

# Nearly Damned by the Influence of Tobacco-Using Preachers

by Lewis Williams

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*The speaker shares his personal struggle with tobacco and argues that it is a sinful habit that Christians should give up, especially preachers who claim to be examples of Christ's holiness.*

**Scripture:** Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 4:22, James 4:7

**Topics:** "Sanctified Living", "Personal Testimony"

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## Description

Brother Williams shares his personal journey of struggle with tobacco use and the impact of preachers using tobacco on his perception of Christianity. He reflects on the influence of a preacher's actions on his own choices and the importance of living a clean and pure life as a representative of Christ. Through a series of events and inner battles, he ultimately finds salvation and renounces tobacco, emphasizing the need to fully surrender to God and reject sinful habits to maintain a sanctified life.

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## Transcript

Brother Williams, do you mean to say that you could not give of your money to support a preacher who uses tobacco, and retain your experience of entire sanctification?

Before giving you my answer, allow me to relate a little of my experience. I am told that my grandfather on my father's side was a Presbyterian (of the old school), and that he kept his decanter on the sideboard and used to take a little "for his stomach's sake," and sometimes took too much. My father was converted when twenty-two years old. He had formerly used tobacco, but then ceased the habit. Every boy born in my father's family who grew up became a user of tobacco; I began the use of it when eight years old. My older brothers would leave it lying about in their rooms, and I would feel of the yellow wrapper, and soon learned to like it. My first chew, and my first smoke each made me sick, but never afterwards. I used it unknown to my parents until I was sixteen. When father learned that I was using it, he expressed sorrow and surprise. I was a strong-willed boy, and with a rambling nature, and left home when sixteen for the first time.

My father was an ordained local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and his home was always a stopping place for the preachers. I never cared anything particularly about religion. I thought my father a good man, and I never saw him angry but twice in his life; and then it was under great provocation. I was somewhat to blame for both of those times myself. As I grew up, I had but little thought or care about

salvation: did not believe there was much of anything in it beyond a simple profession. I had no confidence whatever in the vast majority of those who made a profession; I believed father lived up to what he professed. Is also had much confidence in the superintendent of the little country Sunday School held at the school house, believed him to be a good man, endeavoring to live up to what he professed, but had no confidence in the majority of those who called themselves Christians.

I had a wild, fun-loving disposition and, unknown to my parents, learned to dance when quite young, play cards, and attend the theater, whenever the opportunity afforded. I danced with church members, played cards with church members, and saw church members at the theater. I smoked and chewed tobacco as I saw many church members, and many preachers, who would be at my father's house, do, and I often wondered what difference there was between those preachers and other men, who neither preached nor used tobacco. My father often spoke to me concerning my soul, but I would always be ready with an argument, and would immediately hold up those men and ask for the difference. He would cry over me and talk to me, but I would ask him for a proof that there was a God, and laugh at the lives of many who professed and yet did many things that I would not do. His tears would make me feel sorry for what I had said to him, but I did not change my belief at all.

There finally came to our place a preacher by the name of Vanscoy; and I grew to have much respect for him. He was one man out of many that I believed in; and when my parents talked to me concerning my life, I would say I did not have much faith in religion, but I did believe Mr. Vanscoy had it, if anybody did. Circumstances caused him to leave the ministry, and he went into the brick-making business, a short distance from town. My father sold his farm and moved to town, and proceeded to build a brick house, and as my brother Frank and myself each owned a team, we hauled the brick for father's house. I was always pleased when Mr. Vanscoy would be present to pitch me the brick from the kiln. I liked to have him talk to me. One morning I had backed my wagon in position to load it, and said to Mr. Vanscoy, who stood waiting to begin loading, "Wait a moment," and taking a piece of tobacco from my jacket, took a chew; I was returning the plug to my pocket, when he said, "Throw it up, Lew." I replied, "Throw what up?" He said, "Your tobacco." I tossed it up to him, and, taking his knife from his pocket, he cut off a chew, placing it in his mouth, and returned the plug to me. God help me to tell it. I will never forget that hour; I could not have been more astonished if he had thrown a brick at my head. I looked in amazement at that man, but he chewed and spit, and I saw it was an old habit with him. I cannot tell you how I got my load on, nor how I reached home, but immediately on my arrival, I called mother out and said to her, "You need not talk any more religion to me nor say anything about my having filthy habits. There is your great and good preacher just as dirty and filthy as you say I am." I said much more to her, and every spark of faith or respect I had for the man vanished, so far as the ministry was concerned. I passed his place many many times afterwards, but the episode in the brick-yard always came up before me.

