are:

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- Nicotine - a fast-acting drug that makes smokers crave cigarettes
- Carbon monoxide - a poisonous gas that reduces oxygen in the blood stream causing breathing problems
- Tar - a sticky black residue made up of thousands of chemicals that stays in the smoker's lungs and causes cancer.

Nicotine is very addictive. But it is the tar and other chemicals in cigarettes that cause cancer. Other harmful chemicals found in cigarettes include:

- Acetone - used in nail varnish remover
- Ammonia - used in dry cleaning fluids
- Arsenic - used in pest control and insecticides
- Benzene - used in chemical manufacture
- Cadmium - used in batteries
- Formaldehyde - used to preserve dead bodies.

Over 4,000 chemical compounds, present as either gases or as tiny particles¹⁷.

The bible is clear that we should not simply look after our bodies but we should love them¹⁸! Now as I look at myself in the mirror in the morning I find this increasingly difficult, but I should love my body. The bible simply expects that we will. Paul tells us that our bodies are members of Christ¹⁹ and that we should not even defile them by joining them with a prostitute. In the same way I believe that we should not defile them by deliberately filling them with poisonous, harmful and addictive substances. In short we are deliberately destroying the body God gave us.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (English Standard Version)

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple

We are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. I put it to you that killing that body, risking killing it prematurely, filling it with harmful, poisonous and addictive substances is as far from presenting something that is holy and acceptable to God as you could get. As we look back into the Old Testament we see God's standards for sacrifices we see that they had to be "without blemish²⁰". Filling your lungs with tar, and some 4000 other chemicals is hardly presenting your body without blemish.

My Choice, My Pleasure

People often respond to the question "Is smoking a sin" by telling me that they "enjoy it" as if that makes it all OK. Because it is pleasurable then that makes it OK. The bible tells us that if we love pleasure we will be a poor man²¹ and this is certainly true if you smoke as I look at the prices of cigarettes in the UK. But this again comes back to our point that we were made for God's pleasure and whilst he wants us to enjoy life in all its fullness, his good pleasure must come before ours. We are told in 2 Timothy 3 that as we approach the time of Jesus returning that people will become lovers of pleasure rather than God, they will be lovers of themselves, they will be proud and hold their own views and opinions over those of God, they will even look godly, but will deny the gospel has power²².

You must remember that you are not your own, but you were purchased at great cost²³. Jesus has paid the price for you when he died on the cross. He paid the ultimate price for you, not only to rescue from the eternity without God, but so you might be healed²⁴. As Jesus suffered the most horrific death for your salvation and your health why would you want to cheapen that by deliberately making yourself unhealthy by smoking?

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (English Standard Version)

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

This is the verse that I mentioned right at the beginning as being the one everyone seems to wheel out when asked this question about smoking. There is no doubt that these verses have their place in this debate, but I trust that I have shown you that there are many other passages that equally relate to smoking.

I think it is important that we look at all these arguments not simply from the perspective of smoking, but a whole host of other areas such as eating too much or caffeine addiction to name but a few.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (English Standard Version)

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

We must also be sure that we are not using this as a stick to beat people who smoke, or struggle with some of the other things we have outlined. We need to love them support them and assist them in being transformed into the image of Christ, one degree of glory at a time²⁵.

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Non-Smokers

Are you reading this with a view to speaking to a fellow Christ follower? If so, remember God's grace! Use the information provided to show them that God has a plan for them, one to prosper them and not harm them²⁶. If we simply tell them that they are wrong, that smoking is a sin and they should not do it we will simply put them under law. Law is a horrible master as it simply tells us what we have done wrong but does nothing to help us. As followers of Jesus we are to be like him, full of grace²⁷ and compassion. We should help them understand what they are doing is wrong and not God's best for them and help them through it. Remember their salvation is by faith, not works. They have been justified freely by grace²⁸ and whilst this does not give us license to just go on sinning²⁹, their standing before God is the same as yours! Remember "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus³⁰". If God is not condemning them then we need to be really sure neither do we.

If they are convicted by the word of God then help them work out their addiction and remember that there is sufficient grace for them as they struggle through this difficult process³¹.

