

Study 86-A

Mini - Booklet Series

© Copyright 3/2006
F. Paul Haney
minister and pastor
Christ Fellowship Ministries
P.O. Box 337,
Kensington, CT 06037
USA



Is Smoking a Sin?

Knowledge is the great enemy of blindness, partial and absolute, physical or spiritual. Knowledge fights against superstition and irrationality and wins every battle. Knowledge has the ability to free all of us from the blinders we wear. We are duty bound to “grow in grace and knowledge.” Opportunity to remove blinders comes toward you so very slowly that you cannot help seeing it, *if you will* see it. It creeps up like a snail, passes you, seems to make up its mind that you are not the person to seize opportunity, *and it is gone in a second*. Some of us miss opportunity because we are too dull to try. Others let opportunity go by, too much startled when they see it, or, they are too bewildered or intimidated to recognize it and to take hold of it.¹

We are required to teach what the Bible says is the truth, not what we think it ought to be.

This newsletter, study, or writing may be freely copied and distributed by any means including on the Internet, providing it is copied in total with no alterations or deletions. No charge may be levied on recipients of distributed copies. Brief quotations may be embodied in critical articles and reviews without breaching copyright.

SMOKING TOBACCO in America is a dying art form. In Europe and elsewhere, smoking is rampant. In the State of Connecticut, all restaurants are smoke-free environments. The nonsmoker can enjoy his meal without pipe, cigar, or cigarette smoke wafting about. Sweet-smelling pipe smoke seems to permeate every inch of air in a room as the smoker puffs away. Cigar smoke is just awful. Smoking on airlines has been mostly banned, except perhaps on short flights. First-hand smoke is smoke inhaled directly from the cigarette by the smoker while second-hand smoke is smoke that comes from the smoker either exhaling or from the device and being inhaled by a nonsmoker. Children in cars and in homes are nonsmokers unless they are in the company of a smoking adult—they are thus compelled to become smokers against their will. Is it possible that subjecting children to second hand smoke is equivalent to child abuse? Some think so. For me, second-hand smoke is particularly bad; I get heart palpitations when whiffing it even though I smoked for awhile as a young man before joining the Armed Services. In boot

¹ Partially adapted from “The Book of Today” © 1928 by Arthur Brisbane

Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

camp, cigarettes began giving me headaches, so I quit one day, then quit the next day for sure.

My father smoked heavily (Camel cigarettes) and my older sister smoked heavily. Both are dead, I believe, of tobacco-related cancers. My brother-in-law (at 70) is dying of lung cancer; he was also a smoker, but he did work with various street-cleaning machines and what not for the City and breathed a lot of bad air. Not everybody who gets lung cancer is (or was) a smoker, but the majority of them are (or were) smokers, as I understand it. Certainly, there exists plenty of documentation for the negative health effects of smoking tobacco.

Let me be personally candid for a moment. I was a volunteer spokesman for The American Lung Ass'n. My job was to speak to young school children about the dangers of smoking tobacco. I would show pictures of real lungs with emphysema and some that were clean. Once I asked the children, as I recall they were 5th graders or so, how many had tried smoking a cigarette (after stating that the teachers in the room were to look away!) and probably half the class or so raised their hands. As a younger man moving about the corporate and secular world in several roles, it has been my displeasure far too often to date a woman who smoked and to discover that kissing her was like kissing an ashtray. The clothing of smokers cannot help but reek of stale tobacco smoke. I instinctively draw back from such persons. Fingers and teeth get stained from smoking. As a real estate salesman some years back, I discovered that the smoker's home also retains stale tobacco smells while white walls, ceilings, curtains, and pictures all suffer damage as a result of years of tobacco smoke settling on them. As a young man raising a family in a non-smoking environment, I once refused to allow my Dad to smoke in our home, which did not make him happy since he had to go outside to smoke.

