

## Teachings Regarding

# Free Will, Choice, and Agency

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*“[The Scriptures] talk of our being ‘free to choose’ and ‘free to act’ for ourselves and of our obligation to do many things of our own ‘free will.’ ”*

**D. Todd Christofferson** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)  
("Moral Agency," BYU Devotional, 31 January 2006  
<http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=10871&x=53&y=10>)

*“The greatest right humans possess is the right of free choice, free will, free agency.”*

**Ezra Taft Benson** (President)  
(*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], p.691)

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## The Terms *Free Agency* and *Moral Agency*

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The phrase "free agency" does not appear in scripture. The only agency spoken of there is moral agency, "which," the Lord said, "I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment." (D&C 101:78; italics added.) ("Our Moral Environment," *Ensign*, May 1992, p. 67)

Life is meant to be a test to see if we will keep the commandments of God. (See 2 Ne. 2:5.) We are free to obey or to ignore the spirit and the letter of the law. But the agency granted to man is a moral agency. (See D&C 101:78.) We are not free to break our covenants and escape the consequences. ("Covenants," *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, p. 84)

**Spencer J. Condie** (of the Seventy)

I am indebted to President Boyd K. Packer, who made us aware of the fact that the term free agency appears nowhere in holy writ. Instead, the scriptures generally speak of agency or free will, but when agency is modified, it is referred to as "*moral agency*" (D&C 101:78; emphasis added). Because the term *free agency* has been used by various modern prophets, I use the terms *free agency* and *moral agency* interchangeably, aware that the latter term is more correct. ("Agency: The Gift of Choices," *Ensign*, Sept. 1995, p. 18)

**Note to the Reader:** Following Elder Spencer J. Condie's lead, the quotes in this compilation use both *moral agency* and *free agency* but are meant to convey the same meaning.

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# Free Choice

## **Free to Choose Good or Evil**

### **2 Nephi 2**

26 And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall *they have become free forever*, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

27 Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And *they are free to choose liberty* and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, *or to choose captivity* and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

28 And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

29 And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom. (Emphasis added)

**Brigham Young** (1801-1877) President

Many are disposed through their own wickedness “to do as I damned please,” and they are damned. (*Discourses of Brigham Young* [1954], p.65)

## **Purpose of Life is to Learn to Choose**

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We come into mortal life to receive a body and to be tested, to learn to choose. (“The Choice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, p. 21)

## **We Can Never Make A Choice Independent of Good or Evil Influences**

**Henry B. Eyring** (First Presidency)

They may mock and deride, as did a man named Korihor, with these words recorded in the Book of Mormon: “And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges” (Alma 30:27).

Korihor was arguing, as men and women have falsely

argued from the beginning of time, that to take counsel from the servants of God is to surrender God-given rights of independence. But the argument is false because it misrepresents reality. When we reject the counsel which comes from God, we do not choose to be independent of outside influence. We choose another influence. We reject the protection of a perfectly loving, all-powerful, all-knowing Father in Heaven, whose whole purpose, as that of His Beloved Son, is to give us eternal life, to give us all that He has, and to bring us home again in families to the arms of His love. In rejecting His counsel, we choose the influence of another power, whose purpose is to make us miserable and whose motive is hatred. We have moral agency as a gift of God. Rather than the right to choose to be free of influence, it is the inalienable right to submit ourselves to whichever of those powers we choose. (“Finding Safety in Counsel,” *Ensign*, May 1997, p. 25)

## **The Choice Between Good and Evil is the Most Important We Will Ever Make**

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) First Presidency

Let us never forget ... That we are here subject to opposing influences—the influence of Satan and his followers on the one hand, and the influence of Christ and his followers on the other hand;

That as we are being acted upon by these two influences, we are free “to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil.” (2 Ne. 2:27.)

It is important that we keep in mind that the choices we make as we decide what is good and what is evil are the most important decisions we will ever make. Upon them depends our happiness or misery throughout time and eternity. (“The Voice of the Spirit,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1978, p. 4)

## **We Are Not Free to Do Anything We Please**

**Harold B. Lee** (1899-1973) President

Now there is another important understanding that we have from the scriptures. We are all free agents, which means to some people who manifest a spirit of rebellion that they are free to do anything they please, but that is not the correct meaning of free agency as the prophets have declared in the scriptures where free agency has been defined: “they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27.) (*Stand Ye In Holy Places* [1974], p.11)

## ***Blessings If We Choose Right, Punishments If We Choose Wrong***

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles  
Moral agency in the face of difficult choices was not for Adam and Eve alone (Moses 7:32; D&C 101:78). There are blessings if we choose aright and penalties if we choose wrongly. Therefore, attempting to stand between friends and the consequences of their wrong choices is not realistic; it is not nearly as useful as being lovingly at their sides before and when choices are being made. Men and women really are "free to choose" (2 Nephi 2:27), and we cannot and should not try to have it otherwise. (*But for a Small Moment* [1986], p.130)

### ***We Are Free To Choose Our Responses***

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles  
While we are not always free to choose just when and how all of life's interactions will occur, we are nevertheless free to choose our responses to these moments. ("The Pathway of Discipleship," *Ensign*, Sept. 1998, p. 10)

**Marvin J. Ashton** (1915-1994) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles  
In God's plan we are usually free to choose the changes we make in our lives and we are always free to

choose how we will respond to the changes that come. ("Progress through Change," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p.61)

### ***Our Choices May Effect the Next Generation***

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles  
All are free to choose, of course, and we would not have it otherwise. Unfortunately, however, when some choose slackness, they are choosing not only for themselves, but for the next generation and the next. Small equivocations in parents can produce large deviations in their children! Earlier generations in a family may have reflected dedication, while some in the current generation evidence equivocation. Sadly, in the next, some may choose dissension as erosion takes its toll. ("Settle This in Your Hearts," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, pp. 65-66)

### ***Our Choices Show What We Value***

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles  
Our lives are made up of thousands of everyday choices. Over the years these little choices will be bundled together and show clearly what we value. ("The Choice," *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, p. 21)

## ***Free Will***

### ***Free Will Defined***

**Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary**, 11 ed  
1. Voluntary choice or decision.  
2. Freedom of humans to make choices that are not determined by prior causes or by divine intervention.

### ***God Created Man To Act According to Their Free Will***

**Mosiah 2**  
21 God "has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and *do according to your own will*" (emphasis added)

### ***Free Will is a True Principle***

**John Taylor** (1808-1887) - President  
We talk sometimes about free will. Is that a correct

principle? Yes. And it is a principle that has always existed, and proceeded from God, our Heavenly Father. When God revealed himself to Joseph Smith, it was optional whether he obeyed his counsel or not. I suppose, however, looking at things as they exist, and as they are in truth, God understood that he would do it, he having been selected for that purpose a long, long time ago. And [I suppose] that the Lord knew that he would adhere to those principles and would carry out the designs of heaven as they should be communicated unto and required of him. (*The Gospel Kingdom* [1943], p.59)

**Howard W. Hunter** (1907-1995) - President  
Abraham Lincoln once asked, "What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence?" He then answered, "It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling sea coasts, our army and our navy. ... Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in us." (Speech at Edwardsville, Illinois, 11 Sept. 1858, quoted in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968, p. 636.)

There are, of course, those who, in bitterness and disbelief, have rejected the idea of an independent spirit

in man that is capable of free will and choice and true liberty. ("The Golden Thread of Choice," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 17)

### ***We Must Exercise Our Free Will to Live the Celestial Law***

**Lorenzo Snow** (1814-1901) - President

We cannot be forced into living a celestial law; we must do this ourselves, of our own free will. (*Teachings of Lorenzo Snow* [1984], p.166)

### ***Good Works are Done Only By Free Will***

**Mosiah 18**

28 And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul.

**D&C 58**

27 Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

28 For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

**Heber J. Grant** (1856-1945) - President

We are told in this same Doctrine and Covenants that we should be anxiously engaged in laboring and bringing to pass many good works, of our own free will and accord. The power is in us wherein we are agents unto ourselves. We should not wait to be commanded in all things. He that is compelled in all things is a slothful and not a wise servant. We should have the ambition, we should have the desire, we should make up our minds that, so far as the Lord Almighty has given to us talent, we will do our full share in the battle of life. It should be a matter of pride that no man shall do more than you will do, in proportion to your ability, in forwarding the work of God here upon the earth. That has been my ambition all my life—to do my full share. (*Gospel Standards* [1981], p. 39)

**Spencer W. Kimball** (1895-1985) - President

"Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own **free will**, and bring to pass much righteousness." (D&C 58:27.)

All men have been given special powers and within certain limitations should develop those powers, give vent to their own imaginations, and not become rubber stamps. They should develop their own talents and abilities and capacities to their limit and use them to build up the kingdom. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [1982], p. 257)

**Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910-2008) - President

The Savior has said in our dispensation, "Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and

do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness." And then he added these significant words: "For the power is in them." (D&C 58:27-28.)

The power is in us, in each of us—the power to do significant acts of service on our own initiative if we will become anxiously engaged. (*Faith: The Essence of True Religion* [1989], p. 40).

**George Q. Cannon** (1827-1901) - First Presidency

Our Heavenly Father requires something more of us than to be merely obedient to a commandment when he gives it to us. He desires us to strive to do good of ourselves without waiting to be commanded to do so. (*Gospel Truth* [1987], p. 123)

### ***We Cannot Blame Anyone Else For Misuse of Free Will***

**Heber J. Grant** (1856-1945) - President

We are trusted by the Lord. We are agents. We have our free will. And when the battle of life is over, we have had the ability and the power and the capacity to have done those things which the Lord required us to do and we cannot blame anybody else. (*Gospel Standards* [1981], p.63)

### ***Each Person Has the Free Will to Obey or Disobey***

**Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876-1972) - President

The Lord does not delight in the punishment of men. He is kind enough to grant to each his freedom to merit blessings or punishment according to his free will or pleasure. It never was the intention of the Lord to destroy, in the sense of annihilation, any of the souls of his children. His great object is to save them all, if they will freely partake of the blessings of salvation. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 Vols. [1954-56], 2:227)

### ***Salvation and Exaltation Come Through the Exercise of Free Will***

**Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876-1972) - President

This great gift of agency, that is the privilege given to man to make his own choice, has never been revoked, and it never will be. It is an eternal principle *giving freedom of thought and action to every soul*. No person, by any decree of the Father, has ever been compelled to do good; no person has ever been forced to do evil. *Each may act for himself*. It was Satan's plan to destroy this agency and force men to do his will. There could be no satisfactory existence without this great gift. Men must have the privilege to choose even to the extent that they may rebel against the divine decrees. Of course *salvation and exaltation must come through the free will* without coercion and by individual merit in order that righteous rewards may be given and proper punishment be meted

out to the transgressor. Therefore, when the great day of the Lord shall come, the wicked who have merited banishment from a righteous government will be consumed, or the privilege of continuance on the earth will be denied. (*Answers to Gospel Questions* 5 vols. [1957-66], 2:20; emphasis added)

**George Q. Cannon** (1827-1901) - First Presidency

Brethren and sisters, be not deceived upon these points. Flatter not yourselves with the idea that ye can enter into the Celestial Kingdom of our God and hug to your bosom those weaknesses and impurities which characterize fallen human nature. Purity and perfection can alone enter there. Our lives and all that we have must be devoted to the service of our Maker. We must be filled with a steadfast integrity which nothing can move. And we must not only labor cheerfully and gladly in doing those things which God has commanded, *but we must be anxiously engaged in the good cause and do many things and bring to pass much righteousness of our own free will for the power is in us.* "He that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned." (D&C 58:29.)

