

“...not by commandment or constraint...” - D&C 89:2

1833-02-27 Doctrine and Covenants Section 89 on W.W. Received

**This Side: Abstinence Not
Required to be a Worthy Saint**

Joseph Blesses Wine at a Wedding

"We then partook of some refreshment, and our hearts were made glad with the fruit of the vine. This is according to the pattern set by our Savior himself, and we feel disposed to patronize all the institutions of heaven." [Source: [JS Papers](#)]

1836-01-13

1838-02

**This Side: Abstinence
Required to be a Worthy Saint**

**Tobacco Usage Levied as Supporting
Allegations Against David Whitmer for
Excommunication Proceedings**

"He spoke many things against them, setting forth in a plain and energetic manner the iniquity of Elders Phelps and Whitmer, in using the monies which were loaned to the Church. Also David Whitmer's wrong-doing in persisting in the use of tea, coffee, and tobacco." [Trial of the Far West Presidency of the Church]

1838

**Kirtland Camp Constitution Dictates No
Usage of Coffee/Tea/Liquor/Tobacco/Snuff**

"shall see that cleanliness and decency are observed in all cases, the commandments kept, and the Word of Wisdom heeded, that is, no tobacco, tea, coffee, snuff or ardent spirits of any kind are to be taken internally." [Source: [BH Roberts History](#)]

1841-12-22

1842-05-01

1843-06-27

**Joseph Gives Money for Whiskey to the
Brethren, Confirms They Did Not Break the
W.W.**

"It was reported to me that some of the Brethren had been drinking whiskey that day in violation of the word of wisdom. I called the Brethren in, and investigated the case, and was satisfied that no evil had been done and gave them a couple of dollars, with directions to replenish the bottle, to stimulate them in the fatigues of their sleepless journey." [Source: [JS Papers](#)]

1844-06-26

**Joseph, Hyrum, Apostle John Taylor,
Apostle Willard Richards in Carthage Jail,
Used Wine as an Anti-Depressant the
Night Before the Martyrdom**

"Some time after dinner we sent for some wine. It has been reported, by some; that this was taken as a sacrament. It was no such thing; our spirits were generally dull and heavy, and it was sent for to revive us." [Source: John Taylor, see [JS Papers](#)]

1844

**Lucy Mack Smith Records Memoir: Joseph
Refused Alcohol During Leg Surgery**

"Then," said Dr Stone, "will you drink some brandy." "No," said the child, "not one drop." Then said the Dr, "will you take some wine?" "You must take something, or you can <never> endure <the severe> operation to which you must be subjected. <"No, answered> the boy, I will not touch one particle of liquor; neither will I be tied down: . . ." [Source: [JS Papers](#)]

1844-06-27

**The Carthage Group Drinks and Smokes
Right Before the Martyrdom**

"Joseph gave Dr. Richards two dollars to give the guard; but the guard said one was enough, and would take no more. The guard immediately sent for a bottle of wine, pipes, and two small papers of tobacco; and one of the guards brought them into the jail soon after the jailor went out." [Source: [BH Roberts History of the Church](#)]

1847-07-24 Arrival in Utah

**Brigham Young Calls People to Grow
Grapes for Wine in Southern Utah During
General Conference**

1851-09-09

**Brigham Young Opens the W.W. as Binding
to the Saints Through Vote at General
Conference**

[Significance: This began to lay the foundation for the modern interpretation and enforcement.]

**Porter Rockwell Starts Hot Springs Hotel
and Brewery**

[JD 7:53]

1856

**Brigham Young Commands the Saints to
Stop Drinking Alcohol to Get Drunk,
“...until you really need it.”**

[JD 7:53]

1859-10

1864-09

Brigham Young Speaks in South Utah

"If we were to ask those brethren who want to return to the center stake of Zion. . . . "Do you chew tobacco?" "Yes." "Drink whiskey?" "If I can get it." "Do you drink tea and coffee?" "My wife does, and I join her and I like it." "When you get into the canyon do you swear and get mad and angry?" "Sometimes [I] get angry." "Do you ever have any feelings with your neighbors with regard to the water ditches [for your] neighbor's cattle breaking into your garden and fences?" "Yes." . . . You must overcome your anger and passions. . . . The spirit of the gospel will raise you aloof from this." [JD 7:53]

1869

**Brigham Young Approves of the Use of
Tobacco, Tea, and Liquor**

"...with canker, there is no better medicine than green tea...If a person is weary, worn out, cast down, fainting, or dying, a brandy sling, a little wine, or a cup of tea is good to revive them. Do not throw these things away, and say they must never be used; they are good to be used with judgment, prudence, and discretion." [JD 12:9]

1871

**Brigham Young Build's St. George Home
with Places to Store Alcohol**

[Source: *The tour guides at location.*]

Mark Twain Tries the Mormon Whiskey

According to Twain: "It was the exclusively Mormon refresher, 'Valley Tan.'...Valley Tan is a kind of whisky, or first cousin to it; it is of Mormon invention and manufactured only in Utah. Tradition says it is made of (imported) fire and brimstone."

