

Should A Christian Smoke Tobacco?

SMOKING of tobacco in any shape or form is not only an unchristian habit but also a major danger to health.

A man of God has very high regard for life, and more often than not in his meditations and prayers shows his earnest desire for good health and long life to the glory of God.

Therefore it would amount to doing violence to one's sense of spiritual values or violating Christian discipline to indulge in smoking which has been proved to be harmful and capable of shortening a man's life.

The consumption of tobacco has taken various forms such as chewing, snuff-taking, pipe-smoking, smoking of cigars and cigarettes.

Tobacco smoking is a widespread practice. It is said to be a social habit, and from all the facts available, it was unknown both to the ancient faithful before Christ and the early Christians.

History

As regards the history of smoking it is on record that the savages of America were said to be the first users of tobacco, and that smoking was first witnessed by civilized men in November, 1492.

H.S. St. John was quoted as stating: "The smokers were first seen on the island of Cuba. The practice of using tobacco is said to have been in vogue in every native tribe on the continent and the surrounding islands that were contacted after America was discovered. Obviously, the use of tobacco had a heathenish and barbarous origin."

In a report on smoking, the Royal College of Physicians of London stated: "Tobacco smoking in pipes was first introduced to western civilisation by the Spanish explorers of America in the early 16th century. English explorers of the New World brought it to England and by 1590 sufficient quantities were being imported for the Queen to impose the first import duty of 2d a pound.

Towards the end of the century smoking was largely replaced in fashionable circles by snuff-taking but the mass of the people continued to smoke pipes and tobacco consumption continued to rise. Cigars were introduced at the beginning of the 19th century but were never as popular in England as on the continent. Cigarettes were first made in Spain in the mid-17th century. The habit of smoking then appears to have been introduced into England by troops returning from the Crimean War."

Pride of Life

Today the smoking habit has made slaves of so many people that they find it almost impossible to break. In the early days smoking was a habit of only the adults, and pipe-smoking seemed to be the exclusive reserve of old men and women. Now things have changed so much that even school children are found to be smokers. Some of the modern youths are under the illusion that a degree of social respectability is attached to smoking of cigarettes. And those who want to distinguish themselves so as to appear more modern and sophisticated take to long pipes. This is all lust of the flesh and mere pride of life against which Christians are warned. As it is written: *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."* -1st John 2: 15-17.

According to Guinness Book of Records, "the heaviest smokers in the world are the people of the United States, where about 528,000 million cigarettes (an average of nearly 4,000 per adult)

were consumed at a cost of about 7,500 million dollars (£3,125 million) in 1967. The peak consumption in the United Kingdom was 7.0 lb, per adult in 1946. The peak volume was 277,900,000 lb. in 1961, Compared with about 256,000,000 lb. in 1967, when 119,000 million cigarettes were sold, and the average consumption was estimated to be 2.830 per adult. In the United Kingdom 68.1 per cent. of adult men and 43.9 per cent. of adult women smoke.”

We have read various advertisements concerning tobacco and cigarettes, and we find but sentiments intended only to promote commerce. Some of the advertisements are couched in attractive terms such as these:

Egusi cigarette is the best you can buy with your money. Its extra length and fine filter give a real smoking pleasure. Cool and refreshing. For flavour that's rich and full, men of pride and honour turn to Egusi-the cigarette that places you on top of the world!

Some men may really be moved by such advertisements to indulge in smoking “Egusi” cigarette. What the advertisers extol are the flavour, the extra length and finer filter. All body-building substances essential to good health in foods such as meat, beans, milk, eggs and so on, are lacking in cigarettes or tobacco.

Smokers on their part have offered several reasons for what they consider to be the benefits they derive from smoking. Some say that it restrain. them from vomiting after meals or when they go to toilet. Others opine that it keeps them warm and gives good appetite. Yet some others are of the feeling that smoking keeps them mentally alert in their studies. And there are those who have no reason of the kind but who only wish to ape their friends on the erroneous notion that it is a social necessity.

All the reasons so far given for smoking have developed from the individual's frame of mind and temperament, and not from any beneficial effects of tobacco smoking. And considered against the background of attested results of medical research projects that have thrown light on the dangers of smoking, all the reasons of smokers are inconsequential and deserve not the least degree of credit.