The man who seeks for the possession of celestial glory is not content with treading the well-beaten road traveled in by the world, but his mind soars aloft with an intense desire to comprehend and put into practice every law pertaining to exaltation, though it may be far off in the (to him) dim future. His continual struggle will be to obey those higher laws which can only be perceived and understood by those who attain unto very powerful faith. (*Gospel Truth* [1987], p. 83; emphasis added)

### ***Mortality Given To Have Opportunity to Exercise Free Will to Obey God's Laws***

**Ezra Taft Benson** (1899-1994) - President

We understand that the purpose of the Council in Heaven was to announce and present the plan of redemption for the salvation of all of God's children. The council was called so that every man and woman could sustain the provisions of the Father's plan, which required that all people obtain mortal bodies, be tried and proven in all things, and have opportunity to choose of their own free will to obey the laws and ordinances essential to their exaltation. (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], p.23)

### ***Free Will—The Only Uniquely Personal Thing We Can Give God***

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In conclusion, the submission of one's will is really the

only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God's altar. The many other things we "give," brothers and sisters, are actually the things He has already given or loaned to us. However, when you and I finally submit ourselves, by letting our individual wills be swallowed up in God's will, then we are really giving something to Him! It is the only possession which is truly ours to give! ("Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, p. 24)

### ***Sin Committed By Our Free Will***

**George Q. Cannon** (1827-1901) - First Presidency

Therefore, in the great day, when we stand up to be judged according to the deeds done in the body, we cannot plead that we could not help doing so and so, because if we commit sin we do so by our own free will. God has not predestined any of us to be damned. ("Foreknowledge of God," May 10th, 1891 in *Collected Discourses*, Ed. Brian H. Stuy, Vol 2)

### ***Obligations Covenanted At Baptism Accepted by Free Will***

**John A. Widstoe** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

A person must exercise his right of choice when he enters the Church. The new convert is not baptized until he is well acquainted with the doctrine and practice of the Church. After he has been taught, he asks with open eyes for admission to Church membership. Children are likewise taught the meaning of the ordinance, before they are baptized at eight years of age.

This means that the candidate for baptism accepts of his own free will and choice all that the Church has to offer, and all that it requires. He accepts the organization, code of doctrine, and manner of living within the Church. As by the free exercise of his agency he seeks baptism, so by that agency he becomes subject to the order of life within the Church. The requirements of the Church are not in any sense infringements upon his right of choice. He has made his choice. The principles of truth upon which the Church rests must henceforth determine his actions and conduct in life. (*Evidences and Reconciliations* [1960], p. 270.)

# Agency and Choice

## **Agency is the Power to Choose and Act**

### **2 Nephi 2**

14 And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both *things to act* and things to be acted upon. (emphasis added)

### **Dictionary Definitions of Agency**

**1828 The American Dictionary of the English Language (Noah Webster)** – 1. The quality of moving or of exerting power; the state of being in action; action; operation; instrumentality; as, the agency of providence in the natural world. 2. The office of an agent, or factor; business of an agent entrusted with the concerns of another; as, the principal pays the charges of agency.

**Oxford English Dictionary** – The faculty of an agent or of acting; active working or operation; action, activity.

**Webster's Collegiate Dictionary** – Faculty or state of

acting or of exercising power; action.

**Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary**, 11 ed.—The capacity, condition, or state of action or of exerting power.

**Dictionary of Sociology** – The term agency is usually juxtaposed to structure and is often no more than a synonym for action, emphasizing implicitly the undetermined nature of human action, as opposed to the alleged determinism of structural theories.

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

Free agency means the freedom and power to choose and act. ("Church Welfare Services' Basic Principles," *Ensign*, May 1976, p. 120)

**David A. Bednar** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

As children of our Heavenly Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity and power of independent action. Endowed with agency, we are agents, and we primarily are to act and not merely be acted upon" ("Watching With All Perseverance," April 2010 General Conference)

## *There is More Than One Kind of Agency*

**Note:** *There are different agencies that man have or may have opportunity to act in: moral agency, priesthood, the church, and the family. The ultimate agency man may achieve is to be able to act God. The following are statements authenticating these agencies.*

### **Moral Agency**

**D. Todd Christofferson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In years past we generally used the term *free agency*. That is not incorrect. More recently we have taken note that *free agency* does not appear in the scriptures. They talk of our being "free to choose" and "free to act" for ourselves (2 Nephi 2:27; 10:23; see also Helaman 14:30) and of our obligation to do many things of our own "free will" (D&C 58:27). But the word *agency* appears either by itself or with the modifier moral: "That every man may act in doctrine and principle ... according to the *moral agency* which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment" (D&C 101:78; emphasis added). *When we use the term moral agency, we are appropriately emphasizing the accountability that is an essential part of the divine gift of agency. We are moral beings and agents unto ourselves, free to choose but also responsible for our choices.* ("Moral Agency," *Ensign*, Jun 2009, p. 46; emphasis added)

### **Moral Agency is Personal Agency**

**Alvin R. Dyer** (1903-77) - First Presidency

The greatest gift from God unto his children is that of personal agency. (Conference Report, April 1969, Second Day-Morning Meeting, p.56)

**Wilford Woodruff** (1807-1898) - President

For God has given to every man individual agency, and He will hold him accountable for the use of this agency. (Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, at the General Conference, Sunday afternoon, October 6, 1889. *Collected Discourses*, 5 vols. Ed. Brian H. Stuy, Vol. 1)

***The appropriate use of moral or individual agency can bring additional agencies: Church callings, the priesthood, parenthood, and godhood.***

### **Priesthood**

**D&C 64**

29 Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord's errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord's business.

**James E. Faust** (1920-2007) - First Presidency

• As priesthood holders we are agents of the Lord. The

Lord spoke of this sacred agency to the elders of the Church in Kirtland in 1831: "Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord's errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord's business." (D&C 64:29) ("Message to My Grandsons," *Ensign*, May 2007, p. 54)

- Priesthood is divine agency, and the Lord will hold us accountable for our use of this great authority. ("I Believe I Can, I Knew I Could," *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, p.49)

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

It is a sobering responsibility for those who bear the priesthood to *act as agents of the Lord* to help those in need. That trust requires faith, worthiness, and a sensitivity to the promptings of the Spirit to communicate the will of the Lord. ("Obtaining Help from the Lord," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, p. 84; emphasis added)

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Think of it, brothers and sisters-the priesthood has been restored. It is here on the earth today. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the living prophet. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve are modern-day Apostles of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Under the direction of these prophets, seers, and revelators, who hold the keys in this dispensation, priesthood holders in the Church today have the legitimate right to act in the name of God. *As his authorized agents*, they are commissioned to go forth and bless others through the power and authority of the priesthood, making all priesthood covenants, ordinances, and blessings available today. ("Blessings of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, November 1995, p.32; emphasis added)

**John Taylor** (1808-1887) - President

What is priesthood? ... I shall briefly answer that it is the government of God, whether on the earth or in the heavens, for it is by that power, agency, or principle that all things are governed on the earth and in the heavens, and by that power that all things are upheld and sustained. (*Teachings Of Presidents Of The Church: John Taylor* [2001], p.117)

**Joseph F. Smith** (1838-1918) - President

[The] Melchizedek or Holy Priesthood ... is the authority by which individuals or the ... quorums ... composing the priesthood of the Church, may legitimately act in the name of the Lord; or the moving, directing, controlling, *governing or presiding agency*, right and authority, which is vested in the Godhead and delegated unto man for the purpose of his instruction, initiation into the Church, spiritual and temporal guidance, government and exaltation. (*Teachings Of Presidents Of The Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], p.137; emphasis added)

**Stephen L Richards** (1879-1959) - First Presidency

I don't believe that the Priesthood has been bestowed upon men merely for their own aggrandizement. I look upon this power as an agency for service to mankind. I have characterized it as the perfect plan of service. I

believe that it will not greatly profit any man to hold the power of the Priesthood unless he uses that power for the benefit of his fellows. Indeed, I have come to think that the holding of the power may conduce to his condemnation rather than his exaltation, if he is indifferent to it and fails to utilize it for the advancement of God's work. (Conference Report, April 1926, p.82)

## Church

**John A. Widtsoe** (1872-1952) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Church, the community of persons with the same intelligent faith and desire and practice, is the organized agency through which God deals with His children and presents His will. Moreover, the authority to act for God must be vested on earth in some one organization and not independently in every man. The Church through the Priesthood holds this authority for the use of man. (*Priesthood and Church Government* [1939], p. 180).

**Bruce R. McConkie** (1915-1985) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

To help families and individuals, *the Church, as a service agency*, provides many opportunities to teach and learn. We are commanded to "teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom" (D&C 88:77). This is done in sacrament meetings, in conferences and other meetings, by home teachers, in priesthood and auxiliary classes, through seminaries and institutes, and through the Church Educational System. ... But the Church and the priesthood administer the gospel. There must be an institutional Church so there will be order and system in all things. There neither is nor can be salvation without the Church. *The Church is the service agency, the organization, the earthly kingdom which makes salvation available to men.* (*Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* [1989], p.235,237; emphasis added)

**Joseph F. Merrill** (1868-1952) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

To accomplish his purposes the Lord has set up his highly organized Church as an agency to serve his children. Hence the Church exists for us and for all who will accept its service. (Conference Report, April 1945, p.113)

**James E. Faust** (1920-2007) - First Presidency

Brethren, we appreciate your devotion and righteousness. You carry out your callings in the quorums, branches, wards, and stakes so well that the Church grows, and the whole work of God goes forward throughout the world. Through your priesthood you are able to bless in the name of the Lord your families and others you may be called upon or assigned to bless. *This comes from the divine agency entrusted to us by the Lord*, for He has promised, "Whomsoever you bless I will bless." ("Spiritual Nutrients," *Ensign*, Nov 2006, 53-55)

**Dieter F. Uchtdorf** - First Presidency

No calling is beneath us. Every calling provides an opportunity to serve and to grow. The Lord organized the Church in a way that offers each member an opportunity

for service, which, in turn, leads to personal spiritual growth. Whatever your calling, I urge you to see it as an opportunity not only to strengthen and bless others but also to become what Heavenly Father wants you to become. ("Lift Where You Stand," *Ensign*, Nov 2008, 53–56)

## **Parenthood**

**Russell M Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Do not try to control your children. Instead, listen to them, help them to learn the gospel, inspire them, and lead them toward eternal life. *You are God's agents in the care of children He has entrusted to you.* Let His divine influence remain in your hearts as you teach and persuade. ("Salvation and Exaltation," *Ensign*, May 2008, pp. 7–10); emphasis added)

**H. David Burton** - Presiding Bishop

Our Father in Heaven has provided His precious young sons with a superb support team more than equal to the one used by the athlete. *Our parents make superb agents.* They look after our interests. They are not only interested in us, but because they love us, they are terrific consultants as well. ("And That's the Way It Is," *Ensign*, May 2003, p.48; emphasis added)

**Milton R. Hunter** - of the Seventy

Parents in Israel, a heavy responsibility rests on each of us to help our children develop proper habits of thinking. The Savior has laid the responsibility on us to be *the principal agents* in teaching our children the gospel plan of salvation. I tremble when I realize the responsibility that is mine as a father. (Conference Report, October 1946, p.43; emphasis added)

## **Godhood**

**Lorenzo Snow** (1814-1901) - President

Now, I believe in the independence of men and women. I believe that men and women have the image of God given them-are formed after the image of God, and possess deity in their nature and character, and that their spiritual organization possesses the qualities and properties of God, and that there is the principle of God in every individual. *It is designed that man should act as*

*God*, and not be constrained and controlled in everything, but have an independency, an agency and the power to spread abroad and act according to the principle of godliness that is in him, act according to the power and intelligence and enlightenment of God, that he possesses, and not that he should be watched continually, and be controlled, and act as a slave in these matters. (*The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, ed. by Clyde J. Williams [1984], p.4; emphasis added)

**Brigham Young** (1801-1877) - President

What is the foundation of the rights of man? The Lord Almighty *has organized man for the express purpose of becoming an independent being like unto Himself, and has given him his individual agency.* Man is made in the likeness of his Creator, the great archetype of the human species, who bestowed upon him the principles of eternity, planting immortality within him, and leaving him at liberty to act in the way that seemeth good unto him, to choose or refuse for himself .... As I have just stated, the Lord Almighty has organized every human creature for the express purpose of becoming independent, and has designed that they should be capable of receiving the principles of eternity to a fulness; and when they have received them unto a fulness, they are made perfect, like unto the Son of Man, and become Gods, even the Sons of God. (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols [1967], 2:314; emphasis added)

**Harold B. Lee** (1899-1973) - President

As an essential to the obtaining of a fulness of [the] attributes and qualities [of godhood], man has been given his free agency, that he should act for himself and choose his course according to his own pleasure. As mortals, we have this priceless heritage; but like reckless spendthrifts that we are, we often squander our precious treasure in riotous living and return to eat the husks with our Father's swine. (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, edited by Clyde J. Williams [1996], p.75)

## **Moral Agency**

### **Moral Agency is Personal Agency**

**D&C 29:35**

Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself . . .

**D&C 37:4**

Behold, here is wisdom, and let every man choose from himself until I come.

**From True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference**

Your Heavenly Father has given you agency, *the ability to choose and to act for yourself.* ("Agency," in *Truth to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day [2004], p. 12; emphasis added)

**David A. Bednar** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In the grand division of all of God's creations, there are things to act and things to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:13–14). As sons and daughters of our Heavenly



Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity for independent action and choice. Endowed with agency, you and I are agents, and we primarily are to act and not just be acted upon. ("And Nothing Shall Offend Them," *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, p. 89)

In the grand division of all of God's creations, there are "things to act and things to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:14). As children of our Heavenly Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity and power of independent action. Endowed with agency, we are agents, and we primarily are to act and not merely be acted upon" ("Watching With All Perseverance," April 2010 General Conference)

**L. Aldin Porter** - of the Seventy

A very important part of the plan is the right of personal choice. The Lord calls it moral agency. We may choose as we desire, but we may not avoid the consequences of our choices. ("Our Destiny," *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, p.65)

**Alvin R. Dyer** (1903-77) - First Presidency

The greatest gift from God unto his children is that of personal agency. (Conference Report, April 1969, p.56)

**Wilford Woodruff** (1807-1898) - President

- For God has given to every man individual agency, and He will hold him accountable for the use of this agency. (Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, at the General Conference, Sunday afternoon, October 6, 1889. *Collected Discourses*, 5 vols. Ed. Brian H. Stuy, Vol. 1)
- God has given unto all of his children of this dispensation, as he gave unto all of his children of previous dispensations, individual agency. This agency has always been the heritage of man under the rule and government of God. [We] possessed it in the heaven of heavens before the world was, and the Lord maintained and defended it there against the aggression of Lucifer and those that took sides with him, to the overthrow of Lucifer and one-third part of the heavenly hosts [see Revelation 12:1-9; D&C 29:36-37; Moses 4:1-4]. By virtue of this agency you and I and all mankind are made responsible beings, responsible for the course we pursue, the lives we live, the deeds we do in the body. (*Teachings Of Presidents Of The Church: Wilford Woodruff* [2004], p.205)

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Obedience to the plan is a requisite for full happiness in this life and a continuation of eternal joy beyond the veil. Essential to His plan of happiness is agency—the right of personal choice. ("The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, p.73)

### ***Moral Agency—the Power to Do According to Our Own Will***

**Mosiah 2**

God "has created you from the beginning, and is

preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and *do according to your own will*" (verse 21; emphasis added)

**Alma 12**

31 Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, *placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good—* (emphasis added)

**Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876-1972) - President

This great gift of agency, that is the privilege given to man to make his own choice, has never been revoked, and it never will be. It is an eternal principle *giving freedom of thought and action to every soul*. No person, by any decree of the Father, has ever been compelled to do good; no person has ever been forced to do evil. *Each may act for himself*. It was Satan's plan to destroy this agency and force men to do his will. There could be no satisfactory existence without this great gift. Men must have the privilege to choose even to the extent that they may rebel against the divine decrees. Of course *salvation and exaltation must come through the free will* without coercion and by individual merit in order that righteous rewards may be given and proper punishment be meted out to the transgressor. Therefore, when the great day of the Lord shall come, the wicked who have merited banishment from a righteous government will be consumed, or the privilege of continuance on the earth will be denied. (*Answers to Gospel Questions* 5 Vols. [1957-66], 2:20; emphasis added)

### ***Moral Agency—A Gift From God***

**Moses 4**

3 Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him . . .

**Moses 7**

32 The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

**D&C 101**

78 That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

### ***Agency—The Foundation Principle of the Eternal Plan***

**Joseph F. Smith** (1838-1918) - President

The free agency of man is a fundamental principle which, according to the tenets of the Church, even God Himself does not suppress. (*Teachings Of Presidents Of The Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], p.283)

**Ezra Taft Benson** (1899-1994) - President

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that life is eternal, that it has purpose. ... [God has a] plan ... for the benefit and blessing of us, His children. ... Basic to [that] all-important plan is our free agency. ... The right of choice ... runs like a golden thread throughout the gospel ... for the blessing of His children. (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], pp. 80-81.)

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

I purpose to make a few remarks about the foundation principle upon which the gospel of Jesus Christ is built, the principle of agency. (Conference Report, October 1968, p.64)

**J. Reuben Clark, Jr.** (1871-1961) - First Presidency

When the Lord placed man upon the earth he set up certain general laws, fundamental principles, and then permitted man to develop himself within those laws and those principles. If he undertook to tell us each time what we were to do in every detail ... [it] we would virtually destroy the free agency of man, *the foundation stone upon which all of our existence is built*. (Conference Report, April 1936, p.61; emphasis added)

**Bruce R. McConkie** (1915-1985) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Agency is so fundamental a part of the great plan of creation and redemption that if it should cease, all other things would vanish away. "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence." (D. & C. 93:30.) (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. [1966], p.26)

**William R. Bradford** - of the Seventy

The most basic, fundamental principle of truth, that upon which the entire plan of God is founded, is free agency. As an individual you have the right to govern yourself. It is divinely given to you to think and act as you wish. It is your decision. ("The Governing Ones," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p.37)

## ***Agency is an Eternal Principle***

**Brigham Young** (1801-1877) - President

The volition of the creature is free; this is a law of their existence and the Lord cannot violate his own law; were he to do that, he would cease to be God. He has placed life and death before his children, and it is for them to choose. If they choose life, they receive the blessing of life; if they choose death, they must abide the penalty. This is a law which has always existed from all eternity, and will continue to exist throughout all the eternities to come. Every intelligent being must have the power of choice, and God brings forth the results of the acts of his

creatures to promote his Kingdom and subserve his purposes in the salvation and exaltation of his children. (*Discourses of Brigham Young* [1954], p.62)

### ***From True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference***

You had the power to choose even before you were born. In the premortal Council in Heaven, Heavenly Father presented His plan, which included the principle of agency. Lucifer rebelled and "sought to destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3). As a result, Lucifer and all those who followed him were denied the privilege of receiving a mortal body. Your presence on the earth confirms that you exercised your agency to follow Heavenly Father's plan.

In mortality, you continue to have agency. Your use of this gift determines your happiness or misery in this life and in the life to come. You are free to choose and act, but you are not free to choose the consequences of your actions. The consequences may not be immediate, but they will always follow. Choices of good and righteousness lead to happiness, peace, and eternal life, while choices of sin and evil eventually lead to heartache and misery. ("Agency," in *Truth to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day [2004], p. 12)

**Howard W. Hunter** (1907-1995) - President

There are, of course, those who, in bitterness and disbelief, have rejected the idea of an independent spirit in man that is capable of free will and choice and true liberty.

We declare a bright and glorious view of God and man to all who will hear, a view revealed in and illuminated by the restored light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We testify of God's loving goodness and of his eternal respect for each of us, for us as individual children of God and for what each of us may become.

As our prophet leader, President Ezra Taft Benson has declared, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that life is eternal, that it has purpose. ... [God has a] plan ... for the benefit and blessing of us, His children. ...

"Basic to [that] all-important plan is our free agency. ...

"The right of choice ... runs like a golden thread throughout the gospel ... for the blessing of His children." (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988, pp. 80-81.)

Part of our reassurance about the free, noble, and progressing spirit of man comes from the glorious realization that we all existed and had our identities, and our agency, long before we came to this world. To some that will be a new thought, but the Bible teaches clearly just such an eternal view of life, a life stretching back before this world was and stretching forward into the eternities ahead.

God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Jer. 1:5.) At another time God reminded Job that "all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7) before there was yet any man or woman on

the earth God was creating. The Apostle Paul taught that God the Father chose us “before the foundation of the world.” (Eph. 1:4.)

Where and when did all of this happen? Well, it happened long before man’s mortal birth. It happened in a great premortal existence where we developed our identities and increased our spiritual capabilities by exercising our agency and making important choices. We developed our intelligence and learned to love the truth, and we prepared to come to earth to continue our progress.

Our Father in Heaven wanted our growth to continue in mortality and to be enhanced by our freedom to choose and learn. He also wanted us to exercise our faith and our will, especially with a new physical body to master and control. But we know from both ancient and modern revelation that Satan wished to deny us our independence and agency in that now-forgotten moment long ago, even as he wishes to deny them this very hour. Indeed, Satan violently opposed the freedom of choice offered by the Father, so violently that John in the Revelation described “war in heaven” (Rev. 12:7) over the matter. Satan would have coerced us, and he would have robbed us of that most precious of gifts if he could: our freedom to choose a divine future and the exaltation we all hope to obtain.

Through Christ and his valiant defense of our Father’s plan, the course of agency and eternal aspirations prevailed. In that crucial, premortal setting, a major milestone was passed, a monumental victory was won. As a result, we would be allowed to continue to pursue what President David O. McKay once described as the “eternal principle of progress.” Later Christ himself would come to earth, President McKay noted, “to perfect society by perfecting the individual, and only by the exercising of Free Agency can the individual even approach perfection.” (In Conference Report, Apr. 1940, p. 118). (“The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 18)

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Principles of agency pertain on both sides of the veil. There, in postmortal realms, personal choice and accountability will be of paramount importance. (“The Spirit of Elijah,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, p. 84).

### ***Agency Is Not the Ultimate Goal – It Is a Means to an End!***

**Dallin H. Oaks** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

My next example in this message on weightier matters is the role of choice, or agency.

Few concepts have more potential to mislead us than the idea that choice, or agency, is an ultimate goal. For Latter-day Saints, this potential confusion is partly a product of the fact that moral agency—the right to choose—is a fundamental condition of mortal life. Without this precious gift of God, the purpose of mortal life could not be realized. To secure our agency in mortality we fought a mighty contest the book of Revelation calls a “war in heaven.” This premortal contest

ended with the devil and his angels being cast out of heaven and being denied the opportunity of having a body in mortal life (see Rev. 12:7-9).

But our war to secure agency was won. The test in this postwar mortal estate is not to secure choice but to use it—to choose good instead of evil so that we can achieve our eternal goals. In mortality, choice is a method, not a goal.

Of course, mortals must still resolve many questions concerning what restrictions or consequences should be placed upon choices. But those questions come under the heading of freedom, not agency. Many do not understand that important fact. We are responsible to use our agency in a world of choices. It will not do to pretend that our agency has been taken away when we are not free to exercise it without unwelcome consequences.

Because choice is a method, choices can be exercised either way on any matter, and our choices can serve any goal. Therefore, those who consider freedom of choice as a goal can easily slip into the position of trying to justify any choice that is made. “Choice” can even become a slogan to justify one particular choice. For example, today one who says “I am pro-choice” is clearly understood as opposing any legal restrictions upon a woman’s choice to abort a fetus.

More than 30 years ago, as a young law professor, I published one of the earliest articles on the legal consequences of abortion. Since that time I have been a knowledgeable observer of the national debate and the unfortunate Supreme Court decisions on the so-called “right to abortion.” I have been fascinated with how cleverly those who sought and now defend legalized abortion on demand have moved the issue away from a debate on the moral, ethical, and medical pros and cons of legal restrictions on abortion and focused the debate on the slogan or issue of choice. The slogan or sound bite “pro-choice” has had an almost magical effect in justifying abortion and in neutralizing opposition to it.