1873

**Brigham Young Requests Exclusive
Rights from Territorial Legislature to
Distill Whiskey and Liquor**

President Young recognized how much alcohol and liquor sales were bringing cash to the Church's resources, and wanted exclusive rights to create a monopoly over its production and sale. "Dixie Wine" was a pride of Southern Utah, and was placed into the time capsule of the dedication of the St. George Temple.

1873

**Heber C. Kimball Says Brigham Went to
Inspect Grape and Coffee Growing
Potential in Southern Utah**

"This is one thing that causes President Young to go down south, so that he may ascertain if that country is capable of producing our cotton, sugar, coffee, and grapes." [JD 9:24]

1884

**Elder John Smith on Using Meat
Sparingly**

"The revelation says that meats are to be used sparingly and that it will please the lord if they are only used in times of famine and excessive cold. Animal life is to be properly guarded and not wantonly sacrificed to the appetite of man. His use of it must be limited to times of scarcity or those seasons of extreme cold when it may be necessary." ["The Word of Wisdom," Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star 46 (March 1884)]

The Re-Framing Period Context

(1900-1920s: Joseph F. Smith & Heber J. Grant Assume Administrative Control and Enact their Interpretation into the Collective Consciousness and Policies (Administrations: JFS 1901-1918; HJG 1918-1945) Heber J. Grant was a supporter of the U.S. Prohibition movement, and when it was overturned, he lamented its departure. Many efforts during these two administrations were made to show the rest of the American Conservative Christian community and U.S. citizens that the Latter-day Saints were just like them. The Church erected a massive resort/amusement park on the coast of the Salt Lake to attract visitors from around the nation, named Saltair, which it sold in 1906 to pay off debts.

Change:

Original Position Relating to Alcohol: Drunkenness was the sin, not the ingestion of alcohol. Tea, tobacco, alcohol, are allowed in moderation and seen as valid for usage in utilitarian ways to minimize pain.

Interpretive Lens: Conservatism Moral Foundations, extending ethics are legislating morality to maximize safety by limiting positive liberty in the name of safety.

Resulting New Position on Alcohol: The ingestion is *now* the sin, drunkenness as a Stanton is the result of the sin.

Justifications:

- Limit means for possible moral infraction and save people from risk.
- Money spent on alcohol benefit other nations other than America *"never to come back, with nothing in exchange"* (Elder HJG)
- Set an Example for the national prohibition movement (Elder HJG) *"Utah should be exemplary temperance state."*
- Makes the LDS better than... *"I feel that the Latter-day Saints have in the Word of Wisdom a law that will exalt them and lift them above those who fail to keep"* (Pres GAS)

Discussion on the Word of Wisdom in General Conference Frequency

1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
38	90	61	28	77	103	172	227	300	177	105	128	118	91	99	58	33	8

1895

**Pres. Joseph F. Smith Posits New
Interpretation to: God Did Not Frame It as a
Law Originally But It Was**

"In the beginning it was not given by commandment, lest we should be under condemnation if we did not observe it; . . . In later times, however, it was revealed through President Brigham Young that we had reached a point in our experience when the Word of Wisdom became a law unto the people, and they were required to obey it."

1901-01-09

**Elder George Teasdale Preaches Eating
Pork is Worse than Drinking Coffee & Tea**

"He thought that tithing was more important than the Word of Wisdom. We have a nation against us. They call our doctrines pernicious and will do what they can to destroy it. He thought Pork was more against the Word of Wisdom than tea and coffee."

[Elder Anthon Lund's Record Link](#)

1913-10

**Pres. Joseph F. Smith Reworks His
Interpretation - New Interpretation to: God
Did Not Frame It as a Law Originally But It
Was Nonethless**

"The reason undoubtedly why the Word of Wisdom was given —as not by 'commandment' or 'restraint' was that at that time, at least, if it had been given as a commandment it would have brought every man [and woman] addicted to the use of these noxious things under condemnation; so the Lord was merciful and gave them a chance to overcome, before He brought them under the law..." I believe that we are coming nearer to the point where we shall be able to observe that great and glorious law of temperance which the Lord Almighty has given unto us." [Source: Conference Report Oct 1913]

<<< 1920-01-17 U.S. Prohibition Act Goes Into Effect >>>

1921

**W.W. New Re-Interpretation Added to
Temple Recommend Requirements**

"He thought that tithing was more important than the Word of Wisdom. We have a nation against us. They call our doctrines pernicious and will do what they can to destroy it. He thought Pork was more against the Word of Wisdom than tea and coffee."