That house was completed and preachers came and went, but I took no interest in them what ever, and seldom cared to hear them preach. Finally, one day father told me he had a minister friend coming that evening, and as he was an old-time friend, he wished me to remain at home and see him. I understood all; he wanted the preacher to talk with me, and I remained. He was either a presiding elder at the time, or had been, I forget which. The minister came, and after tea, we adjourned to the parlor. I had been a silent listener to the conversation, but not a word had been spoken to me concerning religion. When we were seated in the parlor, that preacher, who was posing as an ambassador of Jesus, representing the cause of Christ on earth, professing to be an example for others, took out a cigar, bit off the end, lighted it, and began smoking with as much ease as though it were the most natural thing to him on earth. A cigar was

handed to me, and I accepted it. I knew that tobacco smoke had never been in that parlor before; I knew that the very smell of it made my mother deathly sick, and yet, there in my mother's parlor, sat a representative of religion, filling the room with smoke, befouling the furniture, the curtains at the windows, and the house in general, which none of us boys were ever allowed to do. Not one word did that preacher say to me about my soul; not one sentence did he address to me concerning his Master's (?) business, and, filled with disgust, I soon excused myself, and in a few minutes was down street in a billiard parlor where the air was filled with exactly the same odor as my mother's parlor; the difference being that the smokers in the billiard parlor were men who made no profession of religion, and the smoker in my mother's parlor was a man who professed to be a representative of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And I am unsaved young man, had no more use for him or his profession than for any other man whom I detested. My parents never mentioned his name to me after that evening, and I absolutely had neither confidence nor respect for a preacher who used tobacco. I knew it was a filthy habit, and I used it, and made no profession whatever. Whenever I was spoken to concerning my life or religion, I always replied that I guessed I was not so very bad, for the preachers did the same thing I did. My life was a wicked one, and it caused my parents much sorrow and grief, but, except by them, I was seldom spoken to about religion.

What might have taken place had that man been what his position implied, a man clean and pure, filled with God and a burning love for a lost world, an example of the Christ who broke His heart and died for fallen humanity? Had he been such a man, who knows what the influence of that evening might have been? Had he approached me in love and tenderness and in the spirit of Jesus, I might have had the whole tenor of my life changed; but no, he was just the opposite, -- a carnal, sensual, filthy man. I remember my mother airing the house the next day, to get rid of the impure smell that a presiding elder of the M. E. Church had befouled it with. How many ministers today are doing the same thing; and, instead of being a power for good in their community, they are being used by the devil to corrupt young men and boys, and start them out and downward on a course of lustfulness and sin.

Can I take the money that I have placed on God's altar in entire consecration to be His forever, and give it to support a preacher engaged in such hellish business? Listen! A friend of mine, one whom I have known for years, was sitting in my study some little time ago and was telling me some of his experiences in evangelistic work. He said, "I have just been out east of here holding a meeting with an M. E. preacher who is a user of tobacco. In his former charge, he used to invite the boys in after services on Sunday night, and 'hold a smoker with them.' One Sabbath evening after service, he said, 'Georgie, come on, let us go over to the parsonage and burn some incense,' meaning tobacco." Think of that, ye folks who profess to have consecrated your money to the Lord! Think of taking the Lord's money and supporting a preacher who, in idolatrous blasphemy, speaks thus of his dirty uncleanness, and who, by his actions and influence, is training your boys to lives of debauchery and making out of them foul smelling creatures, impairing their own lives, poisoning God's own pure, free air, and transmitting diseases and death in their families.

