

## VI. Smoking

Tobacco products are widely used in our society today, for example, in cigars, in pipes, in chew, and most commonly, in cigarettes. The discussion that follows is applicable to all such uses of tobacco, but smoking is the central topic, since it is so prevalent.

This lesson examines the use of tobacco. Is smoking an activity in which the faithful Christians should be engaged? As with all our lessons on morality, we will investigate what the Bible says about it and live by that standard.

### A. Smoking Is Dirty

Smoking is one of the nastiest, filthiest habits that anyone can develop.

#### 1. It produces undesirable effects on the body

- bad breath
- stinking clothing
- stained teeth
- discolored skin

#### 2. It produces undesirable effects on the surroundings

- house fires
- burns on furniture
- irritating air
- flying ash and piles
- a smelly home or office

The Bible instructs us to put away filthiness. The adage, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," is not far from scriptural principles.

*2 Corinthians 7:1*

*James 1:21*

### B. Smoking Harms The Physical Body

Cigarette smoking is the main cause of many diseases. Someone may argue, "My body is mine to do with it as I please; if I do harm to my body, it is no body's business but my own." This is arrogance and selfishness. Actually, our bodies are not our own; our bodies are a gift from our creator. We are but stewards of that gift. Smoking is not the way to "glorify God in your body."

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

It's no wonder that smoking causes disease: it's poisonous. Cigarette smoke contains nicotine, and nicotine is a poison. Look up the word "nicotine" in any dictionary and see what it says. Moreover, research has determined that cigarette smoke contains additionally about 12 different deadly gases, among them are carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, and nitrogen oxides.

As long as we are alive on this earth, God expects us to serve Him and teach others to do His will. If we bring upon ourselves a needless, early demise, we have robbed God of our time to be effective for His causes.

*Philippians 1:22-26*

Let's consider some diseases with known links to smoking.

### **1. It is the number-one cause of lung cancer.**

The chances of dying from lung cancer was statistically studied by the American Medical Association. Here's what they found:

- If you smoke, your chances of dying from lung cancer are 1 in 148.
- An ex-smoker's chances are 1 in 946.
- A non-smoker's risks are only 1 in 16,238.

### **2. Emphysema is much more easily contracted.**

Emphysema, an incurable breathing disorder, is characterized by an inefficiency in the lungs to exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide with the blood. Over time in susceptible people, lung infections or irritations can cause a blockage of airways in the lungs. These blockages trap air in the lung, causing the blood vessels in the affected area to disappear. Less contact between air and blood is the result. More lung irritations result in further damage until breathing is impaired. This disease can obviously kill.

Smoking provides the perfect irritation of lung tissue for this disease. Statistics show the disease occurring in smokers 2000% more than in non-smokers!

### **3. It increases the risk of heart problems and chronic bronchitis.**

Here is the American Heart Association's Scientific Position:

"Cigarette smoking is the most important preventable cause of premature death in the United States. It accounts for more than 440,000 of the more than 2.4 million annual deaths. Cigarette smokers have a higher risk of developing a number of chronic disorders. These include fatty buildups in arteries, several types of cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (lung problems). Atherosclerosis (clogged arteries) is the chief contributor to the high number of deaths from smoking. Many studies detail the evidence that cigarette smoking is a major cause of coronary heart disease, which leads to heart attack."

## **C. Smoking Is Addictive**

Smoking is more than just a bad habit; it is an addiction. In fact, it is one of the strongest and cruelest addictions known to man.

### **1. What is addiction?**

There is a distinction that must be made between habit and addiction. Habits may be good ones or they may be bad ones. I may have the habit of locking my car door when I leave it or flossing my teeth at bedtime, but that does not mean I am addicted to those things. Addiction, on the other hand, involves dependence, and that is always wrong, because in addiction, self-control is compromised.

Smoking addiction is so strong it has been found to have a life-long effect. Even if you beat the habit, the desire is still chemically programmed in your body. The temptation to smoke again is much greater than the temptation for someone who has never smoked. There are actually 3 kinds of people: smokers, ex-smokers, and non-smokers. Ex-smokers will never be non-smokers again.

### **2. Self-control**

The scriptures are filled with admonitions regarding mastery of our own bodies.

*Romans 6:12-13, 16*

*1 Corinthians 9:27*

Self-control is at the heart of smoking; Christians are to exhibit self-control.

