

“Is Smoking a Sin?”

Is it a sin to smoke? I have always thought it was, with the caveat that the Bible does not expressly forbid it. However, if smoking is wrong, why isn't eating high fat foods or candy wrong? I realize that these foods do provide something positive, but they are still bad for you.

It's interesting that you should link smoking with eating junk foods. Probe field associate Todd Kappelman makes this connection often in discussing the “Christian” position on smoking, as he points out that people who condemn tobacco are often the first ones to pop Twinkies and Ding Dongs in their mouths and not think anything of it. Is one so much worse than the other?

So I asked Todd how, exactly, he would respond to your question, and took notes as he answered.

He said that there are three positions that can be taken concerning questionable behaviors, which are appropriate to the discussion of smoking.

First is *prohibition*: “I don't, and you shouldn't either.” Pedophilia and abortion, for instance, would fall in this category.

The second is *abstinence*: “I don't, but I won't say you shouldn't.” For many people, drinking and watching TV fall in this category.

The third is *moderation*: “I do, but I also practice moderation in it.” For many other people, drinking and watching TV fall in THIS category. A number of Christians take this position in regard to smoking.

Moderation is a Biblical standard in non-moral issues: Phil. 4:5 says, “Let your moderation be known to all men.”

It's interesting that the culture of North American Christianity has made smoking an unacceptable, "unChristian" behavior, while in Europe, many Christians don't think twice about smoking, but consider American Christians' materialism and women's makeup unacceptable, "unChristian" behavior. So much of what we think is wrong is culturally bound.

Still, the issue of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit needs to be taken into account. Is it possible to smoke to the glory of God? To bring us back to your original question, is it possible to eat fatty foods with empty calories to the glory of God? [When I had my husband Ray read this response, he added here that if you had nothing else to eat but fatty foods, they are still calories which would keep one alive, whereas nicotine is a drug without redeeming qualities, and there is nothing good that smoking does for you. Even junk food provides calories that may enable someone to live, but smoking only hurts you.]

Todd said that smoking is a non-moral issue. The rightness or wrongness of smoking wasn't even discussed before the health consequences of tobacco were discovered. [Note: not all the Probe staff is convinced of this argument.]

Todd conceded that these arguments are all weak and sketchy, which is why there is danger in taking a hard stance. One person may have freedom from the Lord to smoke, especially pipes and cigars which have moderation built in (so I hear). Others may sense His leading to quit or stay away from tobacco in the first place.

The two best questions that each person should ask, I believe, are 1) Can I do this to the glory of God? -and- 2) Is it OK with the Lord for me to do this? It is entirely possible, given different cultures and groups of people we minister to, that He could give freedom to one person and tell another no.

I hope this helps!

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