Health Hazard

Dr. A. C. Selmon, M.D., in his book *The New Health and Longevity* stated: “No evil habit has so enslaved the peoples of all nations as that of using tobacco. Whether it is used as smoking tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco, or the drinking of nicotine water, its effects are only harmful. There is NOTHING good which can be said about the use of this poisonous weed by man...Briefly put, what the tobacco user pays for his ‘pleasant feelings’ is summarized in the following sentence: ‘As his money goes up in smoke, along with it goes. his keen sense of physical and mental efficiency, and he is left with a weak heart, an impaired respiration, a raw throat, a slowed brain, nerves on edge, a poor sense of taste, smell and sight, a lowered resistance to disease and a shortened life.’ Statistics bear out the truth of this statement.” (pages 93-94).

About the use of tobacco, *The New Modern Medical Counselor* by Hubert O. Swartout, M.D., D.N.B., Dr. P.H., in collaboration with 30 leading medical specialists, has this to say: “The use of tobacco, whether, by smoking, chewing, or snuffing, is a bad habit, often called so even by those who use it. It stimulates certain nerves abnormally and makes the heart rhythm irregular. It shrinks the small blood vessels in the skin and raises the blood pressure thereby.”

“Smoking irritates the air passage and often causes a chronic cough. Many medical scientists believe that the recent marked increase in lung cancers that originate in the lining of the bronchial tubes is due to the parallel marked increase in the use of cigarettes smoking. Besides, the tobacco habit tends to make a slave of a person.”-Pages 132- 133.

During the formal opening of the World Health Week in Benin on Tuesday April ; 7, 1970, Dr. I. S. Mebitagban, a medical officer in the Mid-West State Ministry of : Health, was reported to have called on cigarette producers to label cigarette wrappers clearly with the word "POISON" so that smokers should know that they are smoking at their own risk. Reporting the doctor's address, The Nigerian Observer (April, 1970) stated: "In his topic, 'smoking and cancer', he (the doctor) said, all attempts should be made to discourage cigarette advertisements on the radio, television and parties as it is now practised in some advanced countries. He asserted that there are no advantages derived from smoking. Dr. Mebitagban said large doses of cigarettes might give rise to depression on the human nervous system and added that Nicotine is a neuro-muscular blocking agent which could cause death by neuro-muscular paralysis."

Cancer is reported to have made inroads on people's health in some African countries. Dr. Mebitagban, therefore deserves praise for being outspoken and for keeping Nigerians alert against the dangers embedded in smoking.

The Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopedia states: "The psychologists particularly have been concerned with the question as to why people smoke. A serious scientific questionnaire showed that sociability, relaxation and steadying of the nerves are among the most significant of the reasons given. Less significant were the effects of smoking on hunger and the pleasures associated with the sight of smoke, the feel of the cigarette, and the social charm associated with the habit."

"From the point of view of the effects of tobacco on the body, the smoking of nicotine affects the nervous system and the blood vessels. Most serious of the (effects of tobacco are its effects on the circulation of the blood. .. Especially important is the possible relationship of excessive cigarette smoking to cancer of the lung." (Vol. 7 and 8, page 2024).

There are many people who know very well that smoking is harmful but because they have become victims of the habit they encourage themselves to continue with it. Dr. A. L. Warner, a specialist on "dope" was once quoted as stating: "Practically all the cigarette tobacco has added to it, glycerin diluted with rum, the burning of which produces other poisons. There are, of course, other ingredients added by various makers. Just what each brand contains is kept a secret. These are added for purely commercial purposes. The aim of each manufacturer is to produce a cigarette that will so grip its user that it will forever make him a victim of (that particular brand). This trick of the trade is leading to youthful criminality."

The following excerpts from an editorial of the Medical World is an eye-opener: "The felltore (of smoking) which makes it most dangerous ...is the practically universal habit of inhalation of the smoke. This brings it into contact with many square feet of vascular tissues in the mouth, throat, bronchial tubes and air cells in the lungs, which almost instantly absorb the poisons from the fumes and nearly as quickly infuse them into the circulation. In young boys (and girls) the effects of cigarette smoking are quickly noticeable and soon become alarming. If the habit is not checked, sallow skin, sunken eyes, loss of appetite, stained fingers, listlessness and loss of memory, loss of application or concentration of the mind, insomnia, giddiness, irritable throat, impaired digestion, malnutrition, and in many cases impaired vision results."

The evils of smoking cannot be overstated. As published in the African Challenge (Sept. 1966) Dr. Eugene Guthrie was reported to have told the American Public Health Association at its annual meeting in Chicago: "We know that cigarettes are a serious hazard to our overall health. At least 250,000 adults die prematurely each year, due to smoking"! (Emphasis ours).

