



# Is smoking a sin?

A guide for things expressly not commanded in scriptures

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"Is Smoking a Sin?"

For Ravi...

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## **"Is Smoking a Sin?"**

Have you ever asked this question, is there anything like a born-again smoker? I had this discussion where a young person asked me this question and sincerely unlike other issues where I could quote up scripture for, I could not find a literal place to answer from.

We live in an era where there are so much activity and indulgences, and unlike the generations past, we have a new crop of believers who are beginning to question our reasons for things. The interesting thing is they are also knowledgeable about the scriptures, so no half-baked response coated with some emotional, societal or cultural overtone will pass. I sought to find a very simple way to judge an action especially for young adults who would be faced with a myriad of situations where a struggle between their heads and hearts could ensue.

For many people, there is a struggle to place issues not expressly written in scriptures in the correct moral context. If we say the Bible or God is our lawgiver and we respect His Word, what happens when we cannot find express instructions for issues that surround our lives like dating, masturbation, abortion, vaping, porn, weed and the likes. We need to be able to have a metric for selecting lifestyle choices.

This young man came with a sincerity I knew I could not give him one of those sermons I was given when I was much younger. I needed to help him with a guide, something he could fall back to when in doubt or could not figure out what to do.

We have relied on interpretations of elders and people who have spiritual oversight; pastors, teachers and the likes to give us an idea of what the mind of God is on these issues. This in itself is laborious and burdensome, as it will require having to check on every aspect of our lives. Is there a way

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to determine what is right and what is wrong, especially when not spelt out by the scriptures? Is there a way to know the mind of God on issues and matters that surround life and living? Is smoking a sin?

*As the Scripture says, "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been able to give the Lord advice?"*

Romans 11:34 ICB

## **Is There a Law for Everything?**

When Moses took the children of Israel out of bondage, it became necessary to regulate their activities in line with the heart and mind of God. The ten commandments were initially given and you can imagine how angry he was when on his descent they had broken almost all of the laws he was given. He ground the stone into powder and had them all drink from it. He later had to go up to get new tablets.

Further on their journey, it became important to give laws and rules to help the people regulate their lives and guide their leaders in being just in settling disputes in line with God's moral law. In those days with confusion, you needed to reach out to Moses who was able to interpret or give the mind of God on a matter. But even that became burdensome. Moses eventually had God place his spirit on 72 others. This is important to note because it meant that if Moses wanted to do any of this by human extrapolation or wisdom, he would have to wait till the astrologers



and magicians of that day came up with a "scientific" reason for a particular choice. He was not consulting science or checking facts and statistics, how many humans were involved in the human trials or if it went well for another test batch like we try to do now to determine what is right or wrong. It was a spiritual transaction and not one as to make it mysterious, it was obvious to all that it was good.

I had a conversation with my friend Segun where we talked about personal instructions, we had been given by God to refrain even from things that were good and okay. It is funny because you cannot fully explain yourself or your reasons to anybody. He shared how he was instructed by God to delete a popular gospel band's music from his device, which he did without understanding why, but we, later on, got to know of a member of the group renouncing his belief in God.

I think we need to let this soak in first. Moses had the spirit of God and was able to interpret the mind of

God. The 72 elders also carried that spirit and could stand in that position. They knew the mind of God and so were able to discern between good and evil in the sight of God.

In the New Testament, we come into that life and share the same spirit through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are made priests and kings unto God and he speaks expressly to our hearts. We have that same spirit as in the Old Testament when Moses could discern the mind of God on every matter and give directions for living. We can lead our lives knowing at every junction where we get confused, the spirit of God is there to teach, lead, guide and direct.

## **The dilemma**

So where do we lead if everyone uses the "spirit"? What happens when my spirit leads me in one way and your spirit leads in another? Where do we find truth (not middle ground)? Something must hold true. There is a situation in scriptures that highlights this.

*Then some men came to Antioch from Judea. They began teaching the non-Jewish brothers: "You cannot be saved if you are not circumcised. Moses taught us to do this."*

The Acts 15:1 ICB

So largely, there were two major groups of believers; the Jews who believed in circumcision according to the law of Moses, while the Gentiles had no such law. There was a conflict that needed to be settled, so they sent people to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles

*The apostles and the elders gathered to study this problem. There was a long debate.*

The Acts 15:6-7 ICB

After the discussions and a word of revelation, a decision not to bother the Gentile believers with the burden of circumcision was agreed upon.