Smokers

Are you reading this with because you are struggling giving up, or have just become a Christian and want to know if you need to quit. If so, remember God's grace! If you feel, having read this that you are a bad Christian please do not. The bible says that if we are a real Christ follower that there is no condemnation for us³². We should not go on sinning³³ but we should through prayer and Holy Spirit determination make every effort to be found without spot or blemish³⁴.

I realise that stopping smoking is not an easy thing. The addiction to nicotine is real and stopping is hard. All I can tell you is that the bible tells us that God will give you all the grace you need so that in all things and at all times you can abound in every good work³⁵. In this case I suggest that your good work is quitting smoking! And as you struggle as I am sure you will remember that as you realise your weakness, your inability to stop, remember that it is in that moment his power is made perfect³⁶ – as you realise you are unable to do it on your own.

You may find it helpful to find someone in your church, or a fellow Christ follower at work who you can make yourself accountable to. Don't just decide in your own heart and mind that you will quit. That will never work. Tell someone else, someone you trust who will ask you the tough questions, who will challenge you regularly and ask if you have had a crafty one!

Also, you will find it helpful to meditate on passages in the bible that will help you, that will fill you with faith and focus your will on serving God and his purposes. Here is an extract from **Biblical Confessions to Build your Faith** by Larry Tomczak

I'm not just an ordinary man or woman; I'm a son of the living God. I'm not just a person; I'm an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. I'm not just an old sinner; I'm a new creation in Jesus, my Lord. I'm part of a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation; I'm one of God's people. I'm not under guilt of condemnation. I refuse discouragement for it is not of God. God is the God of all encouragement. There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

You can download the entire paper for free from www.andyrobinson.org.uk

Leaders – Young or Old

I believe that there is an extra responsibility placed on those who lead to be a good example. We need to be able to say “Follow me as I follow Christ³⁷”

1 Timothy 4:12 (English Standard Version)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

As a leader we need to be able to set an example in all things, to some degree we are on display to the people we lead and we need to be above reproach. We need to operate with a clear conscience (although a clear conscience is not a valid excuse if we are in sin³⁸). None the less you are being held up as an example to those you lead and as such need to be operating in such a way that you will achieve the goal before us³⁹ that is to become more like Jesus. I am not saying that you have to be perfect⁴⁰ to be a leader, but you must be pressing into the things of God and I think that if you are smoking, given the weight of biblical evidence against it you are not setting an example in that. You are deliberately causing harm to the body God has given you and to those around you. You are giving into a desire of your body and the bible is clear that we should not do that⁴¹.

Bible References not explicitly stated

- ¹ Luke 10:27
- ² Mark 12:30
- ³ Mark 12:31
- ⁴ Matthew 28:19
- ⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16
- ⁶ www.cancer.gov
- ⁷ <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving/smokingandtobacco/>
- ⁸ www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_93.pdf
- ⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:19
- ¹⁰ www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/books/nicotine/index.htm
- ¹¹ Romans 14:23
- ¹² Hebrews 11:1
- ¹³ Numbers 32:23
- ¹⁴ Isaiah 47:3
- ¹⁵ James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5, Proverbs 3:34
- ¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 7:1
- ¹⁷ <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving/smokingandtobacco/whatsinacigarette/>
- ¹⁸ Ephesians 5:28
- ¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:15
- ²⁰ Exodus 12:5, 29:1, Leviticus 1:3, 10 3:1 (46 other references)
- ²¹ Proverbs 21:17
- ²² 2 Timothy 3:1-9
- ²³ 1 Corinthians 6:20
- ²⁴²⁴ Isaiah 53:5
- ²⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18
- ²⁶ Jeremiah 29:11
- ²⁷ John 1:17
- ²⁸ Romans 3:24
- ²⁹ Romans 6:15
- ³⁰ Romans 8:1
- ³¹ Romans 5:20
- ³² Romans 8:1
- ³³ Romans 6:1-2
- ³⁴ 2 Peter 3:14
- ³⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:8
- ³⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:9
- ³⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:11
- ³⁸ 1 Corinthians 4:4
- ³⁹ Philippians 3:14
- ⁴⁰ Philippians 3:12
- ⁴¹ 1 Peter 2:11