

Doing Drugs - The Drugs Debate

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 June 2000

Preacher: Peter Stokes

[0 : 00] at dealing with a number of different issues and bridging gaps between the church and politics.

I made the privilege only a couple of days ago of speaking to a person who is one of just a few hand-picked people who are two ICs to our Prime Minister.

It was very interesting talking to him and through Salt Shakers we've done more and more liaising with government, trying to put the Christian perspective into the many issues that are confronting our community.

Drugs is one that certainly is confronting our community at the moment and we really need to look at it in the same way as Christians that we look at any issue in the community.

And I sum that up in three things that we need to do. We need to ask what is God's point of view.

We need to ask what is best for the community.

[1 : 13] And then thirdly and lastly, we have to look at what is our own point of view and what is best for us. Because if we take ourselves first, which unfortunately is very much the trend of our culture today, then we can see the results already.

We only have to look at our community and see that this lucky country of Australia has one of the highest youth suicide rates, in fact general suicide rates in the world.

We kill over 100,000 babies by abortion every year in this country. People are locking themselves in their homes and even in their cars.

Our prisons are full and people are dying from drug overdoses. If we look at that, are we such a lucky country? And the reason I suggest that we're in that mess is because we've forgotten the three ways of looking at all these issues, even within the church to a large degree.

What is God saying? Believing God's word to be his word is the first place to start. Unfortunately, some in the church have even forgotten that.

[2 : 30] And they turn away from God's word and say, well, the culture dictates what God's word says and we have to look at God's word in the light of the culture. I'm afraid I turn around and I don't care if it sounds old-fashioned, but I say that what we have to do is look at the culture in light of God's word and put God's word into that.

Charles Colson said recently that there are two sorts of commission for the church. One is the great commission to go preach the gospel. The other is the cultural commission to influence that culture and mould it into God's culture.

And so it's vitally important that any of these issues that we're dealing with, including the drug issue, that we look at it from God's point of view. And I guess we have to say, well, what does God say about drugs?

The swift answer to that is nothing. There's no reference to drug taking in the Bible, but we can't stop there. There are numerous references to what our attitudes should be to life generally and many of those can be very quickly attributed to how our attitude should be to drugs.

We picked the verses out of Corinthians tonight because I think they are really the heart and soul of what God says to us about our bodies.

[3 : 57] I often have to remind people that in the Old Testament they had a temple. It was a magnificent building. Solomon built a temple following what was quite an elaborate mobile temple for many years and that temple was held in extremely high esteem.

There were certain parts of that temple that the average people were not even allowed to go into. But you see, when we change from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we find that what God is saying is that we are now the temples of the Holy Spirit.

And through these words of Paul, he is really emphasising where our first point of call should be when deciding when anything is good or bad for us.

What are we doing to this temple? If we're Christians, we know it's God's temple. We know and we say as Christians that God lives in us. That should be our first port of call and as young people, it shouldn't be what do our friends think?

What's going to make us feel good? But where are we at with Jesus Christ and how will we let him influence what we do with our bodies? We've heard some very interesting things already this evening.

[5 : 26] We've heard about how drugs are used as escapism, how they change emotions, how people lost their self-control from taking drugs, how easily Sean became addicted.

In fact, he said it was scary about how quickly he had become addicted. You feel good, but in the downside, you feel bad. They change your emotions. Emotional problems that people want to forget.

The problem with drugs is they don't deal with the emotional problems, they just make them a bit blurred for a short while. And all of these things are changing our own minds.

Secondly, of course, they're destroying relationships. Again, Sean said he had a distraught mother. It destroyed his relationships with his family. It destroyed his own health. He became paranoid. He was playing games in his head. In other words, he lost control of himself. The drugs took over. And if we go back to those verses in Corinthians where it says, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

[6 : 35] Therefore, honour God with your body. How can we honour God if we allow something else to take control of our body? An artificial substance.

In fact, the great thing that Sean said was that he realised that God, Jesus, loved him. And that's when he found he didn't need the drugs. And what an amazing testimony that God does love us enough to help us get through without those drugs if we want him to.

And that's the difference, I guess. Well, that's a Christian perspective on ourselves taking drugs. I guess we need to look at what is a community's perspective and what is being proposed at the moment to bring it really down to practical terms. What are we actually saying here in Victoria? What is the government saying that we should do about the current drug problem? Well, this is the government answer to that drug problem. Now, if you've thought about what's happening at the moment, most of you, I guess, will have known that the government is suggesting that we open five safe injecting rooms in Melbourne with all sorts of arguments going along as to why we should do that.