The report of U. S. Surgeon-General Luther Terry's Advisory Committee -entitled Smoking and Health, stated: "On the basis of prolonged study and evaluation of many lines of converging

evidence, the Committee make the following judgment: Cigarette smoking is a health hazard of sufficient importance in the United States to warrant appropriate remedial action." (Reader's Digest, April 1964).

What is more, the report of the Royal College of Physicians of London on smoking in relation to cancer of the lung and other diseases presented to the meeting of Fellows of the College on October 26, 1961, is another valuable document. At paragraphs 67-69 it was shown that several relatively uncommon diseases occur more often in smokers than non-smokers. "Smoking impairs athletic performance." (Para. 72) And at paragraphs 112-119, the Government was urged to take decisive steps to curb the rising consumption of tobacco, and especially of cigarettes.

Christian Discipline In the face of the glaring facts exposed in this Sermon, it will be fool-hardiness for anyone-particularly Christians-to want to see where it is written in the Bible "Thou shalt not smoke", before he takes his stand against smoking. Christian discipline enables one to know the difference between clean and unclean, or holy and unholy. And Jesus Christ told his disciples: "Now ye are clean through the words which I have spoken unto you." -John 15: 3; see also Leviticus 10: 10.

It has been proved beyond doubt that smoking of tobacco is a filthy habit and it is therefore inconsistent with holiness which is the essence of a true Christian life. People have complained about the offending breath of smokers in buses and taxi. Uncleanliness is an indication of the presence of evil spirits; it is one of the works of the flesh which can bar a person from entering the Kingdom of God.-Galatians 5: 19-21.

A true Christian seeks perfection not only of the spirit but also of the body. In this regard St. Paul's exhortation concerning purity of life in his second epistle to the Corinthians, is worthy of note. Said he: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from ALL FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2nd Corinthians 7: 1) And in I Thessalonians 4: 7, the apostle further wrote: "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."

In a prophetic statement the Almighty God gave a promise which instils in His people, particularly in these days of the Lord Jesus, great hope and comfort. "Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth." (Jeremiah 33: 6) Since this promise of an amazing consolation must be fulfilled on the faithful, it will be tantamount to working against the purpose of God to indulge in a practice such as smoking to the detriment of our health.

Every true Christian has the belief that God is able to protect him from any 'kind of disease as He saved the Israelites from the diseases or plagues of Egypt in the days of Moses the prophet. (Exodus 15: 26) And the Psalmist declared: "Bless the LORD; O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103: 2-5) It is on the basis of this faith we pray God to give us good health and long life in order to serve and glorify Him For the fact that smoking impairs health and shortens life as medical authorities say, common sense should dictate to us that it is not good for a Christian.

When the Psalmist said that God satisfies His people with good things so that the youths are renewed with strength like eagle's, smoking of tobacco is obviously not one of such good things. Rather it has been established that smoking is harmful. Christians should love to digest the word of God and be filled with His Spirit as counselled by St. Paul. (Ephesians 5: 18-20) Of course, we can take material food which is of second. ary importance and with which God has blessed us for

the sustenance of life. But certainly NOT tobacco smoking which destroys life.

Some smokers of low intelligence point at doctors who smoke and feel encouraged to go on.

They do not know that doctors, like some other men, are also subject to evil influence. Doctors who smoke are like preachers who say one thing and do another. Norman Cousins in his article in the Reader's Digest (June 1964) quoted a doctor friend as saying: "I didn't need a report to convince me that smoking can cause cancer, bronchitis or heart disease. I see the evidence almost daily in hospital wards or among my own patients, and I have seen enough lung surgery to recognize the difference between the pink, healthy tissue of non-smokers and the discoloured, foul tissue of smokers." "You see this, and yet you yourself will continue to smoke?" he (Cousins) asked. "Yes." "Why?" "I suppose I'm like many of my patients. I've advised them to give up smoking, but they'd rather not. It doesn't make much difference to them if some years are lopped off their life. They really don't care." It is God that owns and gives life and it is a sin to do anything deliberately to shorten one's span of life.

It is dangerous to a nation for a majority of its people to develop a feeling that they have no regard for life. If health were not important Governments of the world would not have been spending fabulously for it. Christians should have the understanding of the will of God so as not to imitate the ungodly and be carried away with the fashions or lusts of the world which will soon pass away. – 1st Corinthians 7: 31; 1st John 2: 17.