The smoking habit is very expensive these days; one pack a day for a year (\$3.00 x 365) could run a person around \$1,000 or more! That is plenty for a down payment on a decent car. To me, smoking is a dirty habit—I just cannot help being quietly repulsed by it. The flower bed outside our Post Office is littered with cigarette butts, even though there is a large receptacle just outside the door for them. People dump their automobile ashtrays in parking lots. We



live across the street from a high school, and cigarette butts and empty cigarette packages are strewn around the area (along with some broken bottles, plastic drink bottles, and various kinds of paper products, like candy wrappers. Yes, I recently spoke to the school officials about all this.). I have often wondered why people died quickly of smoke inhalation in burning buildings, while deliberate smoke inhalation is desired by so many people—I guess the harm of inhaling all those released chemicals is just a matter of degree. I have often wondered how so many church people can continue to smoke and attend church services at the same time. A Seventh Day Baptist Church I helped pastor recently had an alarming number of smokers attending. A few young ones would light up outside the building. Nevertheless, as a pastor, the question is not how repulsive smoking is to me or other nonsmokers, but whether or not smoking is a sin.

Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

Is smoking tobacco a sin? We have been told sin is the transgression of the law. **“Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness” (1Jn.3:4, RSV).** KJV: “...the transgression of the law.” The legal view devolves to lawlessness yet it is more than just breaking God’s law. “Sin” = Greek 266 *hamartia*. (abstract) *offense, sinful*, from base 264, *to miss the mark, offend, or trespass*. “Transgression” = Greek 458, *anomia*, from 459, *anomos, violation of law, wickedness, unrighteousness, or iniquity*. Does inhaling tobacco smoke offend God in any way? Does second-hand tobacco smoke offend anyone in any way? Does supporting a tobacco company by product purchases equal *missing the mark*? Can a person who has become a true believer also be a heavy smoker? How about a light smoker? *How about a Christian smoker who refuses to even try to quit smoking?* No matter what, we all sin (offend) from time to time. A sinner habitually sins and offends others. Believers are not *habitual*/sinners; they have been forgiven and now they are to be overcoming their sinful ways and the negative aspects of their lives. The strength for overcoming comes from Yahweh God through prayer and diligence. Tobacco (nicotine) addiction is said to be just as bad as addiction to other drugs and substances. That would make it an extremely difficult addiction for anyone to kick all alone. Stopping a tobacco habit is not easy, especially if you are a long-time smoker. But there are organizations and products that will help.

Our gods come in many forms. We have the Almighty God of the Bible. And we have almighty gods of food, drink, drugs, activities, clothes, and various other products. What is closest to our hearts often turns out to be a god of some sort. What we are slaves of is what we will serve diligently. In the matter of who comes first, as a matter of priorities, it is not always the God (Yahweh) of the Bible who wins out. There is an old country song by Tex Williams and Phil Harris that goes, “Smoke! Smoke! Smoke that cigarette. Puff! Puff! Puff it till you puff yourself to death. Tell Saint Peter at the Golden Gate, that you hate to make him wait—but you’ve just gotta’ have another cigarette.” It goes on to tell of an addiction that is more important than anything else. Can anyone say that addiction to smoking is a good thing?

Jesus spoke about slavery to those who believed in him. As descendents of Abraham, they thought they were not slaves at all. They missed the point. **“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ ” (Jn.8:34-36).** So, those who sin (and by this I mean habitually, which is the sense here) are slaves to that sinful activity. And the escape from that slavery is to allow the Son to make you free. Can a *habitual smoker* also be a true believer? If we determine that smoking is a sin, then of course, one addicted to smoking is a slave to sin. Even if we determine that smoking itself may not be a sin, the smoker is still addicted to smoking and that makes him a slave to tobacco products. The question then becomes: “Should a person (a believer) be a slave to an addictive substance like tobacco?” This can become a slippery slope, because if we say that one who is a slave to tobacco is going against the principles of God, how are we to look at overeating, or overindulging in any

Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

activity? Could smoking be a matter of “Christian Liberty”? Is everything a sin because, by somebody’s standards, we overdo it? —Even exercise? And who determines what overindulging is? What level is acceptable and what level is not? Who determines what is or is not sinful slavery? If a person is merely harming himself with his activity, is that sin? —Or must he harm others for the activity to rise to the level of sin? (These two last questions may become keys to the solution.)