Pro-choice slogans have been particularly seductive to Latter-day Saints because we know that moral agency, which can be described as the power of choice, is a fundamental necessity in the gospel plan. All Latter-day Saints are pro-choice according to that theological definition. But being pro-choice on the need for moral agency does not end the matter for us. Choice is a method, not the ultimate goal. We are accountable for our choices, and only righteous choices will move us toward our eternal goals.

In this effort, Latter-day Saints follow the teachings of the prophets. On this subject our prophetic guidance is clear. The Lord commanded, “Thou shalt not ... kill, nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). The Church opposes elective abortion for personal or social convenience. Our members are taught that, subject only to some very rare exceptions, they must not submit to, perform, encourage, pay for, or arrange for an abortion. That direction tells us what we need to do on the weightier matters of the law, the choices that will move us toward eternal life.

In today’s world we are not true to our teachings if we are merely pro-choice. We must stand up for the *right*

choice. Those who persist in refusing to think beyond slogans and sound bites like pro-choice wander from the goals they pretend to espouse and wind up giving their support to results they might not support if those results were presented without disguise.

For example, consider the uses some have made of the possible exceptions to our firm teachings against abortion. Our leaders have taught that the only possible exceptions are when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest, or when a competent physician has determined that the life or health of the mother is in serious jeopardy or that the fetus has severe defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth. But even these exceptions do not justify abortion automatically. Because abortion is a most serious matter, we are counseled that it should be considered only after the persons responsible have consulted with their bishops and received divine confirmation through prayer.

Some Latter-day Saints say they deplore abortion, but they give these exceptional circumstances as a basis for their pro-choice position that the law should allow abortion on demand in all circumstances. Such persons should face the reality that the circumstances described in these three exceptions are extremely rare. For example, conception by incest or rape—the circumstance most commonly cited by those who use exceptions to argue for abortion on demand—is involved in only a tiny minority of abortions. More than 95 percent of the millions of abortions performed each year extinguish the life of a fetus conceived by consensual relations. Thus the effect in over 95 percent of abortions is not to vindicate choice but to avoid its consequences. Using arguments of “choice” to try to justify altering the consequences of choice is a classic case of omitting what the Savior called “the weightier matters of the law.”

A prominent basis for the secular or philosophical arguments for abortion on demand is the argument that a woman should have control over her own body. Not long ago I received a letter from a thoughtful Latter-day Saint outside the United States who analyzed that argument in secular terms. Since his analysis reaches the same conclusion I have urged on religious grounds, I quote it here for the benefit of those most subject to persuasion on this basis:

“Every woman has, within the limits of nature, the right to choose what will or will not happen to her body. Every woman has, at the same time, the responsibility for the way she uses her body. If by her choice she behaves in such a way that a human fetus is conceived, she has not only the right *to* but also the responsibility *for* that fetus. If it is an unwanted pregnancy, she is not justified in ending it with the claim that it interferes with her right to choose. She herself chose what would happen to her body by risking pregnancy. She had her choice. If she has no better reason, her conscience should tell her that abortion would be a highly irresponsible choice.

“What constitutes a good reason? Since a human fetus has intrinsic and infinite human value, the only good reason for an abortion would be the violation or deprivation of or the threat to the woman’s right to choose

what will or will not happen to her body. Social, educational, financial, and personal considerations alone do not outweigh the value of the life that is in the fetus. These considerations by themselves may properly lead to the decision to place the baby for adoption after its birth, but not to end its existence in utero.

“The woman’s right to choose what will or will not happen to her body is obviously violated by rape or incest. When conception results in such a case, the woman has the moral as well as the legal right to an abortion because the condition of pregnancy is the result of someone else’s irresponsibility, not hers. She does not have to take responsibility for it. To force her by law to carry the fetus to term would be a further violation of her right. She also has the right to refuse an abortion. This would give her the right to the fetus and also the responsibility for it. She could later relinquish this right and this responsibility through the process of placing the baby for adoption after it is born. Whichever way is a responsible choice.”

The man who wrote those words also applied the same reasoning to the other exceptions allowed by our doctrine—life of the mother and a baby that will not survive birth.

I conclude this discussion of choice with two more short points.

If we say we are anti-abortion in our personal life but pro-choice in public policy, we are saying that we will not use our influence to establish public policies that encourage righteous choices on matters God’s servants have defined as serious sins. I urge Latter-day Saints who have taken that position to ask themselves which other grievous sins should be decriminalized or smiled on by the law due to this theory that persons should not be hampered in their choices. Should we decriminalize or lighten the legal consequences of child abuse? of cruelty to animals? of pollution? of fraud? of fathers who choose to abandon their families for greater freedom or convenience?

Similarly, some reach the pro-choice position by saying we should not legislate morality. Those who take this position should realize that the law of crimes legislates nothing but morality. Should we repeal all laws with a moral basis so that our government will not punish any choices some persons consider immoral? Such an action would wipe out virtually all of the laws against crimes. (“Weightier Matters,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, pp. 13ff; underlining added)

## ***The Free Exercise of Agency— The Purpose of Mortality***

**Wilford Woodruff** (1807-1898) - President

The Lord Almighty never created a world like this and peopled it for six thousand years, as He has done, without having some motive in view. That motive was, that we might come here and exercise our agency. The probation we are called upon to pass through is intended to elevate us so that we can dwell in the presence of God our Father. And that eternal variety of character which

existed in the heavens among the spirits—from God upon his throne down to Lucifer the son of the morning—exists here upon the earth. That variety will remain upon the earth in the creations of God, and for what I know, throughout the endless ages of eternity. Men will occupy different glories and positions according to their lives—according to the law they keep the flesh. (*The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* [1946], p.8)

## ***One of the Purposes of Earth Life is to Test Our Agency***

**Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910-2008) - President

We were born into this life under a divine plan. We are here to test our worthiness, acting in the agency which God has given to us. ("The Great Things Which God Has Revealed," *Ensign*, May 2005, pp. 80ff)

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

[T]he whole gospel of Jesus Christ presupposes man's untrammelled exercise of free agency. Man is in the earth to be tested. The issue as to whether he succeeds or fails will be determined by how he uses his agency. His whole future, through all eternity, is at stake. (Conference Report, April 1966, p. 98)

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Why are you here on planet earth? One of the most important reasons is to receive a mortal body. Another is to be tested—to experience mortality—to determine what you will do with life's challenging opportunities. Those opportunities require you to make choices, and choices depend on agency. A major reason for your mortal existence, therefore, is to test how you will exercise your agency. (See 2 Ne. 2:15, 25.) ("Choices," *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, p. 20)

**D. Todd Chirstofferson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

A consistent effort will educate and refine our desires so that in time our desires will become aligned with the Father's. But we should expect to be tested. The gift of agency is intended to give us experience. We "taste the bitter, that [we] may know to prize the good" (Moses 6:55). And Jesus, "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

Joseph Smith was told to expect some severe opposition despite making good choices. Said the Lord, "Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). We are in a mortal experience because we cannot become as God without that experience. We must prove to Him and to ourselves that we can consistently make the right choices and then stick to those choices, come what may.

Some think that they should be spared from any adversity if they keep God's commandments, but it is "in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10; 1 Nephi 20:10) that we are chosen. The Lord's promise is not to spare us the conflict but to preserve and console us in our afflictions and to consecrate them for our gain (see 2 Nephi 2:2;

4:19–26; Jacob 3:1).

Exercising agency in a setting that sometimes includes opposition and hardship is what makes life more than a simple multiple-choice test. God is interested in what we are becoming as a result of our choices. He is not satisfied if our exercise of moral agency is simply a robotic effort at keeping some rules. Our Savior wants us to become something, not just do some things. He is endeavoring to make us independently strong—more able to act for ourselves than perhaps those of any prior generation. We must be righteous, even when He withdraws His Spirit, or, as President Brigham Young said, even "in the dark."

Using our agency to choose God's will, and not slackening even when the going gets hard, will not make us God's puppet; it will make us like Him. God gave us agency, and Jesus showed us how to use it so that we could eventually learn what They know, do what They do, and become what They are.

Remember that with His gift of moral agency, our Heavenly Father has graciously provided us help to exercise that agency in a way that will yield precious, positive fruit in our life here and hereafter. Among other resources, we have the scriptures that contain the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, mentors and parents who love us, the voice of prophets and apostles living among us, the covenants and ordinances of the priesthood and the temple, the gift of the Holy Ghost, prayer, and the Church. May we draw upon these resources constantly to guide our choices, always doing those things that please God. (From "Moral Agency," *Ensign*, Jun 2009, pp. 46–53)

**Delbert L. Stapley** (1896-1978)- Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

As sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we have this gift of free agency to use in our mortal lives. We must be tried, tested, and proved to see if we will choose the right and do all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us. As spirit children of God, we have built-in powers of conscience sufficient to develop our free agency in right choices and to acquire qualities of goodness, humility, and integrity of purpose. ("Using Our Free Agency," *Ensign*, May 1975, p.21)

**Wolfgang H. Paul** - of the Seventy

When the Lord taught Abraham about the eternal nature of spirits and that he was chosen before he was born, He explained to Abraham one of the important purposes for coming to this earth by saying, "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them." [Abr. 3:25] *Thus, our agency makes our life on this earth a test period.* If we did not have this wonderful gift of agency, we would not be able to show our Father in Heaven whether we will do all that He commanded us. ("The Gift of Agency," *Ensign*, May 2006, 34–35; emphasis added)

**F. Enzo Busche** - of the Seventy

In the message of the Restoration, we learn that during our mortal life our agency is tested through the inseparable connection of our spirit with the elements of

this earth, "the flesh," or the "natural man" (see D&C 88:15). By this revelation we not only understand the cause of mankind's misery, but we also receive the keys and power that enable us to end this misery once and for all. As our mind is opened through our study of the plan of salvation, each of us comes to see that our life means that the "real me," or "the spiritual child of God," created in innocence and beauty, is engaged in a fight for life or death with the elements of the earth, the "flesh," which, in its present unredeemed state, is enticed and influenced by the enemy of God.

From the revelations of the Book of Mormon, we know that this enemy fights with all fury and cunningness to make all men miserable like unto himself (see 2 Ne. 2:27). It is Jesus Christ who, through His light, is searching and finding each individual child of God who is yearning and fighting for righteousness and truth and who is crying for help. Without Christ, this war within us is lost. Without Christ's plan of redemption and His atoning sacrifice, we all would have been lost. We knew that before we came to this earth, and we can sense it again, when through the Light of Christ our minds are quickened with understanding (see D&C 88:11).

The issue is *truth*, my dear brothers and sisters, and the only way to find *truth* is through uncompromising self-education toward self-honesty to see the original "real me," the child of God, in its innocence and potential in contrast to the influence from the other part of me, "the flesh," with its selfish desires and foolishness. Only in that state of pure honesty are we able to see truth in its complete dimension. Honesty may not be everything, but everything is *nothing* without honesty. In its final state, honesty is a gift of the Spirit through which the true disciples of Christ feel the force to bear testimony of the truth in such a powerful way that it penetrates the very core of our existence. ...

This war is a war that has to be fought by all of Heavenly Father's children, whether they know about it or not. But without a keen knowledge of the plan of salvation, and without the influence of the divine Light of Christ to bring us awareness, this war is being fought subconsciously, and therefore its battlefronts are not even known to us, and we have no chance to win. Wars in the inner self that are fought subconsciously, with unknown battlefronts, lead to defeats which also hurt us subconsciously. These defeats are reflected in our conscious life as expressions of misery, such as a lack of self-confidence, lack of happiness and joy, lack of faith and testimony, or as overreactions of our subconscious self, which we see then as pride, arrogance, or in other forms of misbehavior—even as acts of cruelty and indecency.

No! There is no salvation without Christ, and Christ cannot be with us unless we pay the price of the constant fight for self-honesty.