My friend dealt with the preacher regarding his incense, but he retorted, "If the truth was known, one third or more of the preachers in my Conference use it, only some of them do it secretly."

Listen! A few months ago I was returning from a meeting in Kentucky when a gentleman took a seat by my side and said, "I live in the town where you have just closed your meeting. You stirred up our people considerably on the tobacco question." I replied, "Did I speak too strongly against it?" "No, sir," he replied, "you cannot speak too strongly against it. Why sir, I am a physician, and in my last month's medical journal

there is the statement made that fifty to sixty per cent of the cases of the women who have to go to the operating table, go as the result of living with husbands who use tobacco and liquor. One begets the appetite for the other; you cannot speak out too strongly against it, sir." This is a statement made by a man of medicine. Think of the tens and thousands of women going to the operating table to be cut and maimed for life, and half of them, or more, being afflicted as the result of the tobacco and the liquor habit. And then do you ask me to take the Lord's money and give it to support a preacher, not only guilty of being responsible for such wholesale butchery himself, but helping to increase it by his influence?

During the above mentioned meeting held in Kentucky, we found a Baptist preacher in the town who used tobacco. One day he was calling on a widow who was doing her best to rightly raise her fatherless boy, who had taken a great liking for his mother's pastor, the Baptist preacher. After the preacher had left the house, the little fellow turned to his mother and said, "Mamma, I want to be a big man, quick! I want to be a big man like Brudder Brown," (meaning the preacher). "Why, my son?" asked the mother. "So I can make," replied the child, who had seen the preacher smoking. Ye parents, think of it! The influence of that tobacco-soaked Baptist preacher over that fatherless child, whose mother was doing her best to train him in the fear of the Lord. "Quick, mudder! I want to be a big man quick, so I can make like Brudder Brown."

Do you mean that I should not publicly declare that I cannot and will not give one penny of the Lord's money to the support of such a man? But let me return to my own experience. I have stated that I was a strong, self-willed boy. In my twentieth year, I promised that I would quit the use of tobacco. I did so; stopped both smoking and chewing abruptly, and, though still unsaved, for several months I never touched it. For months I battled with my appetite. Sometimes I got so dizzy I had to lie down in sheer weakness. Oh, how I wanted tobacco! It seemed all my teeth were aching and would almost jump out of their places. It seemed as if there was something gnawing at my very vitals, and that I would have to have some tobacco or die, and in those struggles, up would come the faces of those preachers who used it, and I would argue, there is no harm in my using it if the preachers can do so. For months I fought that awful battle daily, hourly; every conscious moment I wanted tobacco.

One Sunday I went to hear a Free Methodist preacher in a school house. When we arrived the house was crowded, and the preacher's desk was near the entrance where I stood during the service. I had heard him much ridiculed; that he was a holiness crank and narrow; that he preached Holiness, whatever that was. Well, that morning he hit tobacco pretty strongly, and the crowd laughed at him, but some way I did not feel like laughing, but wondered why he thought it to be so wicked. Other preachers, even presiding elders whom I knew of, used it. However, I never forgot his message; it stuck to me, but oh, the fight with the appetite!

