

DRUGS AND THE CHRISTIAN,

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Mr. Gary S. Dykes

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Drugs and drug use have become important issues to most humans here in the 21st century. Advances in medicine, and pharmacology have brought modern man to the thresholds of many new prospects or choices. Modern research continues to produce many new and exciting drugs, drugs which can improve the lives of millions of peoples. Not only have many diseases seen cures and vast improvements with the proper use of drugs, but enhancement of the human brain has become a reality for healthy individuals and for the aging populations.

Prescription drugs have recently, become a major legal problem in many nations as potent pain killers (for example) are manufactured and made available via prescription. Because of strong addictive properties, many strong pain killers foster illegal use which use has proliferated, and consequently many prescription drugs are viewed in a very negative way. **These negative views, when coupled with the bad reputations of many illegal drugs, have clouded the understanding and appreciation of proper drug use.** Everyday citizens, and in this paper, Christians, are increasingly faced with numerous decisions as to their personal use of a vast variety of pharmaceutical assists. Imagine, as a Christian, seeing your name in a police blotter because you were charged with importing an illegal or controlled substance from another country in which the substance was legal! Something no Christian wishes to experience. As Christians we wish to do God's will, and to operate as He wants us, not as criminals, or as drug abusers. Hence the function of this essay is to help Christians examine some of the Biblical and philosophical issues involved. Hopefully readers will emerge with a clearer understanding of just what God says about drugs, their use and function, in a society, especially in an aging society threatened with a myriad of viruses, diseases and environmental hazards.

Pharmacological substances fall into several categories: synthetic and natural. Other categories may be: legal and illegal, or, medicinal and recreational, prescribed or not prescribed, or even controlled and uncontrolled. All of these categories are valid. To sharpen our focus perhaps a clear definition of what a drug is may best start us off:

drug [drug]

n.

[[ME *drogge* < OFr *drogue* < ? LowG *drooge* (*fat*), *dry* (*cask*), the adj. mistaken as the name of the contents: see [DRY](#)]]

1. any substance used as a medicine or as an ingredient in a medicine which kills or inactivates germs, or affects any body function or organ
2. *Obs.* any substance used in chemistry, dyeing, etc.
3. a narcotic, hallucinogen, etc., esp. one that is habit-forming

vt.

drugged, drugging

[per *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Wiley Publishing, 2006].

The above definitions cover much of the semantic territory, but adding the notion of "a chemical substance used to treat physical and mental diseases"—which is one of the definitions for *medicine*—may complete the typical usages. Drugs differ from foods in that foods are required for normal bodily nourishment and maintenance. Whereas drugs are not required unless an abnormal injury or disease is present.

Herbs and supplements, such as St. John's Wort, Ginko Biloba, Black Cohose and Milk Thistle have application as drugs in a medicinal sense. These naturally occurring substances are part of a large assortment of substances which have chemical properties which produce healing, or healthy improvement of a variety of ailments. In Germany (for example) Milk Thistle is prescribed for liver problems (especially Hepatitis and mushroom poisoning). In some nations, some herbs are controlled substances. Some

drugs, such as Digitalis, extracted from the leaves of the beautiful Foxglove plant, have saved many thousands of lives via its cardiac stimulant properties: no synthetic drugs can duplicate the action of the glycosides of the Foxglove plant. [per Reader' Digest, *Magic and Medicine of Plants*, 1986, page 188]. Even the notorious Marijuana has its medicinal usages, and can be thus prescribed in some countries. In the case of Marijuana, we note that this plant, is both an illegal "drug" as well as a useful prescribed drug (for glaucoma).

Most Vietnam veterans will recall the red stained teeth of the many Vietnamese who chewed the Betel Palm Nuts, the juice of which is high in certain alkaloids, which alkaloids eliminated tapeworms, a useful item for folks dwelling in the tropics!

On the other end of the semantic scale are those drugs which have no medicinal value, nor even a useful value in others aspects. LSD a powerful hallucinogen has no known uses, though naive persons may ingest it to escape reality for brief periods, its side effects are mild, but can produce very dangerous visual/suicidal states. In this category one finds heroin, marijuana, certain mushrooms and cacti. Peyote (a cactus) is legal for some native Americans in their religious rites, but outside of this use, has no true value. Such drugs are listed as schedule I drugs, (C-1), per the 1970 Controlled Substances Act in America: "high abuse potential and no accepted medical use". As you can see some debate and arguments exist to legalize certain compounds for certain (religious, medical) purposes. Yet the general use of these questionable substances should be and is restricted.

Restrictions are needed because humans, are just that, humans. Man creates war, kills innocent and helpless babies, has mistreated all sorts of animals and environments to such an extent that man obviously needs to be governed, to be controlled with laws and an enforced system of jurisprudence and commonly accepted morals. Without a sane government and a system of

accepted morals, man quickly reverts to savagery. This is seen and repeated throughout man's miserable history. Man will abuse and misuse drugs for all sorts of reasons, even financial if they can induce addiction amongst their clients. Thus, good guidelines for existence must prevail. Here in this realm is where the Bible shines.

