



Psychedelic Drug Use and the Follower of Jesus Christ

SACRED MISSION *CHURCH*

Introduction

Psychedelics (ayahuasca/DMT, ibogaine, ketamine, kratom, LSD, mescaline, nitrous oxide, psilocybin, and MDMA) have become a very popular topic in The United States over the last few years. Recently, they have been promoted as a therapeutic treatment in some states and some Christians see psychedelics as a tool to experience God more fully. We need as a church to think biblically about this issue before joining the culture in the acceptance of these drugs.

Psychedelics have been around for years and used widely by many people throughout the world. However, their acceptance in The United States as a possible medical treatment or therapeutic is a more recent trend. Now, it is not uncommon when the topic of psychedelics is brought up in a conversation to hear the phrase, “therapeutic psychedelics”. The American Addiction Centers defines psychedelics as, “Psychedelics or psychedelic drugs, are a subclass of a broader class of drugs commonly referred to as hallucinogenic drugs. These drugs alter one’s conscious perception and thinking processes (cognition) in such a manner that the individual’s conscious experience of the world is altered in a way different than other drugs alter it.” Now to define what therapeutic means. According to Webster’s dictionary therapeutic means, “of or relating to the treatment of disease or disorders by remedial agents or methods.” It is also defined as, “having a beneficial effect on the body or mind.” If we were to combine the definition of a therapeutic with psychedelics we would get, “A hallucinogenic drug that alters one’s conscience perception and cognition that an individual’s conscious experience of the world is altered for treatment of disease or disorders.” When we hear the word treatment our mental guard can be lowered and we are more likely to approve of a “treatment” before taking the time to think biblically and critically about said treatment.

So how should a Christian think through the topic of therapeutic psychedelics? Can a follower of Christ use any type of psychedelic recreationally or medically? We believe the Bible makes it very clear any type of recreational use of psychedelic drugs is excluded. Alternatively, we do believe there are potential uses for psychedelic drugs under proper medical care if certain



criteria are met. In this paper we will look at three guiding principles a Christian should think through on the issue of psychedelics. The three principles are: biblical, legal, and authoritative.

Biblical Principle

A biblical principle is a principle based on what the Bible says about a given situation or topic that impacts the way a follower of Jesus should live. We understand from the definition given in the intro of this paper from the American Addiction Centers that a psychedelic is considered a hallucinogenic drug. Using a hallucinogenic drug alters one's conscious perception and thinking and alters their conscious experience of the world. Therefore a person using a hallucinogenic drug will no longer be alert, aware, or in their right mind. At the same time, this does not mean the person is necessarily hysterical or acting in an out-of-control manner. What we are understanding more fully here is that a person using a psychedelic drug is no longer sober. When looking at the biblical principle here then we need to ask, "What does the Bible say about sobriety?"

Whenever the issue or discussion of sobriety comes up it is always in reference to why followers of Christ cannot participate in a certain activity. When the Bible refers to sober-mindedness the point is not just avoiding something but calling us to something greater. When Peter penned 1 Peter he was encouraging his readers to endure suffering and persecution by giving themselves completely to God. He writes in [1 Peter 1:13](#),

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

When Peter mentions being sober-minded here it is on the heels of his call to the church to prepare their minds for action. The action is setting their hope fully on the grace that will be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The fullness of grace and its completion will arrive when Jesus returns. So until then, we are to think rightly and with sober-mindedness in this present age. The question a follower of Christ must answer is can a person be sober-minded and ready for action when a psychedelic is able to, "alter one's conscious perception and thinking processes (cognition) in such a manner that the individual's conscious experience of the world is altered"?

Recently, there has been a growing trend for Christians to engage in psychedelics to feel closer to God, to see Him more clearly in Scripture, or deal with whatever issue they are currently being faced with. These Christians are actually attempting to forge the supernatural power of the Holy



Spirit through a foreign substance. If we look throughout Scripture it is always God who makes his presence known to mankind. In the Old Testament God dwells in the tabernacle during the wilderness journey ([Exodus 25:8](#)) or dwells in the temple in Jerusalem ([2 Samuel 7:4-6](#)). In the New Testament we see Jesus come in flesh as fully God and fully man and dwell or tabernacle among the people ([John 1:14](#)). Then we have the promise of the Holy Spirit coming from Jesus in [John 14:16](#),

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.”