About that slavery question, the apostle Paul makes this observance: **“Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom.6:16).** I believe that addiction to tobacco is a form of slavery. I also believe that tobacco is an uncompromising god, and that a person addicted to tobacco will do virtually anything to appease that god. He may not murder someone, but when the choice is made between tobacco and other things, as the health of one’s children or the comfort of strangers, tobacco will rule. If you believe that you are not addicted to the point of putting tobacco first, then I challenge you to stop smoking right now and never return to it. If you say, “Why?”... I will say, “Why not?”

I weaned myself off of caffeine because I was tired of the headaches during fasting periods. Although I normally drink water during a fast (and *no* biblical fast commands abstinence from water, *not even on the day of Atonement*), my coffee drinking stopped for the duration. Soon the terrible headache would begin. And it started because I was addicted to caffeine. It took me a full two weeks to rid my body of caffeine dependence. All during that time I felt awful, I had headaches and all I wanted to do was sleep. I was running, as it were, on the fuel of caffeine, and without it, my body craved the drug. Now I am running on my own fuel and I feel much better for having kicked the habit. Fasting is not a problem any more. *Does the smoker fast tobacco as well as food?*



If a person knows (or believes) that smoking is detrimental to the health of others, it seems that the right thing to do would be to not smoke in their presence. Yet, many persons fight against smoking ordinances out of a sense of “freedom” or a “right” that they believe they have. But you have no “right” to smoke in society. It is a privilege. Driving an automobile is a privilege. Building a house in a certain neighborhood is a privilege. Living in that house is a privilege granted by the State and if you do not pay your taxes (rent?) on that property, the privilege of living there can be taken from you. We “own” *private* real estate and other *private* property such as vehicles to the extent that we abide by the rules of society. Privileges are granted, monitored, and subject to control by society—and smoking is a privilege. You are not even free to say what you want; free speech is *relatively* free. For instance, if you yell “Fire!” in a crowded theater when there is no fire, you are subject to prosecution. Call a person a name and you might have to prove to a judge that it is true.

Outside of society or civilization, a person can pretty much do as he pleases, for example, living in the wilderness. But virtually all land in America, even in the far reaches of Alaska, is owned by somebody, including the

Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

wilderness, so even there, a person has to follow society's rules. No company can drill for oil in Alaska's wilderness without permission.

But *rights* come from God. For example, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are God-given rights that can be trampled upon by others. Yet some think they have a right to smoke wherever they please and to pollute your air as well as their own. But in our society, one person's right (or freedom) stops at the border of another person's rights. You are free to walk down the sidewalk in peace, but your right to so walk ceases when you step on my property and trespass my rights as a property owner. With regard to smoke that travels wherever it will and of which no one can control (not even with fans), your right to smoke ceases when my right to fresh air has been compromised by your smoke. I should not be forced to breathe your smoke against my will. You have no right to pollute another's property, be it his air or his grounds. **"Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (Jas.4:17).** According to the Lord's brother, if a person understands what is the correct action in any given situation and he fails to do it (all things being equal), then that person has sinned. This has to be considered on a case by case basis.

If a person knows or believes that smoking is detrimental to the health of others, then he also knows and believes that smoking is detrimental to his own health. Do you have a right to injure yourself? You do and you do not. Apart from God, you can do as you please. But if you have made a covenant with God as a believer, you have voluntarily limited your freedom; you have become a slave to Yahweh and in exchange for salvation, you must live an obedient and clean life, as best you can under the circumstances. Perfection is out of the question. For you, suicide would be wrong for a number of reasons, not the least of which are harm to yourself and harm to your loved ones. If your body is the "temple of God," destroying that temple quickly as in suicide or slowly by ingesting carcinogenic or toxic substances or drugs is wrong. **"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1Cor.3:16-17).** You, as a believer, were bought "with a price." You were redeemed from among the slaves of sin who were *all* condemned to death. The death warrant issued in your name has been canceled. **"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1Cor.6:19-20).** **"For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ" (v.7:22).** Does deliberately inhaling toxic tobacco smoke glorify God? Does bowing down to the god of tobacco glorify Yahweh? As a believer, you are not free to do these things. The root of smoking is a lust to be in bondage to tobacco; this makes it *idolatry*. Otherwise, millions would just stop smoking. And the lust is brought on by addiction. A person comes under the addicting power of tobacco (1Cor.6:12). **"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1Cor.10:31).** Believers are to be examples to others (2Thess.3:9).

Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

But escape from tobacco addiction is possible (**Phil.4:13; 2Cor.12:9**) though not very easy. And understanding, love, concern, and support from the brethren are necessary for escape.

What should the group or personal reaction be? On this point it should be mentioned that individual members of a fellowship or a congregation must never join together in deciding to ostracize, mark, snub, or ignore a person in their midst who is a smoker just because he is a smoker. Not snubbing a smoker does not condone the habit—it merely emphasizes the standard of love offered to any person in the group who is caught up in any given detrimental or sinful activity. If you have studied the issue, and the person (at least) agrees to not smoke in your presence, he should be accepted as one who is trying to better himself. Then go on to another study. The only time a group should disfellowship a person is for offensive activity within the group or obvious antisocial behaviors. Moral judgments and condemnation belong to God, not to individuals.

Finally, is smoking a sin?

Hear me out. “**Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**” I think this passage of Paul’s to the Corinthians is a principle of God’s. Is it a “law”? — Perhaps not in the legal sense. Certainly it is a godly principle and one of which we all fall short many times—I sometimes stumble over God’s principles and I am sure most people do. The question of whether smoking is indeed a sin is a judgment call based upon biblical precepts and godly principles. One prime godly principle to observe is to not do harm to your neighbor or cause him discomfort, and by this, I mean to include even strangers in your midst or in an area wherein the tobacco smoke can be smelled, within reason, of course. For instance, standing outside the doorway of a building and smoking is, in my opinion, a thoughtless and inconsiderate activity. People visiting the building have to walk through the smoke—maybe they don’t want to do that but not all smokers are considerate enough to go somewhere else. Some are kind and thoughtful, but the kind ones are not the persons who cause problems.

Spiritual and physical defilement. Throwing your cigarette and cigar butts down on the ground anywhere, dumping your ashtrays anywhere but in a proper receptacle, or throwing cigarettes, cigars, empty cigarette packs and similar bits of tobacco containers, out of the car window is reprehensible and blameworthy behavior. Besides starting grassfires, the garbage builds up and unless someone else picks up behind the smoker, the place begins to look like a dump. Throwing stuff out like that (and more) is hardly a godly activity and obviously a lot of people do it. If a person is going to smoke, that person should be totally responsible for his activity and his waste products, the same as any one else in society. If you eat a hamburger or drink a coffee, throw the trash into a trashcan. If you walk your dog, pick up behind it, whether you are in a little-used field or on the street. Dog parks are terrible places to walk your dog; _____
I know. Human beings can be some of the dirtiest “animals” who would soil their own area, which is something many dogs will not do. And so many dog owners just simply refuse to clean up behind their animals, even next to a school where



Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

children come and go. That is inexcusable. Cats will even bury their poops, or at least they will try to, but we humans tend to throw our trash on the ground or out the car window. In the “old days” before sanitation rules came into effect in certain places, people used to throw their used wash water and dump their slop buckets containing you-now-what right out of the window into the street! Sometimes the stuff landed on top of persons walking below. This was raw and dirty sewage, and then people sat around wringing their hands over diseases and epidemics, blaming the night air, witches, or the Jews for their misfortunes.

Defiling the camp was something that Yahweh did not like very much but it is something many of us do all the time. One example: **“Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you” (Deut.23:12-14, NIV).** If we extend this principle to our animals, what a cleaner world we would walk in.

By the same token if God “lives in you” in some manner, is it wise to defile the place where he lives?