One of the great tragedies we see in our lives is that the adversary, through the influences of our "flesh," can cheat us into establishing images of truth or perceptions of truth. Our brain, the great computer where all the facts of life's memories are held together, can also be

programmed by the "flesh," with its self-centered ideas to deceive the spiritual self. Without the constant striving through prayer and contemplation to reach the ends of self-awareness and honesty, our so-called intellect can, therefore, based on look-alike truths, play many games of reason, to impress, to get gain, to intimidate, or even to manipulate truth with the vain results of deceit. ("Truth is the Issue," *Ensign*, Nov 1993, p. 24)

## ***The Fall of Adam Activated Moral Agency During Earth Life***

### **Alma 12:31**

Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good--

### **Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Other blessings came to us through the Fall. It activated two closely coupled additional gifts from God, nearly as precious as life itself—agency and accountability. We became "free to choose liberty and eternal life ... or to choose captivity and death" (2 Ne. 2:27). Freedom of choice cannot be exercised without accountability for choices made. ("Constancy Amid Change," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, p. 33).

## ***Moral Agency Given to All Mankind***

### **Joseph F. Smith** (1838-1918) - President

There are many blessings, however, which are common to the human family, which all enjoy, without regard to their moral status or religious convictions. God has given to all men an agency, and has granted to us the privilege to serve Him or serve Him not, to do that which is right or that which is wrong, and this privilege is given to all men irrespective of creed, color or condition. The wealthy have this agency, the poor have this agency, and no man is deprived by any power of God from exercising it in the fullest and in the freest manner. This agency has been given to all. This is a blessing that God has bestowed upon the world of mankind, upon all His children alike. But He will hold us strictly to an account for the use that we make of this agency... (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [1967], 24:176)

## ***All God's Children Have the "Right" of Agency***

### **Dictionary Definitions of "Rights"**

*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11 ed. – Something to which one has just claim. Something that one may properly claim as due.

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* – That to which one has a just claim; any power or privilege vested in a person by the law, custom, etc.

### **Brigham Young** (1801-1877) - President

My independence is sacred to me – it is a portion of that same Deity that rules in the heavens. There is not a being upon the face of the earth who is made in the image of God, who stands erect and is organized as God is, that would be deprived of the free exercise of his agency so far as he does not infringe upon other's rights, save by good advice and a good example. (*Discourses of Brigham Young* [1954], p.62)

### **Wilford Woodruff** (1807-1898) - President

With regard to the rights of the human family, I wish to say that God has given unto all of his children of this dispensation, as he gave unto all of his children of previous dispensations, individual agency. This agency has always been the heritage of man under the rule and government of God. He possessed it in the heaven of heavens before the world was, and the Lord maintained and defended it there against the aggression of Lucifer and those that took sides with him, to the overthrow of Lucifer and one-third part of the heavenly hosts. By virtue of this agency you and I and all mankind are made responsible beings, responsible for the course we pursue, the lives we live, the deeds we do in the body. (*The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* [1946], pp.8-9)

## ***Elements of Moral of Agency***

### **Bruce R. McConkie** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Four great principles must be in force if there is to be agency:

1. Laws must exist, laws ordained by an Omnipotent power, laws which can be obeyed or disobeyed;
2. Opposites must exist—good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong—that is, there must be an opposition, one force pulling one way and another pulling the other.
3. A knowledge of good and evil must be had by those who are to enjoy the agency, that is, they must know the difference between the opposites; and
4. An unfettered power of choice must prevail. (*Mormon Doctrine* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. [1966], p. 26)

### **D. Todd Chirstofferson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

What, then, are the elements of moral agency? To me there are three.

First, there must be alternatives among which to choose. Lehi spoke of opposites, or “opposition” –righteousness and its opposite, wickedness; holiness versus misery; good versus bad. Without opposites, Lehi said, “All things must needs be a compound in one; ... no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility” (2 Nephi 2:11).

He further explained that for these opposites or alternatives to exist, there must be law. Law provides us the options. It is by the operation of laws that things happen. By using or obeying a law, one can bring about a particular result—and by disobedience, the opposite result. Without law there could be no God, for He would be powerless to cause anything to happen (see 2 Nephi

2:13). Without law, neither He nor we would be able to predict or choose a particular outcome by a given action. Our existence and the creation around us are convincing evidence that God, the Creator, exists and that our mortal world consists of “both things to act and things to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:14)—or, in other words, choices.

Second, for us to have agency, we must not only have alternatives, but we must also know what they are. If we are unaware of the choices available, the existence of those choices is meaningless to us. Lehi called this being “enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16). He recalled the situation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they were presented with a choice, “even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter” (2 Nephi 2:15). Adam and Eve’s choice, of course, brought about the Fall, which brought with it a knowledge of good and evil, opening to their understanding a multitude of new choices. Had they remained in Eden, “they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23). But with the Fall, both they and we gain sufficient knowledge and understanding to be enticed by good and evil—we attain a state of accountability and can recognize the alternatives before us.

The beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it pours knowledge into our souls and shows things in their true light. With that enhanced perspective, we can discern more clearly the choices before us and their consequences. We can, therefore, make more intelligent use of our agency. Many of God’s children fall into unanticipated traps and unhappiness because they either lack or ignore gospel light. They are unaware of their options or are confused about the outcomes of their choices. Ignorance effectively limits their agency.

Third is the next element of agency: the freedom to make choices (see 2 Nephi 10:23). This freedom to act for ourselves in choosing among alternatives is often referred to in the scriptures as agency itself. For this freedom we are indebted to God. It is His gift to us (see Moses 4:3).

“The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency” (Moses 7:32).

King Benjamin reminded us that in addition to giving us the freedom to choose, God makes it possible for us to use the gift because He “is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another” (Mosiah 2:21).

Freedom of choice is the freedom to obey or disobey existing laws—not the freedom to alter their consequences. Law, as mentioned earlier, exists as a foundational element of moral agency with fixed outcomes that do not vary according to our opinions or preferences. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed, “We are responsible to use our agency in a world of choices. It will not do to pretend

that our agency has been taken away when we are not free to exercise it without unwelcome consequences.” [Dallin H. Oaks, “Weightier Matters,” in *Brigham Young University 1998–99 Speeches* (1999), 148] (From “Moral Agency,” *Ensign*, Jun 2009, pp. 46–53)

**Harold B. Lee** (1899-1973) - President

But, you ask, why does God, if He truly loves his children, permit Satan to tempt us and thereby jeopardize our chances to gain the best experiences in mortality and return to enjoy eternal life in His presence? The answer is given by a great prophet-teacher: “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one [which is evil] or the other [which is good].” (2 Nephi 2:16.) Think about that for a moment. If there were no opposition to good, would there be any chance to exercise your agency or right to choose? To deny you that privilege would be to deny you the opportunity to grow in knowledge, experience, and power. God has given laws with penalties affixed so that man might be made afraid of sin and be guided into paths of truth and duty. (See Alma 42:20.) (*Stand Ye In Holy Places* [1974], p.219)

## ***Agency Given to Choose and Act On Good or Evil Choices***

**Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910-2008) - President

Mankind has been given agency to choose between right and wrong. (“Reverence and Morality,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 47)

**M. Russell Ballard** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We tend to think of agency as a personal matter. If we ask someone to define “moral agency,” the answer will probably be something like this: “Moral agency means I am free to make choices for myself.” Often overlooked is the fact that choices have consequences; we forget also that agency offers the same privilege of choice to others. At times we will be affected adversely by the way other people choose to exercise their agency. Our Heavenly Father feels so strongly about protecting our agency that he allows his children to exercise it, either for good or for evil. (“Answers to Life’s Questions,” *Ensign*, May 1995, p.22)

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We want our children and their children to know that the choice of life is not between fame and obscurity, nor is the choice between wealth and poverty. The choice is between good and evil, and that is a very different matter indeed. (“The Choice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, p. 21)

**Joseph B. Wirthlin** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Father’s plan gave us our agency to choose right or wrong, good or evil so we can learn, develop, and progress. (“Deep Roots,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, p. 75)

**David B. Haight** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We have our agency to choose right from wrong, good from evil. But just because evil exists does not mean that

we must partake of it. You cannot do wrong and feel right. (“A Time for Preparation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, p. 37)

**Dallin H. Oaks** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

When I say *free agency* I refer to what the scripture calls agency, which means an exercise of the will, the power to choose. (“Free Agency and Freedom,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* [Eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Religious Studies Center, BYU, Provo Utah, 1989] p. 1)

**Howard W. Hunter** (1907-1995) - President

Today, I would like to address both groups, members of our church as well as others, about one of the most important tenets of our faith and one of the most precious of God’s gifts to mankind. It is our freedom, our agency, our inalienable and divine right to choose what we will believe and what we will not believe, and to choose what we want to be and what we want to do. I wish to speak of our responsibility and our opportunity to choose God, and the good, and eternal life; or to select evil, the destructive, and that which leads to painful misery and despair. (“The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 17)

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The vital revelations about the agency of man—our freedom to choose—inevitably disclose the perfect generosity and justice of God. (“Free to Choose,” in *Moving in His Majesty & Power* [2004], pp. 1-2)

**Dallin H. Oaks** Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

God has given us agency—the power to choose between good (the path of life) and evil (the path of spiritual death and destruction). (“Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1995, p. 8)

## ***Good and Evil Is Determined By God Not Man***

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Please understand, no one has the privilege to choose what is right. God reserved that prerogative to Himself. (“Healing Your Damaged Life,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, p. 61)

**Spencer W. Kimball** (1895-1985) - President

You probably think you have found a new freedom: to think wholly for yourself, to make wholly your own determinations, to criticize and decide for yourself what is right and wrong. That was decided eternities ago. Right and wrong are not to be determined by you or me. Those elements were decided for us before our birth. We have the free agency to do the right or do the wrong, but who are we to alter those changeless things? We can scoff at sacred things, express our own little opinions, but remember that millions of men and women with keener minds than ours, with more erudite training than yours and mine, have said things and done things more startling, more ugly, more skeptical than you or I could think of. Millions have gone down the path you are entering. They have all come to grief or will ultimately.



Shall the violin say to Tony Stradivarius, "You did not make me"? Shall the created thing question the creator? (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [1982], p.160)

### ***Do Not Confuse Agency With the "Right" to Do Wrong***

**Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876-1972) - President

I have heard people say, and members of the Church too, "I have a right to do as I please." My answer is: No, you do not. You haven't any right at all to do just as you please. There is only one right that you have, and that is to do just what I read to you: keep the commandments of Jesus Christ. He has a perfect right to tell us so. We have no right to refuse. I do not care who the man is; I do not care where he lives, or what he is--when the gospel of Jesus Christ is presented to him, he has no right to refuse to receive it. He has the privilege. He is not compelled to receive it, because our Father in heaven has given to everyone of us in the Church and out, the gift of free agency. That free agency gives us the privilege to accept and be loyal to our Lord's commandments, but it has never given us the right to reject them. Every man who rejects the commandments of our Father in heaven is rebellious. (*Conference Report*, April 1967, pp.120-121)

### ***Our Choices Can Never Be Independent of Good or Evil Influences***

**Henry B. Eyring** - First Presidency

Korihor was arguing, as men and women have falsely argued from the beginning of time, that to take counsel from the servants of God is to surrender God-given rights of independence. But the argument is false because it misrepresents reality. When we reject the counsel which comes from God, we do not choose to be independent of outside influence. We choose another influence. We reject the protection of a perfectly loving, all-powerful, all-knowing Father in Heaven, whose whole purpose, as that of His Beloved Son, is to give us eternal life, to give us all that He has, and to bring us home again in families to the arms of His love. In rejecting His counsel, we choose the influence of another power, whose purpose is to make us miserable and whose motive is hatred. We have moral agency as a gift of God. Rather than the right to choose to be free of influence, it is the inalienable right to submit ourselves to whichever of those powers we choose. ("Finding Safety in Counsel," *Ensign*, May 1997, p. 25)

### ***Agency Is Not a Power Designed to Get What You Want***

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Your agency, the right to make choices, is not given so that you can get what you want. This divine gift is provided so that you will choose what your Father in Heaven wants for you. That way He can lead you to become all that He intends you to be (see D&C

58:26–32). That path leads to glorious joy and happiness. ("Finding Joy in Life," *Ensign*, May 1996, p. 25)

### ***Be Very Careful About Surrendering Agency***

**Neal A. Maxwell**

Yes, we mortals are still free to choose. Yes, a war was even fought in heaven to preserve our moral agency. Yet down here, the great gift of agency is often surrendered without so much as a mild whimper! ("The Seventh Commandment: A Shield," *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, p.78)

### ***Every Choice Brings Consequences***

**D&C 93**

30 All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.

31 Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.