[8 : 06] And let me tell you that the world's arguments are always full of holes. In fact, they're often full of lies. And the more you become involved, as we have over recent years, of actually taking a deep look at the proposals that come out of a lot of our governments and supported by a lot of people, most arguments to change our culture are based on lies.

That's the way, quite frankly, to put it in biblical terms, that's the way Satan works. And we've only got to scratch the surface a little bit to find the lies.

And then we understand where the ideas are coming from. If you scratch the surface and find that whatever is being proposed is in the best interests of the vast majority of people rather than the self-interest of a few, then that's a first good sign that you're on the right direction.

If we were to take this issue of a safe injecting room, as they've delighted in calling it for so long until, interestingly enough, until they became challenged on the word safe, Mr Pennington doesn't use the word safe anymore.

He'll often just talk about an injecting facility. And yet when they did a survey amongst people in the community, every question that mentioned the injecting room had the word safe before it.

[9 : 41] They had 12 questions before they got to question 13, which was roughly, if we can find a safe, a suitable place to put them, are you in favour of safe injecting rooms?

This was after Mr Pennington had stopped using the word safe because he kept coming up against people like us who kept saying, how are they safe?

You cannot have a safe means of taking an illegal drug when you don't know what that drug is. Nevertheless, they're pursuing the injecting room proposal.

And all sorts of people are supporting it, even some in the church. And that is always a big disappointment to us when we're tackling these issues from a biblical point of view and some

people in the church come out with a different biblical point of view.

But often it's very easy to discover that that biblical point of view has been worked at from a cultural point of view rather than from saying, how does the Bible fit this situation? They say, how do we fit that situation into the Bible?

[10 : 50] Now, in dealing with this particular issue, we have to say that Margaret Hamilton, and this is not typically a biblical sermon, but it's an interesting pursuit of where we're going with drug policy in Victoria.

Margaret Hamilton, who works for Turning Point Ministries, this year, they've got my able assistant down here, she's better at memorising things than I am. Turning Point has actually stated that injecting rooms will not save lives.

And yet, how often have we heard that injecting rooms will save lives? The reason they won't save lives is because if you look at some of the very interesting statistics about drug taking in Victoria, then you start to see some of the false arguments and the reasons why this suggestion is the first one rather than the last one.

And might I say to you that that reason is because there is ulterior motive at foot. Have a look at this graph, which rather interestingly shows that 81% of drug deaths in Victoria in one year usually from tobacco.

16% from alcohol and 3% from illicit drugs. And the first thing I want to say to you tonight is, folks, young people especially, if you can make 18 or 19 without getting involved in alcohol or tobacco or illegal drugs, then there's a 90% chance you'll go through the rest of your life without ever trying.

[12 : 34] Now there's a bit of a goal for you to reach 18 and 19 without getting involved in these things. How hard is that?

Pretty hard, I guess. There's a lot of community out there that's pushing the issue of getting involved in drinking and smoking. but you can see the ultimate cause of that with 18,580 deaths from tobacco every year.

And yet we don't seem to have had the outcry about tobacco and alcohol that we've had about heroin deaths. One of the reasons, of course, is that heroin deaths come more quickly.

You've got to smoke for a number of years before it'll kill you. You've got to drink a lot of drink unless you go out and drive afterwards before it'll kill you. Smoking doesn't affect your brain as quickly as taking illicit drugs does.

Alcohol affects your brain somewhat quicker. Drugs affect your brain quicker still. And despite the comments that marijuana is a soft drug, it is extremely harmful.

[13 : 54] 25% of people in our psychiatric hospitals today are there because of marijuana use. If we want to look at a perspective on the drug issue, we've got to understand, you see, all of the facets of the issue.

It's no good just saying drugs are wrong, so don't use them, but we have to look at the evidence that's out there in the community. And the evidence is not good.

There are over 12,000 studies in a university in America that show the danger of marijuana. 12,000 studies.

Not just one or two. Not just somebody's idea that, oh, this might be bad for you. But 12,000 studies in one library that have been collated together from around the world that all prove how dangerous marijuana is for the individual.

people. Why don't we hear that sort of message coming from people that are talking about what are supposed to be the experts in drugs? We hear that drug abuse is wrong.

[15 : 04] Mr. Pennington believes drug abuse should be controlled, but drug use, well that's okay because well he thinks that marijuana should be legalised. In New South Wales recently they moved to make small amounts of marijuana legal.

Not so much legal, but just allow you to carry it for your own personal use. The allowable rate was 30 grams. That costs about \$300.

That'll buy you something like 25 bottles of scotch or 40 packets of cigarettes. No, sorry, 15 bottles of scotch and about 40 packets of cigarettes. So if you walked around with 15 bottles of scotch and said, oh, this is just for my personal use, it would seem a bit silly.