As mentioned above, many conservative Bible students declare that "drugs" should be avoided by Christians. Note this quote, as a sample:

Since this verse [i.e. Galatians 5: 19-21] comes from a list of things that, if practiced, would preclude one from heaven, this should be a reasonably strong suggestion that **the Christian should not practice drug use.**

From, Richard L. Deem's website: www.godandscience.org [Deem is a microbiologist, a family man, and an evangelical].

His "drug use" has apparently a very restricted meaning in his mind, as the use of illegal drugs. He associates illegal drugs with the Greek word for *pharmakeia* [φαρμακεία]. The actual Greek word is rendered as "sorcery" in Galatians [NASB et al]. Consequently, we can see the negative connotations ascribed to **all drugs**, by the naive use of the supposed meaning of this Greek term, which is indeed an ancient root for our *pharmacy*. Deem quotes, in part, some of the meanings of the Greek term from Thayer's Lexicon, and then seizes upon that single negative use, as sorcery, or magic, or witchcraft. In Deem's mind, a pharmacist is a medicine man or witch doctor! It certainly is true that in the Bible, φαρμακεία has this negative use. But that use of the first century of the Christian era, should not control our use of the word today in numerous other contexts. In fact even before the Greek New Testament was written, the term also had its use as a legitimate medical substance.

In Homer (circa 750 B.C.) φαρμακεία *pharmakopeia et al*, is used for herbs, medicines and potions, some beneficial some not bueno. For example in the Odyssey (x: 392) Circe applies a "drug" topically to the arms of some men, and their hairs fall off, and made the men appear younger (it revitalized them). It would be error to list all of the usages of this Greek term in just Homer's works and label them all malignant, or malevolent. Because a good use of the word is not seen in the Bible does not justify supposing a debasing meaning must have then been the prominent meaning in the Greek world of the Christian era.

The Bible does not mention the ancient use of marijuana, cocaine or other such drugs. But it does mention drugs. Nor does the Bible clearly distinguish between drugs and alcohol, alcohol can be used as a medicine, even as a disinfectant, and it apparently can settle some stomach problems (I Timothy 5:23). Alcohol is not condemned in the Bible, except when it is abused, or used by priests at improper times. It is to be used in moderation, therefore somewhat regulated.

Mental health is an important issue today, and it was in the Bible. One may meet various Christians and learn from them that they may take blood pressure medicines, or cholesterol lowering medications, but rarely do they discuss their medications for depression, and some are reluctant to disclose their use of narcotic pain medications. One reason for the reluctance, is our society's impression of such drugs, often the association is with spiritual maladies, heavy drug addiction, or some deviant form of mania. For centuries epilepsy was associated with demon possession, and it was not until some research has revealed that some adjustments to various brain chemicals can help such sufferers. Epileptics in the Bible era, were often seen as possessed, and descriptions of such fits often match scenes of a possessed individual. However, today, Satan is not so obvious, and epilepsy is now seen to be a neurological disorder. Negative stigmas still shroud various other mental

disorders, especially in religious circles. Certainly one food for the brain, if ever there was one, is glucose, and indeed it is a food, not a drug per se. However when Jonathan ingested some honey his eyes brightened, suggesting some form of improvement in his behavior or stamina at that time. (I Samuel 14).

Purification rites, of the Old Testament, reveal to us many important drugs and herbs used by the Israelites for these rites. Myrrh (*Commifora myrrha*), Garlic (*Allium sativum*) were both employed for cleansing purposes in ancient times. Even as late as World War I, garlic paste was applied to wounds to protect the wounded from infection. The Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*, Genesis 30:14-16 and Song of Solomon 7:13), was used as an emetic, purgative and as a narcotic. Balm (*Pistacia lentiscus*, Genesis 43:11) was used as an astringent and for other purposes. Rue (*Ruta chalepensis* var. *latifolia* Luke 11:42), was valued as a tithe, because it was also valuable as a "preventive of contagion and an antiseptic" (Moldenke, page 208). These several examples of natural herbs, reveal that it is probable that the ancient Israelites may have employed every herb and medicine which they could acquire to make their lives more comfortable and safer. Many of these ancient plants and herbs have provided modern chemists the raw materials for making synthetic alternatives, and have thus been the sources for many life saving and enhancement drugs. The so-called Blessed Thistle (*Cnicus benedictus*, and or *Silybum marianum*) was used for headaches, to strengthen the heart, to cure festering sores, boils, and to cure the liver, it also helps one's memory. Over 125 kinds of thistles grow in the Holy Land. According to some (Emperor Charlemagne) some types of thistle would help cure the dreaded plague! Certainly the Israelites knew of this plant's curative properties, and most certainly used these common plants in their medical treatments. Before moving on, I would be amiss not to mention the amazing plant, Silphium. Silphium grew on a thin strip of land about 125 miles long

by 35 miles wide on the dry mountainsides facing the Mediterranean Sea. Even as early as the first century A.D., it was becoming scarce from over harvesting. Its value was that its seeds could prevent a woman from becoming pregnant, safely with no side effects! It became extinct by the fourth century, but Europeans quickly learned that the common Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*) was just as effective. In 1986 it was discovered that the chemicals in the seeds of Queen Anne's Lace, block the production of the hormone progesterone. Even, today, women in the Appalachian region of the United States, drink a glass of water with a teaspoon of Queen Anne's Lace seeds, just after intercourse, and they do not get pregnant. A natural way to prevent conception, and to avoid the horrible prospects of abortion for the unfortunate.