32 And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation.

**Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910-2008) - President

I repeat, each of us has a choice between right and wrong. But with that choice there inevitably will follow consequences. ("Reverence and Morality," *Ensign*, May 1987, p. 47)

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In mortality men are free to choose, and each choice begets a consequence. ("Atonement, Agency, Accountability," *Ensign*, May 1988, p.71)

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Often, however, agency is misunderstood. While we are free to choose, once we have made those choices, we are tied to the consequences of those choices. ("Addiction or Freedom," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, p.6)

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Our agency does allow us to choose among alternate paths, but then we are bound to the consequence God has decreed. ("Healing Your Damaged Life," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, p. 61)

### ***We Are Free to Make Choices But Not Free to Choose the Consequence of Those Choices***

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

You have to have agency to choose between good and evil. So we say, "I understand I'm free to do what I want. I'm my own person. I have agency." It's true that we are free to make our own choices, but we're not free

to choose the consequences of those choices. Once you understand that, you begin to understand that there is a great price to be paid for agency. Those people who think agency means “I can do whatever I want whenever I want” do not understand. They may be able to do what they want, but they can’t choose the consequences. (“Integrity and Values: A Discussion with Elder Robert D. Hales,” *Ensign*, Apr 2005, pp. 46–49)

**Joseph B. Wirthlin** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

The Lord has given you the gift of agency (see Moses 7:32) and instructed you sufficiently to know good from evil (see 2 Ne. 2:5). You are free to choose (see 2 Ne. 2:27) and are permitted to act (see 2 Ne. 10:23; Hel. 14:30), but you are not free to choose the consequences. With absolute certainty, choices of good and right lead to happiness and peace, while choices of sin and evil eventually lead to unhappiness, sorrow, and misery. (“Running Your Marathon,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 75)

**Richard G. Scott** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

Yes, moral agency allows you to choose what you will, but you cannot control the outcome of those choices. Unlike the false creations of man, our Father in Heaven determines the consequences of your choices. Obedience will yield happiness, while violation of His commandments will not. (“How To Live Well Amid Increasing Evil,” *Ensign*, May 2004, pp. 100-103)

### **God, Not Man, Determines Consequences of Choices and Actions**

**Brigham Young** (1801-1877) - President

- Our Father controls the results of our acts at his own pleasure, and we cannot prevent it. Man can produce and control his own acts, but he has no control over their results. God causes even the wrath of man to praise him, to redound to his glory and the salvation of his children. (*Discourses of Brigham Young* [1954], p.63)
- He has given them the privilege of choosing for themselves, whether it be good or evil; but the results of our choice is still in his hand. All his children have the right of making a path for themselves of walking to the right or to the left, or telling the truth or that which is not true. This right God has given to all people who dwell on the earth, and they can legislate and act as they please; but God holds them in his hands, and he will bring forth the results of his glory, and for the benefit of those who love and serve him, and he will make the wrath of men to praise him. All of us are in the hands of that God. (*Discourses of Brigham Young* [1954], p.62)

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

- Yes, moral agency allows you to choose what you will, but you cannot control the outcome of those choices. Unlike the false creations of man, our Father in Heaven determines the consequences of your choices. (“How to Live Well amid Increasing Evil,” *Ensign*, May

2004, p.100)

- [O]ur Eternal Father defined truth and established what is right and wrong before the creation of this earth. He also fixed the consequences of obedience and disobedience to those truths. He defended our right to choose our path in life so that we would grow, develop, and be happy, but *we do not have the right to choose the consequences of our acts.* ... Please understand, no one has the privilege to choose what is right. God reserved that prerogative to Himself. Our agency does allow us to choose among alternate paths, but then we are bound to the consequence God has decreed. Later, if we don't like where the path takes us, the only out is through repentance. (“Healing Your Damaged Life,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, p. 61; emphasis original)

### **We Are Not Free to Alter Consequences**

**Ezra Taft Benson** (1899-1994) - President

We are free to choose, but we are not free to alter the consequences of those choices. (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], p.382)

### **Not Free to Escape Consequences of Exercised Agency**

**Spencer W. Kimball** (1895-1985) - President

- Of course we can choose; the free agency is ours, but we cannot escape the consequences of our choice. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [1982], p.195)
- Men have free agency, as the Lord has made clear. They may do right or wrong but they cannot escape the responsibility of answering for their errors if they are normal individuals. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [1982], p.159)

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

- Often, however, agency is misunderstood. While we are free to choose, once we have made those choices, we are tied to the consequences of those choices. (“Addiction or Freedom,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, p. 7)
- We are free to think. We are free to plan. And then we are free to do. But once an action has been taken, we are never free from its consequences. ... To clarify this concept, we can learn from the astronaut. Any time during the selection process, planning, and preparation, he is free to withdraw. But once the powerful rocket fuel is ignited, he is no longer free to choose. Now he is bound by the consequences of his choice. Even if difficulties develop and he might wish otherwise, the choice made was sealed by action. (“Reverence for Life,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 13)

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Life is meant to be a test to see if we will keep the commandments of God. (See 2 Ne. 2:5.) We are free to

obey or to ignore the spirit and the letter of the law. But the agency granted to man is a moral agency. (See D&C 101:78.) We are not free to break our covenants and escape the consequences. ("Covenants," *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, p. 84)

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

There is always at least one victim of iniquity. Yes, I am free to choose, but I can neither be immune from the consequences of my wrong choices nor avoid accountability. ("Free to Choose," in *Moving in His Majesty & Power* [2004], pp. 1-2)

### ***Consequences to Agency Reach Even to Our Desires***

**Dallin H. Oaks** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

God's law can assign consequences solely on the basis of our innermost thoughts and desires. There is no uncertainty in the administration of this law. As Ammon taught King Lamoni, God "looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning." (Alma 18:32.)

Similarly, Paul warned the Hebrews that God "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him." (Heb. 4:12-13.)

In other words, God judges us not only for our acts, but also for the desires of our hearts. He has said so again and again. This is a challenging reality, but it is not surprising. Agency and accountability are eternal principles. We exercise our free agency not only by what we do, but also by what we decide, or will, or desire. Restrictions on freedom can deprive us of the power to do, but no one can deprive us of the power to will or desire. Accountability must therefore reach and attach consequences to the desires of our hearts. ("The Desires of Our Hearts," *Ensign*, June 1986, pp. 64-65)

### ***The Secret of Solving Problems Requires Understanding the Interaction of Agency and Truth***

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The secret to solve problems in your life will be found in understanding and using the eternally beneficial interaction of your *agency* and [God's] *truth*.

The Master said: "He that keepeth [the] commandments receiveth truth and light. ...

*"Light and truth forsake that evil one, ...*

*"And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men."* (D&C 93:28, 37, 39; emphasis added.)

He also declared, "Every man may act in doctrine and principle, ... according to the *moral agency* which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable ... in the day of judgment" (D&C 101:78; italics added).

These scriptures teach how to overcome the effects

of wrong choices, whether they be lying, stealing, gambling, addiction to alcohol or drugs, immorality, inflicting abuse, or anything like it. Simply stated, one must use his *agency to obey truth*.

When others give you advice, have you ever said, "I just don't believe the way you do. Those are your standards and your principles. I have my own"? Please understand that no one can change truth. Rationalization, overpowering self-interest, all of the arguments of men, anger, or self-will cannot change truth. Satan knows that, so he tries to create an atmosphere where one unwittingly begins to feel that he can not only choose what to do, but can determine what is right to do. Satan strives to persuade us to live outside truth by rationalizing our actions as *the right of choice*.

But our Eternal Father defined truth and established what is right and wrong before the creation of this earth. He also fixed the consequences of obedience and disobedience to those truths. He defended our right to choose our path in life so that we would grow, develop, and be happy, but *we do not have the right to choose the consequences of our acts*. Those who willfully, consistently disobey His commandments will inevitably learn that truth. Joseph Smith was inspired to record, "When we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated." (D&C 130:21.)

Please understand, no one has the privilege to choose what is right. God reserved that prerogative to Himself. Our agency does allow us to choose among alternate paths, but then we are bound to the consequence God has decreed. Later, if we don't like where the path takes us, the only out is through repentance. ("Healing Your Damaged Life," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, p. 61; emphasis original)

### ***Accountability an Important Part of Moral Agency***

**D&C 101:78**

That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

You cannot exercise agency and escape accountability and responsibility for each choice. ("Personal Priesthood Responsibility," *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, p.44)

**D. Todd Christofferson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

When we use the term *moral agency*, we are appropriately emphasizing the accountability that is an essential part of the divine gift of agency. We are moral beings and agents unto ourselves, free to choose but also responsible for our choices. ("Moral Agency," *Ensign*, Jun 2009, p. 46)

**James E. Faust** (1920-2007) - First Presidency

- We have the agency to make choices, but ultimately we will be accountable for each choice we make.

(Honesty—A Moral Compass," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, p 41)

- We are all accountable for our actions. My experience as a lawyer taught me that those who follow a life of crime frequently blame their father or mother or society when they are imprisoned. Yet they willfully chose to act "contrary to the nature of God" and consequently are "in a state contrary to the nature of happiness." Some of them even claim, "The devil made me do it!" The truth in that statement is that the devil entices us to do evil. The falsehood is because we have agency. The devil can't make us do anything we choose not to do. ("Message to My Grandsons," *Ensign*, May 2007, pp. 54-56)

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

You cannot exercise agency and escape accountability and responsibility for each choice. ("Personal Priesthood Responsibility," *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, p.44)

### ***God Will Not Tamper With Man's Agency***

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

But the decision, the action, must begin with the individual. The Lord will not tamper with our agency. (*The Holy Temple* [1980], p. 236)

**David O. McKay** (1873-1970) - President

Men may choose the right or they may choose the wrong; they may walk in darkness or they may walk in the light; and, mind you, God has not left his children without the light. He has given them in the various dispensations of the world the light of the gospel wherein they could walk and not stumble, wherein they could find that peace and happiness which he desires, as a loving Father, his children should enjoy, but the Lord does not take from them their free agency. (*Gospel Ideals* [1953], p.301)

### ***We Must Exercise Faith in Order to Properly Use Agency***

**Russell M. Nelson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The proper exercise of moral agency requires faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel. (See A of F 1:4.) Because of Him, you have your agency. He must be the very foundation of your faith, and the testing of that faith is a fundamental reason for your freedom to choose.

You are free to develop and exercise faith in God and in His divine Son, faith in His word, faith in His Church, faith in His servants, and faith in His commandments. ...

Cultivation of that faith will entitle you to the companionship of the Holy Ghost, who will help you make wise decisions. (See 2 Ne. 2:27-28; D&C 14:8.)

Many may profess a measure of faith in God, but without sincere repentance, faith cannot be fully operative. This concept was made known to the Nephites:

"Many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the

truth, ... and are led to believe the holy scriptures, ... which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them." (Hel. 15:7.)

Faith, repentance, and obedience will qualify you for sublime gifts of justice and mercy, which are bestowed upon those worthy of the blessings of the Atonement. (See Alma 34:16-17.)

Yes, every test, every trial, every challenge and hardship you endure is an opportunity to further develop your faith. (See D&C 63:11; D&C 101:4.)