*“So I think we should not bother the non-Jewish brothers who have turned to God. Instead, we should write a letter to them. We should tell them these things: Do not eat food that has been offered to idols. (This makes the food unclean.) Do not take part in any kind of sexual sin. Do not taste blood. Do not eat animals that have been strangled.*

The Acts 15:19-20 ICB

They, later on, sent out men to reach the Gentile believers with the decision and this made them glad.

*The apostles, the elders, and the whole church decided to send some of their men with Paul and*

*Barnabas to Antioch. They chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas, who were respected by the believers. So we have sent Judas and Silas with them. They will tell you the same things. It has pleased the Holy Spirit that you should not have a heavy load to carry, and we agree. You need to do only these things: Do not eat any food that has been offered to idols. Do not taste blood. Do not eat any animals that have been strangled. Do not take part in any kind of sexual sin. If you stay away from these things, you will do well. Good-bye. When they read it, they were very happy because of the encouraging letter.*

The Acts 15:22, 27-29, 31 ICB

But this in itself is a reversing back to the "Moses" era when looked at on the surface. It is like taking a step forward only to take another backward.

So, what if we have a difference in the leading of the Spirit. Do we still have to convene meetings and apostolic conferences to debate issues that have to

do with everyday life and living? How long do we wait till they reach a decision?

It is quite interesting to note this is what has been going on for the last generations. We have had church council and committees seat on matters like sexuality, gender, abortion to mention a few. Where does it end? Where do we find the truth? But as we begin to consider this, we can unpack this dilemma.

## **Laws of Moses vs The Love Law**

Although the Jewish believers who made the complaints had their convictions founded on the law given by Moses. Christ gave us a better summary that would be a guiding principle for defining "truth" when it concerns issues not written expressly. Moses could not write about every issue, so we fall back to the words given by the Lord himself.

*One Pharisee was an expert in the law of Moses. That Pharisee asked Jesus a question to test him. The Pharisee asked, "Teacher, which command in the law is the most important?" Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.' This is the first and most important command. And the second command is like the first: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands."*

Matthew 22:35-40 ICB

Interestingly, the questioner was an expert in the law of Moses and was raising a trick question, but Christ gave even more insight.

The first and most important command is to love God, and not just love him, but to love him with all of our hearts, our souls and our minds. Notice how it comes first from the heart. We would look into this later, but the emphasis here is the fact that Jesus points out that all the law and writings of the prophets depend on these two commands.

This means that if there would be any law, teaching writing, doctrine or instruction regards any work of life, it had to be founded on these two - Love for God and Love for my neighbour, as yourself. It means a simple way to check is to ask the following questions; does this act show my love for God? Does it show my love for my neighbour, and myself?

While this might look like an oversimplification, there is a lot involved. What does it mean to love God?



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What does it mean to love my neighbour? What does it mean to love myself? We need to look into the meaning of love.

## **What is Love?**

To love according to the dictionary is to “Have a great affection or liking for someone or something”. This in itself is predicated by free will, meaning it is not something you are forced, intimidated, coaxed or pressured into. It comes from a place of intentionality, a decision.

I remember talking with my fiancée and bringing her to understand that “I love you” is a decision. There could be better persons out there, but I have chosen to love her. It did not matter what happened my decision was made intentionally, without being coaxed or intimidated. It was a choice made by my free will.

When you love God, you are no longer doing things because “He said so”, you are doing it from a place of decision, one of great affection and liking. Just like the same way, I will do things for my fiancée to make her happy because I have a particular liking for her.

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This is the place where our actions and decisions should come from - pleasing God.

*Our only goal is to please God. We want to please him whether we live here or there.*

2 Corinthians 5:9 ICB

So, to get back to the heart of the matter, asking the question about loving God could be rephrased as "does this act show my wanting to please God?" "Is this act pleasing to God?"

## **Loving Neighbours as Ourselves**

The second command is an offshoot of the first, to love or please God. If we truly love God, we would also love His creations, especially other people, created in His very own image. This lies core at the center of this commandment - the sanctity of human life.