The question a follower of Jesus Christ must answer is, “Why am I not experiencing or feeling the presence of God?” Is it that God is not present? No, because Scripture testifies that God is present as the Holy Spirit dwells within those who have professed faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. If God is not the reason we don’t feel the presence of God then we are the problem. What is the solution? First, we must go deeper in our understanding of the gospel. [Ephesians 3:14-18](#) shows us that Paul prays that we would be strengthened in power through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our inner being all because of how wide, long, high, and deep is the love of Christ. The only way we truly can experience the love of Jesus Christ is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We also experience the presence of God through his Word, the Bible. Whether it’s [Psalm 1](#) or [Psalm 119](#) we see that to be blessed is to walk in the law of the Lord. To experience God’s presence, we can do this through spending time in His Word and being obedient to His Word. We also experience the presence of God through the body of Christ, the church. As we gather with the church we experience the presence of God through the encouragement of other followers of Jesus Christ ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#)). The problem though is that followers of Christ have neglected the gospel, Bible, and the church. As a result, they are now believing the only way to experience God is through an out-of-body experience that God never promised on a regular basis. At times, followers of Jesus Christ will point to Paul having an out-of-body experience in [2 Corinthians 12:1-4](#). The issue with attempting to make the case that an out-of-body experience is okay from Paul here in [2 Corinthians 12:1-4](#) is that this was not a drug-induced out-of-body experience. It was an encounter with God through the power of the Holy Spirit. If you continue to read the rest of [2 Corinthians 12: 9-10](#) Paul says,

“...⁹ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

It was Paul’s continual walking with God each and every day that led him to this experience. In fact, when the Bible talks about walking with God it overwhelmingly communicates a follower of



Christ will love God, obey God, walk humbly with God, and will endure with joy through difficult moments in life. Anytime we think through an area of our lives we must start with what God has said in His Word, the Bible.

Paul tells us in [Romans 8:11](#),

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

If the Holy Spirit, who is God, dwells within you why would you need a foreign substance to understand anything more clearly? Do we not believe the power of the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and gave life to our mortal bodies is not powerful enough to help us see and understand God more clearly? By using a foreign substance are we not proclaiming that God is not powerful enough to illuminate our eyes and heart to grasp all that God has for us in His Word? Part of the problem is we live in a day in age where anything we want we can have now. We do not have to wait. We then apply this logic to our understanding of God and His Word. If we cannot feel or get exactly what we want from our understanding of Scripture then we will force it. Whatever issue we might be facing whether large or small we can get through it or understand it better if we use a psychedelic in the name of Jesus. We even see this in [Galatians 5:20](#) with Paul's use of pharmakeia which means sorcery or magic. Thomas Schreiner in his commentary on Galatians says, “Sorcery or magic (*pharmakeia*) is regularly condemned in Jewish literature ([Exod 7:11, 22; 8:14; Isa 47:9, 12; Rev 18:23; cf. Wis 12:4; 18:13](#)), for instead of trusting God, people try to manipulate circumstances to bring about the end they desire. Sorcery, then, turns one from trust in the living God to dependence on other sources.” This was a common practice for pagans during this time and this is why Paul was warning against the use of pharmakeia within the list of the works of the flesh in [Galatians 5:19-21](#). This is opposed to the fruit of Spirit Paul lists in [Galatians 5:22-23](#). The problem with this approach is that it attempts to supersede the sanctification process in the life of the follower of Jesus Christ. Sanctification is the ongoing lifelong process where God frees us from sin and makes us more and more like Jesus Christ. God does allow us to go through difficult times and moments in our lives in order to draw us closer to Him.