If you walk around with 40 packets of cigarettes on you and say, this is just for my personal use, it would be a bit silly. And yet when it comes to drugs, 30 grams will actually last the average user 30 days because the average usage rate is one gram a day.

You see what I mean by saying when you scratch the surface a bit you find out that there are all sorts of funny things going on below the surface and the truth is not always told. We have done some research on drug deaths in Victoria.

[16:30] We got the coroner's reports for a bit over a 12 year period. It's a bit big for the overhead. But if you look at the two graphs, on the right hand side is the deaths from supposed heroin deaths.

I'll come to that one in a minute. In homes. And this one is the ones on the street. 25% of deaths are on the street. 75% are actually in private homes.

Where does the logic come from that providing somewhere supposedly safe for people to shoot up heroin is the answer to heroin deaths when most of them are happening at home?

Are people going to leave their nice cosy home and go down the street, catch a tram or get in a car, go down the street and shoot up their heroin? No, they're not. In fact, the average heroin user will tell you that they won't go more than about five minutes away from where they score their hit in order to shoot up because that's why they scored the hit.

74% of overdose in private homes makes a mockery of what we're currently talking about as a policy on heroin use.

[17:47] Now we have another slide there that talks about what is actually in the drugs that these people are supposedly who have died of heroin.

We had a researcher look at the figures and we found that only 7% of all those that were classed as heroin overdoses actually died from heroin alone. 8% died of a mostly heroin other drugs concoction and the other 85% was such a concoction of drugs that nobody knew what they'd actually died of.

Again, why are we looking at opening heroin injecting rooms when we see those sorts of statistics? The interesting fact was that until we, on behalf of one of my hats, as well as the coalition and salt shakers, I'm Vice President of the Family Council of Victoria.

We were very concerned about what was happening with drug deaths and drug policy in Victoria. We went to the coroner and asked him for the figures and we discovered that no government body had asked for those figures before.

Why didn't they ask for the figures to find out what was causing the deaths before they decided to head out on a program to solve a problem? They were quite surprised when we did this and very quickly we found a research unit in Monash were suddenly doing the statistics.

[19:11] We'd already done it and we were promoting it and asking the questions and they were caught by surprise. We all too easily today accept what we read in the paper and what we hear on the news and what we hear so-called experts say.

And all too often as Christians we don't actually even look at the facts, let alone look at what the Bible says about the issue. Another thing that we did was to look at overseas research and when you discover that the government are talking about what's happening in Germany, how they're opening injecting rooms in Germany, how they're opening injecting rooms in Amsterdam, in fact they've been there for some time, and what they're doing in Switzerland and they're saying that these things are successful.

We looked at overseas experience but we looked somewhere else, we looked at Sweden and if we lift it up we'll find that estimated heroin dependence users in Australia and this is the Sweden figure per head of population.

If you look at Amsterdam, it's a wash with drugs. If you look at Switzerland, it's a wash with drugs. Their answer, open injecting rooms. Ten years ago, just outside Amsterdam, an injecting room was opened.

Very soon they realised that the only way of making an injecting room safe was to actually control the drugs that were being used, well as best they could under the basis that most drugs are illegal that we're talking about here.

[20:50] So their injecting room decided to not only allow people to shoot up their drugs but they allowed them to, they actually supplied the heroin. But of course it was very scientifically tested before they used it.

They went out on the street, purchased a bit of heroin from a street dealer, went back. If the drug addicts that they tested it on said, oh yeah, this is a good dose of stuff, they went out and bought enough for the day. Scientific testing of drug use.

And for ten years, that drug centre establishment has provided heroin for people to smoke. They don't let them put it in with a needle there. They let them smoke it. But the leader of that injecting facility or heroin establishment, as they like to call it, facility, was asked, what have you actually achieved?

And with tears rolling down his eyes, he said, nothing. He said, in fact, the addicts are now saying to me, you know, if you hadn't been giving me this stuff, I would have been off it by now. Is that the message we want to give to our young people in Victoria?

The message of a drug injecting room which says, we've got no hope, we've got no answer for you, we're just going to provide a place for you to shoot your drugs, where it's safe, where you won't get arrested, where you can keep on coming back over and over again and shoot your drugs.

[22 : 20] Well, no, of course, they say, we can't say no to drugs. They said that about television too, didn't they? A great comic cartoon which we haven't got with us today.

And when we were talking in NVE and X-rated videos and programs on television, everybody said, well, you don't have to watch it. And then they came out with things to help you sort of filter out these things and somebody just said, this cartoon just said, it was a television salesman and it said, well, this one actually comes with an on-off switch.

