

D&C Lesson 22:

THE WORD OF WISDOM: "A PRINCIPLE WITH A PROMISE"

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Among other things, the Word of Wisdom is evidence that the relationship between our bodies and our spirits is both intimate and significant. The repeated scriptural counsel about caring for and protecting our bodies—counsel given from Old Testament times to the dispensation of the fulness of times—must in part tell us that damaging our bodies will also damage or spirits.

Pres. Boyd K. Packer mentioned this bond between spirit and body when he said,

I remember a blessing I received when I was serving in the military. It included counsel that's good for every young person: "You have been given a body of such physical proportions and fitness as to enable your spirit to function through it You should cherish this as a great heritage. Guard [it] and protect it. Take nothing into it that shall harm the organs thereof because it is sacred. It is the instrument of your mind and]the] foundation of your character." That counsel had great influence on me. (C.R., April 1996, p. 23)

The introduction of poisonous substances into our body, this organism which is referred to as a *temple*, would be very much like spray-painting profanity on or in a House of the Lord. (See 1 Cor. 3:16,17)

1, WHY WAS THE WORD OF WISDOM REVEALED?

... I think I am as well acquainted with the circumstances which led to the giving of the Word of Wisdom as any man in the Church, although I was not present at the time to witness them. The first school of the prophets was held in a small room situated over the Prophet

Joseph's kitchen, in a house which belonged to Bishop Whitney, and which was attached to his store, which store probably might be about fifteen feet square. In the rear of this building was a kitchen, probably ten by fourteen feet, containing rooms and pantries. Over this kitchen was situated the room in which the Prophet received revelations and in which he instructed his brethren. The brethren came to that place for hundreds of miles to attend school in a little room probably no larger than eleven by fourteen. When they assembled together in this room after breakfast, the first they did was to light their pipes, and, while smoking, talk about the great things of the kingdom, and spit all over the room, and as soon as the pipe was out of their mouths a large chew of tobacco would then be taken. Often when the Prophet entered the room to give the school instructions he would find himself in a cloud of tobacco smoke. This, and the complaints of his wife at having to clean so filthy a floor, made the Prophet think upon the matter, and he inquired of the Lord relating to the conduct of the Elders in using tobacco, and the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom was the result of his inquiry. (Brigham Young: JD, Vol. 12, p. 158)

Brigham Young's explanation of the circumstances surrounding the receipt of this revelation is not meant to be an explanation of the reasons for the revelation. The Lord makes his purposes quite clear: this revelation comes

In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days . . . (D&C 89:4)

Something about those *evils and designs* has caused the Lord to warn and forewarn us. The message of this divine communication was a warning for those in the day it was given, but it is also a *forewarning*. The Lord knew of the need we would have in our day for this counsel.

Bishop John H. Vandenberg suggested one of the purposes of those evil and conspiring who promote the use of substances that damage our bodies is to support the Satanic intent to limit our agency.

The chief targets of these conspiring men are our bodies and our agency. Satan sought from the beginning to destroy the bodies of the children of men and to assume power over their minds and actions . . . He has cunningly sought to popularize and sophisticate the use of substances that destroy the body or make the mind and body a slave to that substance . . . Satan has reverted to an ancient strategy with which he not only hopes to attack the body, but also to rob man of his agency. ("The Evil Designs of Men; *Improvement Era*, January 1969,p. 50)

In April Conference of 1967, Elder Richard L. Evans suggested another purpose of this warning:

It isn't unusual—indeed, it is expected—that the maker of any machine should send a set of instructions on how best to use it, how best to care for it; and this our Father in heaven has done for us, mentally, morally, physically, spiritually. In the gospel are instructions from our Maker on how to care for and keep ourselves at our best for the purpose for which we were brought into being. As to the physical side: More than a century ago, a prophet of God simply said that some things are not good for man. Now, knowledgeable and intelligent men of science and medicine also say so. But we had just as well have saved all the time and trouble, for the Maker knew it and said it to his servant. And what could be more important than a completeness of health and happiness—happiness and health of the spirit, the body, and the mind of man.