[Elder Anthon Lund's Record Link](#)

1933-12-05

<<< Utah's Constitutional Convention Votes to End Prohibition >>>

"Utahns, like others across the country who continued to favor abstinence from liquor, reluctantly supported repeal of the 18th Amendment because they perceived that the evils spawned by Prohibition were worse than those that accompanied legal liquor sales" - Deseret News

1977-04

**Leonard Arrington, Church Historian's
Article on W.W. releases in Ensign**

"The Lord adds to the Saints' understanding constantly through the prophet and other leaders he calls. The early Saints struggled through terrible adversities and laid the great foundation of faith that is our heritage. They should be honored and appreciated for their faithfulness to the laws that God revealed to them. At the same time we should be grateful for any additional understanding that adds to our happiness and spiritual growth." [Significance: Arrington is considered by conservative church intellectuals as a Liberal heretic, re-writing Church history for dishonorable reasons. Here, Arrington is reinforcing the new Conservative interpretation of the W.W.]

[Ensign April 1977](#)

Comments

This timeline is not a comprehensive one. Its purpose is to give an observer a general view of the attitudes and sentiments and how different leaders used it to benefit their ideological frame from which they viewed the world and the gospel.

Comments: *In my observations, the Conservative member will argue that the principle is a law, from an innately moral perspective, as a way to prevent potential pain, and that rules ought to apply to everyone across the board. (See Haidt's Moral Foundations research, and Conservative populations around the world and bodily purity laws.) The Conservative will utilize empirical evidence to reinforce their position (it is a law because it produces good results) until they are countered by opposing empirical evidence, then will switch to an ontological position (it is good, unrelated to the results). Liberals and Libertarians will argue that the Conservatives are putting words in God's mouth and that infractions against a law are not a sin if the law itself was created artificially. They will seek to point out the contradictions of the Conservative usage of Benjamin Franklin's defense of the Second Amendment's legitimacy against safety-centered arguments quote "They that give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety...", and that if when it comes to other ethical questions, the opposite approach is chosen.*

It is interesting how temple recommend sanctions are only in place for those things that the Prohibition Movement had in common with the Church's administrations at the time, for those things that would have made us appear as unified with the larger American church community in that period. The overindulgence of meat is a part of the Word of Wisdom, yet violating that part is not treated as a punishable offense. It is made even more curious by the Conservative argument that alcohol is an agency impair-er, while killing more animals than necessary is a clear violation of their agency. By the letter of the law, it is only the vegan or vegetarian Latter-day Saint, or those from a background that do not have the means to acquire large quantities of meat, that ought to answer the temple recommend question in the affirmative, while all others who enjoy a Sunday steak dinner and attend the Monday YSA hot-dog at the park cook-out are no longer temple worthy.

Perhaps a change should be made to allow all the members who do partake of the meat in pleasurable quantities to be worthy so as to prevent them from remaining in a state of unworthiness, since the authority to do so apparently lies with the authorities. "...the Church cannot change the laws of God. They stand immutable. We may change the rules; we may say that a drunkard ... [or] he who drinks tea and coffee may go into the temple. These rules we may change." [J. Reuben Clark Jr., Oct. 6, 1935, C.R., One Hundred and Sixth Semi-Annual Conference] The question would be changed on the recommend questionnaire to "Are you a law abiding citizen?" to weed out the ones using illegal substances, and "Do you avoid using alcohol to become drunk?" as its measures to re-align its position with the original interpretation by the Prophet who gazed into heaven and determined that, by what he saw, the mere consumption of these things was not a disqualifier from the high levels of glory.

For now, anyone can violate the Word of Wisdom and be temple worthy, but no one who partakes of alcohol, or green/black tea, or tobacco, is temple worthy. So then, what really is The Word of Wisdom to you?

Further Reading

Resources to Reinforce a Conservative View

I'd recommend viewing what The Joseph Smith Foundation, FAIR Latter-day Saints, and the Church's own website have put out. They all defend the new interpretation.

Resources to Reinforce a Liberal or Libertarian View

I'd recommend viewing what Dialogue Journal, or Sunstone has published on the matter.