Faith can be fortified through prayer. Prayer is the powerful key to making decisions, not only concerning your physical body, but concerning all other important aspects of your life. Humbly seek the Lord in prayer with a sincere heart and real intent, and He will help you. (See Alma 33:23; Moro. 7:9; Moro. 10:4; D&C 9:7-9.)

Remember that faith and prayer alone are seldom sufficient. Personal effort is usually necessary to accomplish your heart's desire. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." (James 2:17; see also James 2:18, 20, 26; Alma 26:22.) ("Choices," *Ensign*, Nov.1990, p.73)

### ***We Must Give God the One Thing He Will Not Take From Us – Our Agency***

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Now, my young friends, I would like to make reference to another experience, one I think of often but one I seldom talk about. I shall not mention it in detail; I only want to refer to it. It happened many years ago when I was perhaps not quite as young as you are now, and it had to do with my decision to follow that guide.

I knew what agency was and knew how important it was to be individual and to be independent, to be free. I somehow knew there was one thing the Lord would never take from me, and that was my free agency. I would not surrender my agency to any being but to Him! I determined that I would give Him the one thing that He would never take—my agency. I decided, by myself, that from that time on I would do things His way.

That was a great trial for me, for I thought I was giving away the most precious thing I possessed. I was not wise enough in my youth to know that because I exercised my agency and decided myself, I was not *losing* it. It was *strengthened!* ("Spiritual Crocodiles," *Ensign*, May 1976, p 32)

### ***Preservation of Agency More Important Than Life***

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

The preservation of free agency is more important than the preservation of life itself. As a matter of fact, without it, there would be no existence. (Conference Report, October 1968, p.65)

### ***Free Government Necessary For Exercise of Agency***

**Dallin H. Oaks** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

“That every man may act ... according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

“Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

“And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land.” (D&C 101:78–80.)

In other words, the most desirable condition for the effective exercise of God-given moral agency is a condition of maximum freedom and responsibility. (“The Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1992, 72)

### ***Agency and Laws***

**Wilford Woodruff** (1807-1898) - President

The God of heaven, who created this earth and placed his children upon it, gave unto them a law whereby they might be exalted and saved in a kingdom of glory. For there is a law given unto all kingdoms, and all things are governed by law throughout the whole universe, Whatever law anyone keeps, he is preserved by that law, and he receives whatever reward that law guarantee unto him. It is the will of God that all his children should obey the highest law, that they may receive the highest glory that is ordained for all immortal beings. But God has given all his children an agency, to choose what law they will keep. (*The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* [1946], p.10)

### ***One of the Mission’s of the Church: To Perpetuate Agency of Man***

**John Taylor** (1808-1887) - President

Besides the preaching of the gospel, we have another mission, namely, the perpetuation of the free agency of man and the maintenance of liberty, freedom, and the rights of man. There are certain principles that belong to humanity outside of the Constitution, outside of the laws outside of all the enactments and plans of man, among which is the right to live. God gave us the right and no man: No government gave it to us, and no government has a right to take it away from us.

We have a right to liberty—that was a right that God gave to all men; and if there has been oppression, fraud, or tyranny in the earth, it has been the result of the wickedness and corruptions of men and has always been opposed to God and the principles of truth righteousness, virtue, and all principles that are calculated to elevate mankind. (*The Gospel Kingdom* [1944], p.222)

### ***Must Make Certain Judgments to Exercise Agency***

**Dallin H. Oaks** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In contrast to forbidding mortals to make final judgments, the scriptures require mortals to make what I will call “intermediate judgments.” These judgments are essential to the exercise of personal moral agency. (“ ‘Judge Not’ and Judging,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1999, p. 9)

### ***Our Use of Agency Fashions Our Future***

**Howard W. Hunter** (1907-1995) - President

When the children of Israel returned from Egypt and stood on the threshold of the promised land, they faced the clear choice of what was before them. Of the future that was about to be theirs, the Lord said to them:

“Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse;

“A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day:

“And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God.” (Deut. 11:26–28.)

That is the choice the Lord puts before us as we face our own promised lands and our own bright futures. We are given the knowledge, the help, the enticement, and the freedom to choose the path of eternal safety and salvation. The choice to do so is ours. By divine decree before this world was, the actual choice is and always has been our own.

Let us be conscious of the fact that our future is being fashioned by the decisions we make. (“The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 19)

### ***Agency Necessary to Inspiration***

**Boyd K. Packer** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

You have your agency, and inspiration does not—perhaps cannot—flow unless you ask for it, or someone asks for you. No message in scripture is repeated more often than the invitation, even the command, to pray—to ask. Prayer is so essential a part of revelation that without it the veil may remain closed to you. Learn to pray. Pray often. Pray in your mind, in your heart. Pray on your knees. (“Personal Revelation: The Gift, the Test, and the Promise,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, p. 59)

### ***We Have Agency to Believe What We Want But Not Teach What We Want***

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

It is not the belief in a false notion that is the problem, it is the teaching of it to others. In the Church we have the agency to believe whatever we want to believe about whatever we want to believe. But we are not authorized to teach it to others as truth. (“From Such Turn Away,” *Ensign*, May 1985, p. 35)

# ***The Difference Between Agency and Liberty/Freedom***

## ***There is a Difference Between Agency and Freedom/Liberty***

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

While perhaps it is seldom, if ever, contended that either political independence or economic freedom alone brings perfect liberty, it is not, however, uncommon for free agency to be considered as synonymous with freedom of the soul. And it is true that the God-given right to choose one's course of action is an indispensable prerequisite to such freedom. Without it we can scarcely enjoy any type of liberty—political, economic, or personal. It is one of our greatest heritages. ...

*Free agency, however, precious as it is, is not of itself the perfect liberty we seek, nor does it necessarily lead thereto.* As a matter of fact, through the exercise of their agency more people have come to political, economic, and personal bondage than to liberty.

The Nephites, for example, at one time, by the exercise of their agency, brought themselves to such a state of affairs that their only course led to political bondage. This they did while living under a government providing for the freest exercise of agency. "Their laws and their governments," says the record, "were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good." Therefore, "they could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction." (Hel. 5:2-3.) Under these circumstances, they chose as rulers wicked men, who would certainly destroy their political liberties, to replace righteous men who had in the past protected and preserved those liberties and would have continued to do so in the future. ...

With respect to the loss of personal liberty through the misuse of free agency, our daily lives are filled with tragic evidence. We see the alcoholic with his craving for drink, the dope fiend in his frenzy, and worse, the pervert with his irretrievable loss of manhood. Who will say that such persons enjoy liberty?

Notwithstanding the fact that through its misuse, political, economic, and personal liberty are lost, free agency will always endure because it is an eternal principle. *However, the free agency possessed by any one person is increased or diminished by the use to which he puts it. Every wrong decision one makes restricts the area in which he can thereafter exercise his agency. The further one goes in the making of wrong decisions in the exercise of free agency, the more difficult it is for him to recover the lost ground. One can, by persisting long enough, reach the point of no return. He then becomes an abject slave. By the exercise of his free agency, he has decreased the area in which he can act, almost to the vanishing point.* ...

These poor souls have placed themselves in the power of Lucifer and his followers, who, as you

remember, became Perdition. (See D&C 76:26.) Their final fate is to be cast out into outer darkness, such punishment being the natural consequence of the alternatives they elected in the exercise of their agency. The fact that they were originally endowed by their Creator with free agency does not save them from the most awful bondage, the bondage of sin.

*Just as following wrong alternatives restricts free agency and leads to slavery, so pursuing correct alternatives widens the scope of one's agency and leads to perfect liberty.* As a matter of fact, one may, by this process, obtain freedom of the soul while at the same time being denied political, economic, and personal liberty. For example, consider the Prophet Joseph Smith. Here was a man enjoying freedom of the soul while suffering the deprivation of almost every other liberty. ("The Perfect Law of Liberty," *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 43-45; emphasis added)

**Dallin H. Oaks** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

First, because *free agency* is a God-given precondition to the purpose of mortal life, no person or organization can take away our free agency in mortality.

Second, what can be taken away or reduced by the conditions of mortality is our *freedom*, the power to act upon our choices. Free agency is absolute, but in circumstances of mortality freedom is always qualified.

Freedom may be qualified or taken away (1) by physical laws, including the physical limitations with which we are born, (2) by our own actions, and (3) by the actions of others, including governments.

Lehi taught his son Jacob that "men are free [have freedom] according to the flesh" (2 Nephi 2:27). For example, in the flesh we are subject to the physical law of gravity. If I should hang from the catwalk in the Marriott Center and release my grip, I would not be free to will myself into a soft landing. And I cannot choose to run through a brick wall.

A loss of freedom reduces the extent to which we can act upon our choices, but it does not deprive us of our God-given free agency. ...

Interferences with our freedom do not deprive us of our free agency. When Pharaoh put Joseph in prison, he restricted Joseph's freedom, but he did not take away his free agency. When Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple, he interfered with their freedom to engage in a particular activity at a particular time in a particular place, but he did not take away their free agency. ("Free Agency and Freedom," in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* [Eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Religious Studies Center, BYU, Provo Utah, 1989] pp. 9-11.)

## ***The Exercise of Agency Brings Greater or Lesser Freedom***

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

- Every choice one makes either expands or contracts the area in which he can make and implement future decisions. When one makes a choice, he irrevocably binds himself to accept the consequences of that choice. (Conference Report, October 1968, p.65)
- [T]he free agency possessed by any one person is increased or diminished by the use to which he puts it. Every wrong decision one makes restricts the area in which he can thereafter exercise his agency. The further one goes in the making of wrong decisions in the exercise of free agency, the more difficult it is for him to recover the lost ground. One can, by persisting long enough, reach the point of no return. He then becomes an abject slave. By the exercise of his free agency, he has decreased the area in which he can act, almost to the vanishing point. . . . Just as following wrong alternatives restricts free agency and leads to slavery, so pursuing correct alternatives widens the scope of one's agency and leads to perfect liberty. As a matter of fact, one may, by this process, obtain freedom of the soul while at the same time being denied political, economic, and personal liberty. ("The Perfect Law of Liberty," *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, p. 45)

**Spencer W. Kimball** (1895-1985) - President

Sin becomes a habit. Sin is intensely habit-forming and sometimes moves men to the tragic point of no return. Without repentance there can be no forgiveness, and without forgiveness all the blessings of eternity hang in jeopardy. As the transgressor moves deeper and deeper in his sin, and the error is entrenched more deeply and the will to change is weakened, it becomes increasingly nearer hopeless and he skids down and down until either he does not want to climb back up or he has lost the power to do so. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [1982], p.83)

**Neal A. Maxwell** (1926-2004) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Of course, as individuals, we are free to choose! But wrong choices will make us less free. Furthermore, erosive error gradually makes one less and less of an individual. God and His prophets would spare us that shrinkage. ("Answer Me," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, p. 32)

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Why has your moral agency been given to you? Only to live a pleasurable life and to make choices to do the things you want to do? Or is there a more fundamental reason—to be able to make the choices that will lead you to fully implement your purpose for being here on earth and to establish priorities in your life that will assure the development and happiness the Lord wants you to receive.

Recently I met an intelligent young man with great potential. He was undecided about a mission. He has decided not to attend a university now. In his free time he only does what he likes to do. He doesn't work because he doesn't have to, and it would take time from pleasure. He passed seminary classes without much thought of

personally applying the knowledge gained. I noted: "You are making choices today that appear to give you what you want: an easy life, abundant enjoyment, and not much sacrifice. You can do that for a while, yet every decision you make narrows your future. You are eliminating possibilities and options. There will come a time, and it won't be too distant, where you are going to spend the rest of your life doing things you don't want to do, in places you don't want to be, because you have not prepared yourself. You are not taking advantage of your opportunities." ("First Things First," *Ensign*, May 2001, p. 6)

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In these latter days, as in the times of old, we must avoid being acted upon by acting for ourselves to avoid evil. The Holy Ghost will prompt us. Joseph was told to flee from Potiphar's wife. Abraham obeyed the commandment to flee out of the land of Ur. Lehi was instructed to flee Jerusalem before it was destroyed. And to protect the Savior's life, Mary and Joseph were prompted to flee into Egypt.