Depression is not evil. It is perhaps the result of an imbalance of neurotransmitters in the brain (usually). It can be genetic, caused by abuse of certain drugs, or a side effect of various maladies (PTSD, hepatitis et al). When antidepressants are utilized, the depression can be decreased; even cured, but with a reliance upon continued use of the medication. Alzheimer's disease and dementia both respond to certain new drugs which enhance certain neurotransmitters. Today, an emerging class of synthetic drugs, called Nootropics, show promise for enhancing one's ability to think, to concentrate, improving memory and slowing the aging of the brain.

I assume that Richard Deem (above) does not disapprove of the use of prescribed medications. However his warnings are typical amongst many conservative Christians. We have been taught that healing lies in Christ Jesus, that we need to live proper moral lives and God may or will heal us. That all sickness is a result of sin. Certainly some sicknesses are the results of sin (aids, syphilis et al) as well as some strokes and heart attacks (Leviticus 26:14-16, John 5:14). God uses sickness to sometimes correct our behaviors, this is true. (Deuteronomy 28:21,22 and Psalms 51:8). God also provides

herbs, and dedicated chemists who do produce useful compounds to assist with our lives on earth. Clearly the Bible teaches that Satan uses and causes many sicknesses, and we know that God provides for healing. (Job 2:6,7 Luke 13:10-16). The discovery of the polio vaccine was no accident. The discovery of Lithium and its effects on manic behaviors, led to the development of many new drugs and antidepressants.

Just because various opiates and opioids can be easily abused, is not a reason why Christians in pain should not avail themselves of these pain relieving medications. Many dear saints died peacefully from very painful cancers, quietly under the effects of properly administered doses of morphine. Christians need to properly use these needed drugs without fears of discrimination from other "Christians". The laying on of hands (to cure illnesses) did exist in early Acts, and it will probably appear again during the reign of Christ on earth (during the Millennium), but we are not now living in those times! In the United States we have good drug laws, and much common sense has prevailed. Christians should not of course become addicts for thrills, just as we should not become alcoholics. As Christians we should try to set examples of proper drug/medication use. Let us not fear what man thinks, but let us desire to do God's will.

Chronic depression can be a frightening affliction. Besides the usual antidepressants (Zoloft, TCAs et cetera) drugs which bring about euphoria can alleviate symptoms of depression; it is hard to be depressed when you feel real good! Most of these types of euphoric compounds affect the neurotransmitter, Dopamine, and they can be very addictive. Such drugs as: codeine, cocaine, Oxycodone, Adderol and the amphetamines. Use of these addictive drugs must be weighed against their negative effects. Nootropics, can also alleviate symptoms of depression, and are not typically addictive (Provigil, Adrafinil, and Piracetam et al). As Christians we should not submit to or be controlled by anyone or anything unless it appears to be

beneficial or Scriptural. Certain pain medications (narcotics) can be of great benefit, and their regular use will produce addiction. Each saint must carefully determine if the state of addiction is worse than the problems and disabilities associated with pain, or depression. Folks outside of our lives, may view our decisions with suspicion, but then we are accountable to God. Some education and explanations may assist those who have phobias concerning any drug use!

In short these guidelines should apply as to the use of certain drugs:

- (1) If addiction results, the medical need must be great enough to offset and justify the addiction.
- (2) Education and information about the side effects and benefits need to be evaluated, even prayed over.
- (3) Romans 6:11-13 and I Corinthians 6:12, are clear in declaring that saints should not become addicts for non-medicinal purposes.
- (4) If the side effects (severe euphoria, hallucinations, et cetera) inhibit our relationship with God and His Word, then the agent should most likely be stopped or adjusted.
- (5) God has provided many herbs and chemical compounds to assist afflicted saints. Their proper use is not prohibited. Pagan use is not a guideline for use by suffering saints, as pagans are prone to be thrill-seekers and even seekers of demonic entities by attempting to enter evil spiritual realms via drug abuse.

A "broken spirit" (below) can also be translated as a "shattered mind", shattered from trauma, sin or depression: and "heart" can be rendered as "mind". God can and does provide for us today to have cheerful hearts, one way may be via prescribed medications to fix neuro-transmissions, to alleviate pain and or depression. Perfectly happy and carefree lives are wonderful, but few of us have such blessings. We now live temporarily in enemy territory.

A cheerful heart is a good medicine;

But a broken spirit drieth up the bones.

Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful mental-state is good medicine;

But a shattered mind drieth up the bones.