*Galatians 5:22-23*

*2 Peter 1:6*

Even if a thing is right in and of itself, we are not to be under the control of it.

*1 Corinthians 6:12*

We are put into bondage by whatever we are overcome. If we are overcome by corruption, we are slaves of corruption.

*2 Peter 2:19*

### **3. How does it start?**

The best way to avoid addiction is to never start in the first place. This is little comfort for those held in its grip, but for those who are not, heed the warning! Here are some of the main reasons people start smoking.

- Peer pressure

Many smokers today are young people who are most easily influenced by others. When those you go to school with or work with see you as different because you do not smoke, you may be tempted to join in to feel included.

*Proverbs 1:7-10*

The idea that smoking will make you look mature is a falsehood. Conversely, maturity and conviction are required to take a stand against it.

- Parental examples

Unfortunately, some children grow up seeing their parents smoke. They may learn from this one way or the other, but in any case, it would be better if children could learn from the proper example.

- Curiosity

Curiosity can fuel creativity and invention, but unchanneled, it can lead astray.

*Proverbs 5:22, 23*

### **4. No Excuse**

Addiction is not a valid reason to not quit. Before the smoker became addicted, he made the free choice to smoke the first one; no one held a gun to his head. Righteous living is easy, but choosing a life of sin is a hard life to live.

*Proverbs 13:15*

### **5. Financial strain**

Not only can smoking rob our time but also our money. Reports indicate that in 1999, the total cost in the United States of healthcare and loss of productivity for smoking was \$100 billion. But what about for the cigarettes themselves? Let's do a little math.

Assume that a pack of cigarettes costs \$2.50 and you smoke a pack a day. That's \$76 per month or \$912 per year. Over 20 years that would be \$18,240 and even more if interest on investment were included. Granted, we may spend money on many frivolous things for amusement or entertainment, but when the money goes literally "up in smoke" it's worthwhile to think about the productive things that could have been done instead. Ironically, you will see people buying groceries with government food stamps, yet cigarettes are in their cart. That's because of addiction.

## **D. Smoking Affects Others**

### **1. It Damages Your Influence**

*Matthew 5:16*

*Philippians 2:14-16*

Do you think it would be easy to convert someone to Christ while smoking a cigarette? Will smoking impress them with your spirituality? Will they see your devotion to God in this practice?

*1 Corinthians 10:31-33*

*1 Peter 2:11-12*

Would you recommend the practice to others? Would you want your own children to smoke?

Smoking is not Christlikeness. Can you picture Jesus smoking as He preached the sermon on the mount, smoking as He performed His miracles of healing, or asking for one last cigarette as He hung on the cross?

*1 Peter 2:21 22*

Smoking is drug abuse; the drug is nicotine. Every point made in lessons on drug abuse can be rightly applied to smoking. This is covered in greater detail in another lesson.

## **2. Pollution**

Recent studies have just begun to show the effect of what we now call "second hand smoke." If you smoke, whoever you are with while you do it has to endure it, whether they also are smokers or not. It is essentially rude and inconsiderate.

*Matthew 7:12*

On a grander scale, the millions of people who smoke needlessly contribute to the world's air pollution problem to a degree. Smoking has become prohibited in most zoos, museums, and botanical gardens for its adverse effect.

## **E. Smoking Is Sin**

Know this: sin is a violation of God's law, and if smoking violates God's law concerning our bodies and self-control, it is sin. A distinguishing characteristic of Christians is to always objectively look to the Bible and call lawlessness sin without bias. This, however, is not a very popular sermon. For decades, smoking was accepted because the long-term effects were not yet known. We are no longer ignorant, yet the acceptance lingers, or at least toleration, perhaps out of patience or sympathy for those enslaved to it. We never hear today of anyone being disfellowshipped in the church because of smoking, but we do if they are drunkards or adulterers. Perhaps there are inconsistent practices in the church today as we are weak, fleshly creatures, but God's law is pure and changeless, and we'd better be teaching it.

## **F. Arguments To Justify Smoking**

A large number of arguments are often heard in an attempt to justify smoking. An honest heart will recognize these arguments as poor excuses for ungodly behavior. Let's hear some of the arguments:

"Soda pop, coffee, overeating, and too much candy are just as harmful as smoking."