The Israelites dared not defile the external physical tabernacle. **“Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst” (Lev.15:31).**

The land was not to be defiled. **“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance” (Deut.21:22-23).** (The hanged man was accursed by God, I think, not so much because he was hanged, but because he deserved hanging.)

“You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell in the midst of the people of Israel” (Num. 35:34).

Idol worship within the camp. Yahweh does not appreciate his people defiling themselves with idol worship. **“And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols” (Ezek.20:18).** Now, one might enquire whether or not this is a “law” of God, to *not* defile themselves with the idols of their fathers. It seems that it is. **“I the LORD am your God; (a) walk in my statutes, and (b) be careful to observe my ordinances...” (Ezek. 20:19).** Defiling oneself with an idol does break God’s laws, even the Ten Commandments. Yet, it is here placed (in a parallelism a, b) as a statute and an ordinance. One thing for sure, by bowing down to an idol, God’s law is trampled.

The question then becomes, “Is tobacco an idol?” Some ancient Israelites and others carried their “household” idols around with them from place to place. (Tobacco is carried around by smokers everywhere they go and if they run out,

Study 86-A, Is Smoking a Sin?

© Copyright 3/2006 F. Paul Haney, CFM, P.O. Box 337, Kensington, CT 06037 USA

they will purchase more to carry with them.) **“Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father’s household gods” (Gen.31:19)**. Later, her father came looking for his household gods, but they could not be found. Rachel was sitting on them. The next reference to any household gods was much later. **“So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments...’ ” (Gen.35:2)**. Hanging on to household gods in the face of Yahweh’s commandments to do otherwise, seems to be rebellion.

Idols were products of men’s hands, usually graven, carved, or cast. Tobacco goods are also products of men’s hands. I have found no mention of tobacco in the Old or New Testament. Was tobacco present to be smoked during Bible times? If it was not, then it stands to reason that no mention would be made of the substance and no direct law forbidding its use.

According to Tobacco.org and the Tobacco Timeline (adapted):

Prehistory: Although small amounts of nicotine may be found in some Old World plants, including belladonna and Nicotiana africana, and nicotine metabolites have been found in human remains and pipes in the Near East and Africa, there is no indication of habitual tobacco use in the Ancient world, on any continent save the Americas. c. 1 BCE: Experts believe American inhabitants have begun finding ways to use tobacco, including smoking (in a number of variations), chewing and in probably hallucinogenic enemas (by the Peruvian Aguaruna aboriginals). c. 1 CE: Tobacco was “nearly everywhere” in the Americas. (American Heritage Book of Indians, p.41). 1492-10-12: Columbus Discovers Tobacco; “Certain Dried Leaves” Are Received as Gifts, and Thrown Away. 1492-10-15: Columbus Mentions Tobacco. “We found a man in a canoe going from Santa Maria to Fernandia. He had with him some dried leaves which are in high value among them, for a quantity of it was brought to me at San Salvador”—Christopher Columbus’ Journal. 1492-11: Jerez and Torres Discover Smoking; Jerez Becomes First European Smoker. In the 1600’s, sailors began to spread tobacco around the world. Cigars seem to have come into being in the 1800’s and cigarettes by 1900. So tobacco use was apparently unknown in OT times in the relevant areas.

From all indications, tobacco (via the drug nicotine) is so addictive that it demands attention from the smoker day and night. Some people have been known to panic without tobacco. Others refuse to part with tobacco for any reason. I have seen pictures of smokers who have had their larynx removed smoking through a stoma, a hole in their neck. In my way of thinking, when someone pays more attention to a tobacco product than to Yahweh, the tobacco product has become the number one god in their life. In my estimation, one cannot serve tobacco and Yahweh at the same time. In my experience, many tobacco users will deny their overwhelming dependence on tobacco, and it is this dependence that creates the god in their lives—a physical dependence that is greater than one’s spiritual dependence upon God.

Although the Bible does not directly address smoking, I would have to answer, “For the believer, yes, smoking is sin.” Is smoking a salvation issue? Could be, but that is only between the smoker and Yahweh. *F. Paul Haney*