Some say there is no moral question on how we physically live our lives. But isn't it a moral question to abuse what God has given? And what a waste to abuse any useful creation of any kind. If someone were to give us a finely working watch, wouldn't it be foolish, indeed irrational, to put into it that which would corrode and defeat its purpose?

We have only one body. It is irreplaceable, indispensable, sacred. It has to last a mortal lifetime. With it and the spirit within, we think, we

plan, we work, we feel, we live our mortal lives.

It is a miracle and most amazing: the housing for the spirit, the mind, the intelligence of man; the instrument through which we think and plan and pursue life's purpose.

Don't dissipate it; don't impair any part of it. Keep it clean and functioning. Don't quibble about words, about what is counsel and what is commandment. Don't rationalize. Don't clutter life with what is sure to distress and embarrass and lose peace and cause problems. Find what is good, and do it. Find what isn't good, and leave it alone. (Elder Richard L. Evans: *Improvement Era*, June 1967, p. 33)

We have watched the courtroom battles on the nightly news between tobacco companies and those desiring to hold the responsible for the effects of their products. In April of 1993, *Reader's Digest* published an article entitled "America's New Merchants of Death." The bold faced heading of the article suggests something about *evils and designs*.

Pushed by dwindling sales at home, US, tobacco companies are aggressively marketing cigarettes abroad. Among those seduced by their clever advertising: the world's children. And Washington is lending a hand. (April 1993, p. 1)

The article includes this statement:

A Reader's Digest investigation covering 20 countries on four continents has revealed that millions of children are being lured into nicotine addiction by American cigarette makers. (April 1993, p. 3)

2. THE LORD'S COUNSEL ABOUT WHAT IS NOT GOOD FOR THE BODY.

Read Section 89 carefully with pencil in hand and highlight those things that the Lord says are not good for the body. The list is not terribly long.

1. Wine
2. Strong Drink

3. Tobacco
4. Hot drinks (tea and coffee)

Members write in asking if this thing or that is against the Word of Wisdom. It's well known that tea, coffee, liquor, and tobacco are against it. It has not been spelled out in more detail. Rather, we teach the principle together with the promised blessings. There are many habit forming, addictive things that one can drink or chew or inhale or inject which injure both body and spirit which are not mentioned in the revelation.

Everything harmful is not specifically listed; arsenic, for instance—certainly bad, but not habit-forming! He who must be commanded in all things, the Lord said, "is a slothful and not a wise servant" (D&C 58:26). ("The Word of Wisdom: The Principle and the Promises;" Elder Boyd K. Packer: April 1996, pp. 22,23)

3. THE LORD'S COUNSEL ABOUT WHAT IS GOOD FOR THE BODY

Now go through the section and mark those things that are good for your body. While you are doing this, you might give yourself a little quiz—perhaps a letter grade in each area:

1. All wholesome herbs
2. Fruit
3. Flesh of beasts and fowls, but "sparingly"
4. Grain, especially wheat

The Lord's command that "all these . . . be used with prudence and thanksgiving" (89:11) deserves some attention and thought, especially from me. My wife claims there are 48 pounds of me she is not sealed to. I may be in need of more prudence at the dinner table.

It seems logical that an overzealous consumption of things the Lord has called good might be nearly as harmful as partaking of things the Lord has said are bad.

I remember an evening in Sao Paulo, Brazil six years ago when I sat with friends at a restaurant that served 26 different kinds of meat in small but unlimited portions. I ate about sixteen times too much of the wrong things in celebration of a return after 30 years to my mission field. I remember thinking then that I might do less damage to myself beating my kneecap with a hammer than I had done with my knife and fork that night.

The injunction to gratefulness in verse 11 (and repeated in verse 12) is a reaffirmation of a principle taught often in the standard works. When we partake of good food, when the taste and smell of the Lord's bounty strengthen the body *and* enliven the soul (see D&C 59:19), we ought to express gratitude. This is not merely a matter of convenience or custom. It is a commandment, and the words regarding thankfulness in this section should remind us of a great promise.

And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more. (D&C 78:19)

4. PROMISED BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF WISDOM

Now it is time to mark the promised blessings that come from obedience to this commandment.

1. And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones . . .
2. And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;
3. And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.
4. And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.