Look at what Paul says in [Romans 8:18-30](#),

“¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but



because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Paul does not tell us that life will be easy. In fact, Paul says the opposite right at the beginning of verse 18 when he acknowledges the “sufferings of this present time” and even points us to the fact that creation is under “bondage” as well. Paul then points us to the fact that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness.” So what is the purpose of the struggles and difficulties we face? Paul helps us in **Romans 8:28**, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” If God uses all things to work together for our good, even the difficult moments, then us attempting to use a psychedelic would be attempting to supersede what God is working out in our lives. Listen to what Wayne Grudem says in his book *Systematic Theology*, “The New Testament does not suggest any short-cuts by which we can grow in sanctification; it simply encourages us repeatedly to give ourselves to the old-fashioned, time-honored means of Bible reading and meditation (**Ps. 1:2; Matt. 4:4; John 17:17**), prayer (**Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6**), worship (**Eph. 5:18–20**), witnessing (**Matt. 28:19–20**), Christian fellowship (**Heb. 10:24–25**), and self-discipline or self-control (**Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8**).” Are we willing to wait on God to work in and through us to make us more and more like Jesus Christ?

Legal Principle

Once we have a biblical understanding then we need to address the legality of the issue we are attempting to understand better. To make this as simple as possible the legal principle can be



defined as, “Is it legal?”. If the issue at hand is not legal, as psychedelics are not in Ohio, then the legal principle would not allow a Christian to participate. Paul says in [Romans 13:1-7](#),

“¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

The initial rebuttal to this is, “What if the government is evil?”. [Romans 13:3](#) is very clear that the role of the government is to strike fear on evil not on good. Our responsibilities as followers of Jesus Christ in the land is to obey where we can and object to what is evil. For example, we object to abortion on the basis of murder and celebrate when laws are put in place to protect the lives of babies. We celebrate laws where marriage is between a man and a woman and reject any laws that say otherwise.

Just because something is legal though does not mean it is Biblical. For example, it is legal to commit adultery in America, but this biblically falls into sexual immorality and should not be participated in as a Christian. Even if a psychedelic drug is legalized in Ohio, like some have been legalized around the country, a Christian should not participate in psychedelics for recreational purposes. The question though is where do these drugs fit in medically? Are there scenarios or cases where one of these drugs can be used medically to bring relief and restoration for a specific medical condition? This brings us to the authoritative principle.

Authoritative Principle

When looking at the authoritative principle we have to ask a question. Who has the authority to administer a drug? A medical professional would be the only legitimate responsible authority to administer a psychedelic drug to a patient for medical treatment. Let's use the example of the psychedelic drug Ketamine. It has been administered by EMTs in emergency situations of



intense pain to transport a patient. According to the National Institute of Mental Health Ketamine works by decreasing the effects of central sensitization, which has an impact on the occurrence of chronic pain. Here you can see a true medical benefit from a drug listed as a psychedelic. However, it is used in specific situations under the care of medical professionals for a determined amount of time.

Currently, there are studies taking place examining the use of psychedelics on a wide range of mental health issues. Within some of the studies, researchers are also looking at removing the hallucinogenic aspect of these drugs. Could there be a place for any of these drugs in end-of-life care instead of morphine? These are all questions that are currently being looked at scientifically. At this point, we do not have enough data to fully understand the dangers or medical benefits of these psychedelic drugs.

Conclusion

It becomes very clear after looking at the biblical principle that any type of psychedelic drug would be excluded from recreational use. There is a case though to be made for the medical use of psychedelic drugs. Think about it this way. We have no issue with drugs that are prescribed or bought over the counter that can cause a person to hallucinate because a doctor or company has told us there are benefits when the right amount is taken. At the same time, followers of Jesus Christ should be opposed to the abuse of these drugs. As followers of Christ, we need to think with sober-mindedness. Are we attempting to escape the problems we are facing with the recreational use of drugs? Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us? There are times when medical attention is needed and should be taken seriously. As science continues to advance in therapeutic psychedelics we would do well to continue to advance in our biblical and theological knowledge to address these issues for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor.