

WORD OF WISDOM
Doctrine and Covenants 89
By Raymond White

Here we go again — another essay on the Word of Wisdom. The typical faire is no alcohol, tobacco, coffee or tea. I get it, and all that is important. But just to be novel, let's take this discussion in some directions that you wouldn't normally think about.

[1] MEAT

A Mormon died and went to heaven. Waiting for him at the pearly gate was Peter sitting at a desk. Peter invited the Mormon to sit. He did, and Peter interviewed him. The questions were standard — the sort of thing that any Mormon would expect at a temple recommend interview — until this exchange:

Peter: Did you live the Word of Wisdom?

Mormon: Yes sir. No alcohol, tobacco, coffee, or tea my whole life long.

Peter: What about verse 12?

Mormon: Um. What about it?

Peter: It says, "Flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air...are to be used sparingly." So? Did you?

Mormon: Gee. No bishop ever asked me that before.

Peter: Well, I'm asking now. Did you eat meat and chicken sparingly?

Mormon: Well, for dinner we'd typically eat pot roast, or pork chops, or KFC when I brought in. Then on Friday, I always took my wife out for a prime rib dinner. That was our date night.

Peter: And lunch?

Mormon: I ate a Big Mac every day for lunch.

Peter: And breakfast?

Mormon: I confess, I had bacon and eggs every morning.

Peter: That doesn't sound very "sparingly," does it?

Mormon: No, I guess it doesn't. Is that going to keep me out of the Celestial Kingdom?

Peter: Oh no, of course not. Your place here is secured by the merits of Jesus Christ. But it does cause me to wonder. I'm just curious. May I ask you...

Mormon: Yes?

Peter: Why are you here so soon?

It is a curious thing that most Mormons pay attention to only those parts of the Word of Wisdom that their bishops ask them about, as though their bishops are giving them permission to believe it.

Maybe a better way to understand the Word of Wisdom — a more healthful way anyway — is to believe that it means what it says.

[2] FISH

Doctrine and Covenants 89:12 Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly.

So now that we see what's there, let's see what isn't there. I asked a class one time: If God restricts meat and poultry, why not fish? Was God neglectful making up this short list?

I was amazed at the answers I got, mostly things like, "Well, God doesn't have to list *everything*, does he?" as though God needed us to apologize for him.

I went on for another five minutes trying to tease the obvious answer out of them to no avail. Finally I'd had enough and gave them a clue.

"What does modern medicine tell us about fish?"

Then the light suddenly went on in one brother's eyes and he said, "Omega 3."

"Exactly so," I replied. "God doesn't restrict our use of fish because fish is some of the healthiest stuff on the planet. Why would he restrict that? That would be pointless. Some of the longest living people are the Japanese and Philippines who live mostly on a fish diet. Maybe God understands biology after all and fish is intentionally not on that list."

[3] HOT DRINKS

Doctrine and Covenants 89:9 And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.

All Mormons know that the church interprets "hot drinks" to mean coffee and tea. I understand that and have no quarrel. Caffeine and tannic acid and a host of other bad things find a welcome home in coffee and tea and we are right to avoid all that.

However, let me share this article with you —

Time Magazine, June 17, 2016, page 16

The list of cancer-causing agents is long—and getting longer. Experts already tell us to avoid smoking, exposure to UV radiation from the sun and even air pollution since these factors can increase the risk of cancer. Now the World Health Organization says hot drinks like coffee and tea belong on that list too.

The group's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) looked at about 1,000 studies that investigated a connection between high-temperature drinks and cancer. Based on the available evidence, they conclude that drinking very hot beverages—anything above 149°F (65°C), which is significantly cooler than most coffee served in restaurants and cafés—is linked to a higher risk of cancer of the esophagus. The results were published in the journal *Lancet Oncology*.

Well, how about that. Maybe God was onto something after all. Of course the caffeine is bad for you, and maybe high caffeine sports drinks should be on our no-no list. But maybe God, once again, means what he says and hot drinks mean *hot drinks*. It's the

heat, folks. And maybe hot chocolate and hot herb teas and hot anything else should be ratcheted down on the temperature scale.

Speaking for myself, warm chocolate tastes a whole lot better than hot chocolate. When it's really hot, I can't taste anything, I just feel the burn and that's distracting.

[4] PRUDENCE

Doctrine and Covenants 89:11 ... to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.

In the Word of Wisdom, the list of specific items is short, unlike the very long kosher list in Leviticus. Why is that? Because, I suppose, God expects us to use our common sense. He explicitly forbids tobacco. Should he have to also explicitly forbid cocaine, heroin, and all those other dangerous drugs that foolish people put into their bodies? No. God ought not have to do that. In fact, it's a good thing he didn't, because if he had, then by the rule of Implied Consent, anything *not* on the list would be permissible. That would include anything invented later, like LSD, like Meth, like, well, the list goes on and grows as people find new ways to destroy themselves.

God choose instead to give us a few glaring-for-instances then commanded us to use our common sense with the single word, "prudence."

Now, "prudence" has some latitude. What if you're driving home at 2:00 A.M. and you're dozing off at the wheel? You consider using No-Doze, but you fret about the Word of Wisdom. You know caffeine is bad and No-Doze contains a heavy shot of caffeine, that's why it works. So, should you take a No-Doze or not?

Well, what does "prudence" dictate? Which is worse? A spot of caffeine or getting killed because you fell asleep at the wheel? Some common sense has to be permissible.

Another example: What if your diabetic wife's sugar level falls to below 40? That's a very dangerous level, and if unchecked could even be fatal. If you're home, a glass of orange juice will do just fine. But if you're not home, what then? Well, one thing that will get that sugar level up in a hurry is Coca Cola. Once again, common sense has to be allowed.

Is caffeine a sin? *D&C 89* doesn't say so. What it does say, though, is "prudence." God gave you a brain, use it.

[5] RUN, OR WALK

Doctrine and Covenants 89:20 And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

I used to think this verse was peculiar. Why? My reasoning was: wouldn't it be the other way around? Wouldn't walking just make you weary while running, with its extra stress, make you faint? Why doesn't the verse say: walk and not be weary, and run and not faint? Wouldn't that make more sense?

Actually, no. The verse makes more sense as it is, because what it means is this: Strong people, healthy people run. And when they run, that wearies them, especially if they violate common sense and smoke and do other stupid stuff. The way to not get weary is to not do stupid stuff.

But there are also weak people, like my diabetic wife. For her, running is out of the question. If she can walk a block, that's a good day.

So, how do weak people maximize what strength they do have? Live the Word of Wisdom, don't do stupid stuff, so that when they do walk, they won't faint.

So, what's the point? The point is, living the Word of Wisdom makes strong people stronger and makes weak people stronger. So wherever you are on the health scale, God's commandment is: be prudent and don't do stupid stuff.

The Word of Wisdom is for everyone.