WORD OF WISDOM

Word of Wisdom is the common title for a revelation that counsels Latter-day Saints on maintaining good health and is published as DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS: SECTION 89. The practice of abstaining from all forms of ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, COFFEE, and TEA, which may outwardly distinguish active Latter-day Saints more than any other practice, derives from this revelation.

Called "a word of wisdom" in the introduction, the revelation was given to Joseph Smith at KIRTLAND, OHIO, on February 27, 1833, when the School of the Prophets was meeting at his home in the Whitney Store. It came in response to the Prophet's inquiry about tobacco, which was being used by some of the men attending the school. The revelation states that it is specifically for the latter days because of "evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men" (D&C 89:4). The Word of Wisdom limited alcohol use to wine for the sacrament and hard liquor for washing the body. It noted tobacco as useful only for treating bruises and sick cattle. Hot drinks (later defined as coffee and tea) were not for "the body or belly" (D&C 89:9). Additional advice was given permitting the use of meat, but suggesting that it be restricted to winter or times of famine (D&C 89:12–13). The revelation places strong emphasis on the use of grains, particularly wheat, as the staple of the human diet (D&C 89:14, 16–17), and upon fruits and vegetables ("herbs" verse 11; cf. 59:17–18) in season. The Word of Wisdom also states that some "herbs" are present on the earth for the healing of human ailments (D&C 89:8–11). Church members should not consume alcohol, tobacco, tea, or coffee and should use moderation in eating other foods.

Those who follow this counsel and keep the other commandments of God are promised that they will have "health in their navel and marrow to their bones," "shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint," "shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures," and "the destroying angel shall pass by them . . . and not slay them" (D&C 89:18–21; cf. Dan. 1:3–20; 2:19–30).

The promises associated with the Word of Wisdom are considered both temporal and spiritual. The temporal promise has been interpreted as better health, and the spiritual promise as a closer relationship to God. These promises reflect the concern of the Church with both the temporal and spiritual welfare of its members. They also reflect God's concern with the condition of the PHYSICAL BODY of every person, paralleling aspects of other religious health codes defining types of foods forbidden for health and spiritual reasons.

The introduction to the 1835 printing of the revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants indicated that it was given as counsel or advice rather than as a binding COMMANDMENT, though the revelation states that it was "adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints" (D&C 89:3). Compliance with its teachings was sporadic from the late 1830s until the early years of the twentieth century. The Church encouraged leaders to be an example to the people in abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee; but no binding Church policy was articulated during this time.

The PROHIBITION movement, spearheaded by the Protestant Evangelical churches in America, focused on alcohol consumption as a political rather than a moral issue. The movement intensified the Church's interest in the Word of Wisdom. There is evidence that Church Presidents John TAYLOR, Joseph F. SMITH, and Heber J. GRANT wanted to promote adherence to the Word of Wisdom as a precondition for entering LDS temples or holding office in any Church organization; and indeed, by 1930 abstinence from the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea had become an official requirement for those seeking TEMPLE RECOMMENDS. While abstinence from these substances is now required for temple attendance and for holding priesthood offices or other Church callings, no other ecclesiastical sanctions are imposed on those who do not comply with the Word of Wisdom.

Other dietary aspects of the Word of Wisdom have not received the stress that the abstinence
porations have. While some leaders, such as John A. Widtsoe, have emphasized the benefits of eating whole grains, no distinctive dietary practices have emerged that distinguish Mormons from non-Mormons, though the use of whole-grain cereals is often assumed to be higher among Latter-day Saints than other people.

With the appearance of cola drinks in the early 1900s, the Church was confronted with cold beverages containing caffeine, a harmful substance believed to make coffee and tea unacceptable. While no official Church position has been stated, leaders have counseled members to avoid caffeine and other addictive chemicals.

Church leaders universally caution against any use of such drugs as marijuana and cocaine and the abuse of prescription drugs. While none of these substances are mentioned specifically in the Word of Wisdom, the concept of the sanctity of the body and the deleterious effects of chemical substances on it have been emphasized as an extension of the Word of Wisdom.

Many of the health benefits associated with abstinence from the substances mentioned in the Word of Wisdom did not become clear until the latter part of the twentieth century. During World War I use of cigarettes among men became widespread, and during World War II, among women. The association of cigarette smoking with lung cancer was documented in the early 1950s, but official statements by scientific bodies accepting this relationship as causal did not occur until the mid-1960s. Since that time, many other diseases have been associated with cigarette smoking, including cancers of the oral cavity, larynx, esophagus, kidney, bladder, and pancreas; peptic ulcers; coronary heart disease; chronic bronchitis; infant mortality; and chronic obstructive airway disease.

Studies have found that Latter-day Saints have substantially lower risk for all of these illnesses (30–80 percent below that of non-Mormons living in Utah or in other areas of the United States) and that people who abstain from these substances are at much lower risk of these diseases than those who do not. Few health risks have been clearly identified with the use of tea and coffee, though some evidence suggests that those who abstain from coffee may be at lower risk for peptic ulcers, cancer of the pancreas, and coronary heart disease. Some studies estimate that those complying with the Word of Wisdom increase their life expectancy up to seven years.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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WORK, ROLE OF

The role of work, as it has been consistently explained in the scriptures and taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, involves four principles: Work is a universal obligation; work enhances the quality of life on earth; daily work has eternal consequences; and work will continue in the eternities.

A Universal and Lifelong Obligation. In the Church no individual who is able to work is excused from working. This principle refers to