You can say no. If we're going to think in terms of drugs as Christians, then it's important we understand the whole issue.

And testimonies such as Sean certainly give us an insight into why people get on drugs. Some of the video told us that, well, you know, a lot of people haven't got things in their lives that they're trying to hide up.

It's just a social thing today. But the evidence is that that's not really the case. Or if it starts out that way, it quickly becomes an addiction and then it controls the life.

[23 : 46] These were the words of a heroin addict associated routine challenge. I don't want free heroin. I don't want free needles. And I don't want free methadone.

I just want to be free. If we're to understand the drug issue, we have to look outside ourselves, outside our churches.

We have to understand what is causing the most drug use in this nation. And in fact, it's dysfunctional families. It's stress. It is, to a degree, young people trying to be cool.

But that turns very quickly into a very uncool situation, as we've heard from Sean tonight. But like all of the things that we have been dealing with over recent years that have been addictions in people's lives, whether it be sex, whether it be drugs, whether it be gambling, it's because underneath there are problems they're running away from.

We may not often realise that we're running away from problems. But it's easier to go down the track the mates are going down, walk the path that our friends are walking, than it is to actually sit down and talk through your life with somebody.

[25 : 15] And of course, young people, there is somebody who wants to talk to you. Sean found Jesus Christ after he got involved in drugs.

I think he would tell every one of you that it would have been much better if he'd met Jesus Christ before he found the drugs. And he's nodding his head. You see, there is no such thing as a safe way to take drugs.

There is no such thing as a safe illegal drug. And in fact, some of those they give us that are legal aren't too safe either. And I'm concerned about the overuse of the legal drugs as well as the illegal ones.

But there is a better answer. And to the older folk, those that are around my era, that at the moment vote, have a say, I would say to you, give our young people a chance.

And don't simply absorb what the governments are telling us, what professionals are telling us, what the experts tell us is the right way to go.

[26 : 32] Because we happen to know that some of those experts have got ulterior motives. We have a book that shows that Alex Wodak, a person often put up as an expert on a drug issue, said 10 years ago, the only way to solve the problem is to legalise heroin, marijuana and basically any other drug.

Why should they be illegal? The simple reason is they were made illegal in the 1940s and 50s because of the damage they were causing to society. Young people, we're not talking about drug reform today.

We're talking about going back to a bad drug policy. A bad drug policy that was in vogue in this country for many years and caused enormous problems. That's why they made them illegal. It's a bit like taking our speed limits off our roads today. Because I want to drive fast. I mean, I love driving fast. Why should I not be able to go more than 100 kilometres an hour when I used to drive coaches in England at 100 miles an hour down the road?

I mean, I should be able to do it here, shouldn't I? I said that to a politician one day. They said, OK, they weren't on the coach. By the way, it was illegal. I mean, it was legal. It was legal.

[27 : 46] We have the rules for good reason. But of course, the best rules of all, we don't like that word rules, but the best values, the best guidance that we can get for our lives is in here.

God created us. He knows us. He wants to know us intimately. So young people don't get sucked in like Sean did.

Listen to what he says. Go talk to him. I'm sure he can tell you a lot of horrible stories about things he did when he was on drugs, about the things it did to him.

I can't tell you. I've never been on drugs. I can tell you what it's like to be drunk and how silly you feel, because I did a little bit of that, but not much. And it's not worth it. Older folk, adults, please don't swallow the lies.

Look at what this book says about what is right and wrong, and then help change this country into the country it should be, governed by Christian rules, by scratching the surface, by talking about the issues and finding out the truth.

[29 : 04] That's what Salt Shakers tries to do with these issues. We try and give people easy to read, easy to understand ways of looking at the issues, to find the truth of the issue from a biblical point of view, to find the truth of the issue from a society point of view.

If you want to hear somebody who knows all about the drug issue, next Friday, a little plug here, next Friday at Crossway, our church, and it's just Crossway's the venue, we have a speaker from Sweden.

She was in Sweden when they had a liberal drug policy. She helped to turn it around with a lot of angry parents who were sick of seeing their kids die or lose their brain power or go completely off the rails because of drugs.

They turned it around. We've shown you the statistics. She's here in Melbourne next week. Come and hear her. Listen to the people who have the experience and have turned things around rather than the experience we're told is experience from overseas.

Get to grips with this issue, young people, because otherwise it will destroy you. Older folk, adults, let's send the right message to our young people that there is a better way.

[30 : 23] We don't want the current drug policy because it's a hopeless policy. We want a biblical-paced policy that puts Christ into people's lives, that gives young people hope.

Let's make up.