Finally I said, if the preachers use tobacco I can also, and began to use it secretly. After doing so for some weeks, I felt that I wanted to come out with it; finally an opportunity occurred, and I let the one to whom I had made my promises see that I was using it again. Never this side of Heaven will I forget the look of surprise and sorrow that overspread that countenance, nor the sob that escaped the lips, with the words, "is it possible you have deceived me? Some day you will be sorry." Was it prophecy? Why was it to be true, and so soon? for in three days I was looking into that face, cold and still in death; and as I sat alone in the dark with my dead, was it the voice of the devil who said, "You have practiced deception; you have broken your word; you used it!" And then the faces of those tobacco-using preachers came up before me. I was unsaved, and with my wild nature I broke away and said, "I will never quit it again! If I go to Hell, I will go there with a chew of tobacco in my teeth and have preachers for company. I put no restraint on the habit, chewed, smoked, and sometimes have slept with a chew in my mouth. Why should I torment myself

and punish myself by not using it? If it was not wrong for preachers, it surely could not be wrong for me.

Years passed by, and I, a wild, roving lad, landed in a western town. One Sunday afternoon I ran into an open-air meeting, and, persuaded by my chum, attended the meeting held indoors. That service made a deep impression upon me, and I went back to the services again. Men whose faces bore the marks of sin and dissipation rose and gave their experience; how they had lived in sin, but that God had saved them. My whole life came up before me, conscience was aroused from slumber, conviction seized me, and I saw myself a lost, guilty soul before God. For ten days I fought out the battle of my life. I do not think I slept ten hours during those ten days; sleep left me and I had no appetite for food. I said but little to those about me, but inwardly there was a tempest.

It was three miles from where I was employed to the place where the meetings were held. I attended every night and would walk each way on the bank of the river. I walked to and fro, and thought, and fought my battle. Much confessing was needed, and slowly during those ten days I retraced many years of my life, until on Saturday night I found myself again in the meeting. At the invitation, I put up my hand, asking for prayers, which resulted in my falling on my knees to pray. Loving, warm-hearted children of God gathered about me and prayed and advised -- "Now, brother, give up all that is sinful and surrender yourself fully to God, and cry out to Him and He will forgive all your sins, and save you." One thing after another went quickly. "Do you give up all wrong doing;" "Yes," (faintly). "Sure? Everything vile and sinful?" No answer. Over and over they sang; again and again they endeavored to draw some word from me, but my lips were locked. A brother was kneeling by my side endeavoring to help me, when a precious sister, who is the wife of a holiness evangelist in the south, inquired, "What does he says?" "He won't say anything," replied the brother. "There is something he won't give up," she said. Ah, what a home thrust that was! It struck to the very center of my being. God helped me to see it as it was. It did not take me long to give up everything and promise God to follow Him in all things but the one thing, and that was my tobacco. I had said I never would give it up again. Preachers used it, and why not I? If they used it, it could not be wrong, but something seemed to ring through my soul, "Give it up, give it up; it is a filthy habit."

Three times I heard the Bible read through at my father's family altar; I knew the Book said to "cleanse yourself from all the filthiness of the flesh," "To touch not the unclean thing" and "I will receive you." Oh, I knew I was an awful sinner and I wanted to find God and I knew God was dealing with me, but silently I would say, "But the preachers use it. They said they were your sons. I have seen many who said they belonged to you who use tobacco, and how can it be so wrong?" But back would come the words, "Give it up, give it up." "But, Lord, I can't. I tried and I can't, and why is it wrong?" And there were the faces of those preachers, and the battle went on. There I was, a wild, dissipated young man, almost ruined, drinking, cursing and carousing, on my way towards Hell; but under the convicting power of God I was struggling for my soul's salvation, and up before me again and again rose the faces of those tobacco-using preachers. If these lines are ever read by a preacher who uses this vile, filthy weed, may God help you either to fall on your knees and give it up and cry out to God until you get complete deliverance from your sin; or come down out of the pulpit; and for the sake of poor, lost souls, never profess to be the ambassador of Christ again. For souls are being led into sin and will stumble into a devil's Hell over your damnable vice; and they will rise up in judgment before the bar of Almighty God against you and condemn you to everlasting doom, those who by your unclean influence have been damned. I believe a vile, dirty, unclean soul will be shut out of Heaven, no matter whether he be a tobacco using gambler or a tobacco-using preacher.