We love our neighbours as ourselves because God has placed a price on us humans - we have worth. And if we find this worth in ourselves, we should also see it in others. If you see it this way, you'll ultimately realise why you should not just love your neighbour, but love them as you would yourself. So, the second question arising from the second command is this - Do you value the worth that God has placed on both your neighbour and yourself? Do you value yourself? If you do, then you must value your neighbour as well.

So in the second command, it is not so much as pleasing our neighbours but understanding that God loves us and them and so our love for Him should also trickle down to them as His creations.

If we are sincere with ourselves and understand this, we will realise a lot of things get easily settled. We are no longer selfish about matters or self-serving. We understand it does not have to do with whether we can take it to dish it out. It is no longer about "my body", "my right", "my life", "my choice". It is about respect for the worth that has been placed upon us by God and valuing this also in others.

## **A Genuine Answer to All Questions?**

So, not all questions are literally answered by the scriptures word for word, but you can find your answers in the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ. I remember telling Him to answer the following three questions:

1. Do you please the Lord by smoking?
2. Do you respect the value God placed on you by smoking?
3. Do you respect the value God placed on others by smoking?

And you can do this for every other thing. Just insert the action as appropriate and you will get your answer. So, when there seems to be a conflict of leading, doctrine or decision or you are unsure of what the mind of God is concerning a matter with regards to whether a transgression or not, look up these three questions and they'll guide you.

Whether in word or in deed and action, if you let these three questions guide you, coming from a place of affection and wanting to please God you will never fail. If you even have a leading in your heart, you can subject that leading or thought to these three questions arising from the commands of Jesus himself.

1. Do I please the Lord by this word/action?
2. Do I respect the value God places on me by this word/action?
3. Do I respect the value God places on others by this word/action?

## **Heart, Soul Mind**

You will notice how many things that pertain to God and His operations have this unique combination - heart, soul, mind

*Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.”*

Matthew 22:37 ICB

It is clarified further in Thessalonians as spirit, soul and body.

*We pray that God himself, the God of peace, will make you pure, belonging only to him. We pray that your whole self—spirit, soul, and body—will be kept safe and be without wrong when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23 ICB

It would seem that God is interested in our Love first coming from our hearts, not first of all rationalizing



why we should or should not act in a way or manner. Our decisions and actions should come from a place of revelation of Him in our spirits.

When we come from this place, we have that freedom from the captive nature of our mental faculties. It becomes easier for our soul (will and emotions) and our minds to follow instead of resisting. We come from a place of surrender to knowledge - which is true faith. This does not cancel the fact that reason is not important, but we can follow his guidance with less resistance.

I once watched a movie, where the protagonist of the story finally realised that it was not that the truth of the matter eluded him, but that he was not willing to see it, even when it was obvious to see. He kept on chasing imaginary shadows until he came to his wit's end and agreed to the truth.

When we have that inner conviction, we stand unwavering in the face of external situations and

circumstances. As my mentor will say, when you are convinced about a thing, you can explain and give the reason for it in a thousand ways. I have in my walk had cause to uphold the truth of God's word in the face of glaring opposition and counter opinions. I have worked with colleagues who do not share my "Christian sentiment" and we get along well. Their choices or pressure do not shake me, because it is founded on something deep.

*It rained hard and the water rose. The winds blew and hit that house. But the house did not fall, because the house was built on rock.*

Matthew 7:25 ICB

I have had people hold on to their indulgences in the name of medical benefit, scientific study, facts etc, but my conviction remains unwavering. They often come full circle and realise those things change and are actually harmful in many ways. When we love God first from our hearts, it makes our obedience easier.

## **Relationship, Leading and Guidance**

When we come into a relationship with God, we become His children and sons. And as with human relationships, communication plays a vital role. A baby picks up its first words from the words spoken around them and there grows into an understanding of the environment and people around via this means.

God takes the issue of communication seriously and keeps reaching out to His own, to lead, guide and direct. I like the verse in the 23rd Psalm that says

*He gives me rest in green pastures. He leads me to calm water. He gives me new strength. For the good of his name, he leads me on paths that are right.*

Psalms 23:2-3 ICB

God is in the business of leading, and he knows the place of rest, the place of calm, the green pastures and the right paths. When we trust Him, we come

into a place of ease, where we no longer struggle. Communication or leading is the birthright of every child of God. If you are His son, you have a right to divine leading in your spirit.