These promises of health and revelation and stamina and safety are wonderful! The health blessings which have come to the church by its adherence to the Word

of Wisdom are known throughout the world. Pres. Hinckley said

People are becoming increasingly health conscious. We have a running start on the world, a code so simple and easily understood. Not long ago I met Dr. James E. Enstrom of the University of California at Los Angeles. He is not a member of the Church. He speaks with complete objectivity. His studies indicate that actuarially speaking, Latter-day Saints live about 10 years longer than their peers. (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Look to the Future," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69)

The promise of revelation reminds us of the experience of Daniel and his friends in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Those four young men had taken a stand in favor of a health code given to their people. The Lord blessed them abundantly because of their compliance with revealed health laws:

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams

And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. Daniel 1:17,20)

President Packer taught

Surely the Word of Wisdom was given so that you may keep the delicate, sensitive, spiritual part of your nature on proper alert. Learn to "listen" to your feelings. You will be guided and warned and taught and blessed. (Boyd K. Packer, "The Word of Wisdom: The Principle and the Promises," *Ensign*, May 1996, 19)

The promise that we "shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint" (D&C 89:20) is a reflection of a promise made in Isaiah that

. . . they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and

they shall walk, and not faint. (Isa. 40:31.)

All of us know wonderful saints who observe the requirements of this revelation perfectly but who are unable to run, or in some cases, even to walk. President Packer explained:

Honor the principle of the Word of Wisdom and you will receive the promised blessings. "All saints," the revelation promises, "who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments," are promised that they "shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones" and "shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint" (D&C 89:18, 20).

The Word of Wisdom does not promise you perfect health, but *it teaches how to keep the body you were born with in the best condition and your mind alert to delicate spiritual promptings.* (Boyd K. Packer, "The Word of Wisdom: The Principle and the Promises," Ensign, May 1996, 18, emphasis added)

President Packer also commented on the promise relating to the destroying angel:

There's a final promise in the revelation. Speaking again of those who keep and do and obey these commandments, the Lord said, "I ... give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them" (D&C 89:21). That is a remarkable promise.

To understand it, we must turn to the time of Moses. The Israelites had been enslaved for 400 years. Moses came as their deliverer. He called forth plagues upon Egypt. The Pharaoh agreed each time to free the Israelites, but each time he reneged on his promise. Finally, "the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go. ... All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die" (Ex. 11:1, 5).

Moses told the Israelites to "take ... a lamb ... without blemish, a

male of the first year. . . . Neither shall ye break a bone thereof" (Ex. 12:3, 5, 46; see also John 19:33).

They were to prepare the lamb as a feast and "take of the blood, and strike it on the . . . door post of the houses. . . . For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land . . . : and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you. . . . And this day . . . ye shall keep . . . by an ordinance for ever" (Ex. 12:7, 12–14). "When your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this . . . ? . . . ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover" (Ex. 12:26–27).

Surely, young people, you see the prophetic symbolism in the Passover. Christ was "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36), the firstborn, male, without blemish. He was slain without breaking his bones, even though the soldiers were sent to do it.

But it is not from mortal death that we shall be spared in such a passover if we walk in obedience to these commandments, for each of us in time shall die. But there is spiritual death which you need not suffer. If you are obedient, that spiritual death will pass over you, for "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," the revelation teaches (1 Cor. 5:7). (Boyd K. Packer, "The Word of Wisdom: The Principle and the Promises," *Ensign*, May 1996, 19)

CONCLUSION: I just purchased a (relatively) new van. I have the key. With that key I can use the vehicle to transport my family to placed we desire to be. Without the key, I would be severely limited. The Geo Metro my wife drives will not transport my family anywhere in one trip. The Word of Wisdom is such a key, one that will enable you to transport yourself to a condition where you can participate in extraordinary spiritual blessings. In the talk from Pres. Packer that I have quoted so often in this lesson, we find this final witness:

I bear witness that this revelation is a powerful protection to all members of the Church . . . as you face a life full of so many troubles and danger and uncertainties. (Boyd K. Packer, "The Word of Wisdom:

The Principle and the Promises," *Ensign*, May 1996, 19)

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