No they're not. There are no warning labels on soda pops or coffee. Besides, one abuse does not justify another. If I'm addicted to coffee or a glutton, that's wrong, too. A thing is determined to be right or wrong not by comparing it to other things but by comparing it to God's word.

"Mark 7:15 says that nothing which enters a man can defile him. That includes tobacco."

Read ahead in verses 17 through 23. Defilement is centered in the heart. Jesus teaches in verse 22 that out of the heart comes "foolishness," which defiles. W. E. Vine states that this word (in the adjective form) "signifies 'without reason,... want of mental sanity and sobriety, a reckless and inconsiderate habit of mind' (Hort), or 'the lack of commonsense perception of the reality of things natural and spiritual ... or the imprudent ordering of one's life in regard to salvation' (G. Vos, in Hastings' Bible Dic.)." That describes smoking. When a man purifies his heart, foolish behavior, like smoking, is not engaged.

"It's just as bad to work in a coal mine or a chemical company as it is to smoke."

Improvements are constantly being made to hazardous work environments as we learn more about the dangers. Nevertheless, as dangerous as some occupations are, safety is never disregarded as it is for smoking.

"The Bible doesn't say, 'Thou shalt not use tobacco.'"

An early premise in our study established that sinful practices do not have to be specifically mentioned in scripture for us to determine they are sinful in principle.

"All God's creation is good. For what use did God make tobacco if not for smoking?"

Perhaps for the production of pesticides.

"Romans 14:14 says, 'There is nothing unclean of itself.' That includes tobacco."

This is out of context. Romans 14 is talking about things that in themselves are not matters of right and wrong.

"We use medicines that are poisonous; smoking is no different than chemotherapy."

The therapeutic use of chemical substances in the body is not to be compared to their recreational use, that is, abuse.

"I enjoy it."

Some sins are admittedly enjoyable, for a season, but they are still sin. Self denial in our service to God requires that we not give ourselves over to every earthly pleasure (2 Peter 2:10).

"I'm not addicted; I smoke only in moderation. I therefore keep it under control, so it's okay."

We have established that smoking is sinful not only because of its addictive nature but also due to bodily harm and influence, which still results from smoking only in moderation. How much control a moderate smoker really has is doubtful, anyway; he may actually be mildly addicted in self-denial. Besides, addicted smokers always start out in moderation.

"I can afford it."

Though you might be able to manage the waste does not change the principle of squandering (Proverbs 21:20).

"Burning incense was a part of worship under the Old Testament, and the smoke pleased God (Revelation 8:3, 4)."

Not one time in the Bible is the word "smoke" used to refer to intentionally inhaling it for the effect as is done today.

## **G. Suggestions To Help People Quit Smoking**

It is not easy to quit smoking. But it CAN be done. Others have done it, so can you, if you smoke. Here are some suggestions to help:

### **1. Admit that it is sin**

Recognize that we can lose our souls over it. If we truly accept this, it will motivate us. The greatest trial or hardship life can give is not worth losing our soul over.

*Hebrews 12:1-4*

### **2. Convince yourself**

Do not surrender yourself to accept that you tried but you just can't quit. God assures us that with every trial, He provides the way of escape. Look for it and find it.

*1 Corinthians 10:13*

### **3. Don't try to do it alone**

Pray for God's help. Talk to other Christians who have gone through it.

*James 5:16*

*Galatians 6:1, 2*

### **4. Remove temptations**

Do not keep cigarettes where you can easily get to them.

### **5. Keep busy**

Do something with your hands to keep them too busy to have time to smoke. Replace bad habits with good.

## **6. Exercise**

This will do two things: it will help keep you from gaining weight, which is often a problem, and it will help you to realize how much better you feel without cigarettes.

Smoking defiles both the body and the spirit; Christians should never do it.

## **H. Thoughts And Questions For Discussion**

1. Explain "you are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19).
2. Define "filthiness" (1 Corinthians 7:1).
3. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12. What did Paul mean by "all things are lawful for me?"
4. If someone has to eat a little bit of cornbread about every half hour of the day, would you say he has a problem with self-control?
5. Do you think smoking sinful? If so or if not, why?
6. Have you heard other arguments given to justify smoking? If so, how would you answer?
7. Do you think it would be wrong to take only one puff on a cigarette just to see what it's like?