*The true children of God are those who let God's Spirit lead them.*

Romans 8:14 ICB

But God is a gentleman, He will not strive with you over leading, He will only come in where He is permitted and allowed. As we grow in our understanding of Him and His ways, we become more attuned to his will. It is like in the natural, where we as children get to understand the moods and expressions of our parents. They do not need to tell us verbally what is wrong, we just pick it and know.

I remember watching a comedy skit where a mom and a child went visiting and the child was offered some snacks. He, first of all, looked at his mom's face to get an expression to either go ahead or not.

She made a quick frown and he got it! He respectfully refused it. She, later on, explained to him why she did not want him to have it at the time.

When we grow in our relationship, we get to know about those nudgings, those almost frowns. It is almost unexplainable - you just know and many times, your head has to play catch up. God wants to lead each and every one of us, to cause us to know His heart and mind.

## **Err in caution**

What happens when you are not so sure? How do you proceed when you do not have the full assurance of the leading of God or cannot fully place the answers to the three important questions from the commandment of Christ? I have found myself in situations such as this, a real place where you do not fully comprehend the right way to go. I have always believed that anyone can differentiate good and bad, where the challenge is differentiating the difference between good and right.

When you do not know how to go, it is better to err in caution than to err in action. I have found this useful in many situations. When you err while being cautious, you will be only reprimanded for being slow, unresponsive or sluggish and many times, you get another chance to get at it again. But, when you err in action, most times the deed is already done and cannot be reversed.

A story comes to mind of a young boy who went out on an errand only to return to an empty house. He was thirsty and headed to the kitchen to have some water when we saw a glass of lemonade on the counter with a note "This is for you". It was his mother's handwriting, but he was not too sure who the note was addressed to. He had two other siblings who probably might have gone out to the park. Everything pointed to the fact that it must be for him, after all, he was the one who had gone on the errand. He decided to leave it and go for water from the sink. His mum on return later confirmed the lemonade was for him and he, later on, had it. Of course, it would have been nicer to have it at that point. It may even have tasted sweeter, but he chose to err in caution.

We can all point to situations in our own lives where our unsure actions got us into problems where inaction would have been a better course of action. You cannot be judged for the words that you did not speak, neither can you be sanctioned for actions that you did not take. It is better to be considered "slow"

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and “not in tune with the climes” than to be wrong  
and be judged as foolish.



## **Concluding Thoughts**

I do believe that you now have an understanding of knowing the will of God in life's matters. While we all work towards maturity and a better walk with Him, where we can be led according to His spirit without fail, we can always have a guide. The instructions are given in the word of God.

I learnt long ago that it did not matter the revelations or the spiritual experience, everything still had to be subject to the scriptures. It didn't matter who the person was, if their revelation didn't match up with the word, it was to be done away with. And as we have seen, there are three basic questions to know what the mind of God is based on the command of Jesus Christ given in the scriptures;

1. Do you please the Lord by that word/action?
2. Do you respect the value God placed on you by that word/action?

3. Do you respect the value God placed on others by that word/action?

If you keep to these, you will never fail, be shaken or moved. Remember after ascertaining the mind of God, our love for him makes us choose to do as he wills to show our affection for him. It doesn't have to make natural or worldly sense. Many times, the world will eventually come full circle to see the harm and evil in refusing to do what God has said.

God's will doesn't come from a place of selfishness for Himself, it comes from His genuine care and concern for us. As with many other things, facts and science have come to realise that godly choices are the best choices when it comes to life's matters.

## **A Simple Prayer to Receive Jesus Christ as Your Saviour**

Dear Heavenly Father,

I come to You in the Name of Jesus.

Your Word says, "...Every one of them will come to me, and I will always accept them" (John 6:37 ICB), so I know You accept me and I thank You for it.

You said in Your Word, "Anyone who asks the Lord for help will be saved" (Rom. 10:13 ICB). I am asking, and I know You have saved me now.

You also said "...If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from death, then you will be saved. We believe with our hearts, and so we are made right with God. And we declare with our mouths to say that we believe, and so we are saved." (Rom. 10:9-10 ICB). I believe in my heart Jesus Christ is the Son of

God. I believe that He was raised from the dead for my justification, and I confess Him now as my Lord

.

Because Your Word says, "... We believe with our hearts, and so we are made right with God ..." and I do believe with my heart, I am now made right God in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21 ICB) ... And I am saved!

Thank You, Lord!

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_