But to my struggle. On it went, while about me were God's children pleading with me to surrender to God and be saved. The blessed Holy Spirit was pleading with me on one side and the devil close on the other. How I was torn between the conflicting forces. How the devil did fight for my soul. "The preacher uses it; those men you had confidence in, they use it; why not you? You don't need to give it up, you can be a Christian without giving up your tobacco. I would not give it up," he would whisper in my ear. Great drops of sweat stood on my forehead, and oh, what agony I was in! After awhile I began to think perhaps it was wrong, and those preachers false. And then the devil came back at me with my deception. "If you do give it up, you cannot get saved anyway. Those you deceived are dead, and you cannot get forgiveness from the dead. You have gone too far, and you might as well go on and use it still; your case is hopeless."

Friends, it seemed that two forces had hold of me, and each was pulling in an opposite direction and that I would be pulled apart. I cannot describe the agony I underwent in those two hours. Friends who were God's own, pleading, praying and weeping; the blessed Holy Spirit knocking and entreating; my own poor soul yearning for peace and freedom on one side; and on the other my broken promises, the devil and the faces of tobacco-using preachers, backing in a vile, filthy, poisonous habit that had me bound as fast and hard and cruelly as ever a slave was bound to his master. The struggle continued for two long hours, until I seemed to be upon the brink of some high precipice, and the ground slipping from beneath my feet. I felt that I was going over and down to the darkness beneath; and, in agony and despair, I flung up my hands and cried out of my very soul, "Lord, save me! I do give up! Jesus, save me!" And quicker than I can tell you how, the darkness turned to sunshine, the gloom and sorrow to brightness, and joy swept in and through and all over me; and I knew Jesus had heard and that I was saved. I sprang to my feet and helped to sing, "Hallelujah, 'tis done! I believe on the Son, I am saved by the blood of the crucified one." Nobody begged me to believe. I was believing. and I felt and knew that Jesus saved me.

I had a time with the tobacco the following morning when I arose from my bed. As was my habit, and before I realized it, I put my hand into my pocket, and taking out a small piece of tobacco, was about to place it in my mouth, when I remembered my promise to God. I threw the tobacco under the bed, went down-stairs to my breakfast, went back up to my room, crawled under the bed and got the tobacco, and was sitting on the bed looking at it, when in walked my chum. He said, "Well, old fellow, what are you going to do about it?" Taking the tobacco from me, he bit off a chew. I replied, "George, I have made many promises, some of which I have broken; and I would give worlds, if I had them, could I undo or make good those promises; but I can't. But I made God a promise last night that I would use tobacco no more, and I'll keep that promise or die in the attempt." I wanted it, but I said, No. For about ten days or so I fought on; but one Sabbath morning God took away the appetite as completely as though I had never known it, and it has remained so to this day. It has never for one moment returned, but, on the contrary, not only my mind or good sense rebels against it, but my very nostrils abhor the deadly, stinking stuff. Sometimes I get in an atmosphere laden with tobacco smoke and even my stomach rebels against what I am for the moment compelled to breathe, and I feel sick. I have a right to God's own pure air, and no man on earth has any more legal right to poison the air that I have to breathe than the water I drink; and the man who does so, is not only a sinner, but a criminal as well; and I have never, since the day God saved me, knowingly contributed a cent to the support of a preacher who uses the vile stuff. I do not believe him to be a child of God. The light on the old Book is too great, and not only the Bible and the highest medical authorities in the land say that it is wrong, but even good sense and common decency disdain it; and I cannot expect God, who has saved me from it, and accepted what little I had to consecrate to Him, to keep me, if I take the money that He entrusts to my hands and give it to a man who would spend it for such a vile, dirty, body-poisoning and soul-damning habit as tobacco. No, I cannot keep my blessing of entire sanctification

and support a preacher who uses tobacco, and what is more, I do not believe that from this hour you can either.

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