The promptings that come to us to flee evil reflect our Heavenly Father's understanding of our particular strengths and weaknesses and His awareness of the unforeseen circumstances of our lives. When these promptings come, they will not generally stop us in our tracks, for the Spirit of God does not speak with a voice of thunder. The voice will be as soft as a whisper, coming as a thought to our minds or a feeling in our hearts. By heeding its gentle promptings, we will be protected from the destructive consequences of sin.

But if we ignore those promptings, the light of the Spirit will fade. Our agency will be limited or lost, and we will lose the confidence and ability to act. We will be "walking in [spiritual] darkness at noon-day." [D&C 95:6] Then how easy it is to wander into strange paths and become lost! How quickly we are bound in the chains of sin spoken of by Lehi to his rebellious sons [see 2 Ne. 1:13]. For example, if we make choices that put us deeply in debt, we will lose our agency to meet our wants and needs or to save for that inevitable rainy day. If we choose to break the law, we may be put in prison, where our agency is so limited that we cannot choose where we go, who we see, or what we do. Spirit prison is very much like that. Therefore, to retain our agency we must daily walk in the light of our Lord and Savior and follow the path of obedience. It is the only path that leads to our Father in Heaven. ("To Act for Ourselves: The Gift and Blessings of Agency," *Ensign*, May 2006, 4–8)

## ***Submission to God Brings Greater Freedom and Agency***

**D. Todd Chirstofferson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

To the secular world it seems a paradox that greater submission to God yields greater freedom. The world looks at things through Korihor's lens, considering obedience to God's laws and ordinances to be "bondage" (Alma 30:24, 27). So how do obedience and truth make us free? We can easily think of some practical ways in

which truth gives us the ability to do things we otherwise could not do or to avoid disasters we might otherwise suffer.

A young British girl learned in school about the characteristics of water along a shoreline that signal the approach of a tsunami. Two weeks later, on vacation with her family in Thailand, she observed those phenomena and insistently warned her parents and the people around her. They escaped to higher ground just in time when the December 26, 2004, tsunami hit south Asia. More than a hundred people owe their lives to that girl's knowledge of certain truths of the natural world. [See "Girl Honored for Saving Lives with Pre-Tsunami Warning," *Deseret Morning News*, Dec. 27, 2005, A2.]

But the Lord's statement that the truth will make us free has broader significance. "Truth," He tells us, "is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). Possession of this knowledge of things past, present, and future is a critical element of God's glory: "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93:36). Does anyone doubt that, as a consequence of possessing all light and truth, God possesses ultimate freedom to be and to do?

Likewise, as our understanding of gospel doctrine and principles grows, our agency expands. First, we have more choices and can achieve more and receive greater blessings because we have more laws that we can obey. Think of a ladder—each new law or commandment we learn is like one more rung on the ladder that enables us to climb higher. Second, with added understanding we can make more intelligent choices because we see more clearly not only the alternatives but also their potential outcomes. As Professor Daniel H. Ludlow once expressed it, "The extent of our individual ... agency ... is in direct proportion to the number and kind of laws we know and keep." [Daniel H. Ludlow, "Moral Free Agency," in *BYU Speeches of the Year 1974* (1975), 182]

The Lord promises that if, in the exercise of our agency, we follow His example and always do those things that please Him and the Father, then we will come to know and understand all things:

"And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things" (D&C 88:67).

"That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24).

"He that keepeth [God's] commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things" (D&C 93:28).

"And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.

"And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father" (D&C 84:46–47).

These are magnificent promises: to be filled with light and truth, to comprehend all things, to be glorified in truth and know all things, and to come even unto the Father. I have no doubt regarding the literal fulfillment of these promises in those who exercise their agency to choose obedience, but along with you, I recognize that they are not realized in a day. Much obedience and experience are required before we enjoy a fulness. We should, however, be encouraged by what John said of the Savior:

"And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace;

"And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness" (D&C 93:12–13). ("Moral Agency," *Ensign*, Jun 2009, p. 46)



## Agency Necessary For Individual Growth

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

Latter-day Saints not only believe that freedom to make one's own choices is an inalienable divine right; they also know that the exercise of it is essential to man's growth and development. Deprived of it, men would be but puppets in the hands of fate. (Conference Report, October 1968, p.65)

**James E. Faust** (1920-2007) - First Presidency

- Our agency, given us through the plan of our Father, is the great alternative to Satan's plan of force. With this sublime gift, we can grow, improve, progress, and seek perfection. Without agency, none of us could grow and develop by learning from our mistakes and errors and those of others. ("The Forces That Will Save Us," *Ensign*, Jan 2007, 4-9)
- Without agency, none of us could grow and develop by learning from our mistakes and errors and those of others. ("The Great Imitator", *Ensign*, November 1987, p.33)

**Joseph B. Wirthlin** (1917-2008) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Father's plan gave us our agency to choose right or wrong, good or evil so we can learn, develop, and progress. ("Deep Roots," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, p. 75)

**Dean L. Larsen** - of the Seventy

When we understand what is right and what is wrong, we are in a position to exercise our freedom in making choices. In so doing, we must stand accountable for our decisions, and we cannot escape the inevitable consequences of these choices. Such freedom to exercise moral agency is essential in an environment where people have the highest prospects for progress and development.

By our very endowment as children of an Eternal Father, we have had implanted within our souls the urgency to be free. It is natural for us to want to be accountable for our own fates, because there is a whispering within us confirming that this accountability is absolutely essential to the attainment of our eternal destiny.

The existence of laws, regulations, and procedures has never been sufficient to compel men to obedience. Productive obedience comes through the exercise of free will. ...

... Today we are being encouraged to accept greater responsibility for the allocation of our time, for our spiritual development through personal and family study of the gospel, and for giving loving Christian service. We must be willing to respond to this new challenge. Our willingness to accept this added accountability will exert an influence that will reach far beyond our Sunday worship service and religious life.

Unless we retain a vibrant desire to be free, and unless we understand and practice the principles that give life to essential freedoms, we have little reason to hope they will endure. If we allow ourselves to accept dependency and regulation and to cease valuing

independence and self-accountability, then we are vulnerable to the forces that destroy freedom. If righteousness is judged primarily by the degree to which one responds to programmed activity, then a condition develops within which opportunities for progress decline. The resulting tragedy affects the mortal potential of man and has a profound effect on his eternal possibilities as well.

Programmed behavior cannot produce the level of spiritual development required to qualify one for eternal life. A necessary range of freedom and self-determination is essential to one's spiritual development. With an understanding of correct principles and an intrinsic desire to apply them, one must be motivated within himself to do many good things of his own free will; for, as the revelation says, the power is in him wherein he is an agent unto himself (see D&C 58:27-28).

In preserving our freedom for self-determination, we cannot ignore the need for carefully ordered structure and procedure within government or any other organization. A careful balance must be maintained between that which is ordered for the welfare of the group and that which is reserved for the conscience and the incentive of the individual.

This necessary balance of freedom and restraint is essential to right relationships within families and communities, and it cannot be ignored in our assignments within the Church.

I have pondered the injunctions that have come to us in recent months from leaders of the Church to simplify and reduce the number of programmed activities prescribed for the members. There seems to be a sensitivity to the need for maintaining this essential balance. We have heard increased emphasis given to the need for individual initiative and accountability within families. In his concluding remarks at the April 1979 general conference, President Kimball said:

"The basic decisions needed for us to move forward, as a people, must be made by the individual members of the Church. The major strides which must be made by the Church will follow upon the major strides to be made by us as individuals. ...

"... Our individual spiritual growth is the key to major numerical growth in the kingdom" (*Ensign*, May 1979, p. 82).

I rejoice in the spirit and intent of this instruction from a living prophet. I see in it the purposeful effort to preserve our individual accountability in the context of our Church membership and religious life.

When members of the Church exercise self-determination in their application of gospel principles they need not relax in their compliance with these principles. In fact, optimum progress can only occur when conditions are ideal for it, and these conditions must include the necessary degree of freedom and self-accountability. Anything less will guarantee stunted spiritual growth.

We must understand that as freedom for unrestricted development is enhanced, the possibilities for failure are also increased. The risk factor is great. The ideal cannot be achieved otherwise. Celestial attainment can be reached in no other environment. ("Self-Accountability and Human Progress," *Ensign*, May 1980, pp. 76-78)

## ***No Lasting Improvement Without Agency***

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

No enduring improvement can occur without righteous exercise of agency. Do not attempt to override agency. The Lord himself would not do that. Forced obedience yields no blessings (see D&C 58:26–33). ("To Help a Loved One in Need," *Ensign*, May 1988, p. 60)

## ***Agency and the Atonement of Jesus Christ***

### ***The Central Role of Jesus Christ in Man's Exercise of Moral Agency***

**Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910-2008) - President

When the great War in Heaven was fought, Lucifer, the son of the morning, came forth with a plan that was rejected. The Father of us all, with love for us, His children, offered a better plan under which we would have freedom to choose the course of our lives. *His Firstborn Son, our Elder Brother, was the key to that plan.* Man would have his agency, and with that agency would go accountability. Man would walk the ways of the world and sin and stumble. But the Son of God would take upon Himself flesh and offer Himself a sacrifice to atone for the sins of all men. Through unspeakable suffering He would become the great Redeemer, the Savior of all mankind. ("We Look to Christ," *Ensign*, May 2002, p.90; emphasis)

**D. Todd Chirstofferson** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We have reviewed the elements of moral agency and its divine origins, but we need to always remember that agency would have no meaning without the vital contribution of Jesus Christ. His central role began with His support of the Father's plan and His willingness to become the essential Savior under that plan. The plan required a setting for its implementation, and Jesus was instrumental in the creation of this planet for that purpose. Most important, while the Fall of Adam was a critical element of the plan of salvation, the Fall would also have frustrated the plan if certain of its consequences were not mitigated by the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was necessary in God's plan for our future happiness and glory that we become morally free and responsible. For that to happen, we needed an experience apart from Him where our choices would determine our destiny. The Fall of Adam provided the

spiritual death needed to separate us from God and place us in this mortal condition, as well as the physical death needed to provide an end to the mortal experience. As Alma put it:

"And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will" (Alma 42:7).

Death had to be permitted, but it also had to be overcome or we could not return to the presence of God. Jacob, the brother of Nephi, explained:

"For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection. ...

"... For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

"And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself. ...

"O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit" (2 Nephi 9:6, 8–10).

Thus, if our separation from God and our physical death were permanent, moral agency would mean nothing. *Yes, we would be free to make choices, but what would be the point? The end result would always be the same no matter what our actions: death with no hope of resurrection and no hope of heaven. As good or as bad as we might choose to be, we would all end up "angels to a devil."*

With resurrection through Jesus Christ, the Fall can achieve its essential purpose without becoming a

permanent death sentence. "Hell must deliver up its captive spirits," "the grave must deliver up its captive bodies," and "the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous" so that "the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect" (2 Nephi 9:12, 13).

*But there was one more thing that Christ needed to accomplish so that moral agency could have a positive potential. Just as death would doom us and render our agency meaningless but for the redemption of Christ, even so, without His grace, our sins and bad choices would leave us forever lost. There would be no way of fully recovering from our mistakes, and being unclean, we could never live again in the presence of the "Man of Holiness" (Moses 6:57; see also 3 Nephi 27:19).*

We cannot look to the law to save us when we have broken the law (see 2 Nephi 2:5). *We need a Savior, a Mediator who can overcome the effects of our sins and errors so that they are not necessarily fatal.* It is because of the Atonement of Christ that we can recover from bad choices and be justified under the law as if we had not sinned.

"Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

"Behold he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Nephi 2:6–7; see also Alma 42:22–24). (From "Moral Agency," *Ensign*, Jun 2009, pp. 46–53)

**Howard W. Hunter** (1907-1995) - President

Given the freedom to choose, we may, in fact, make wrong choices, bad choices, hurtful choices. And sometimes we do just that, but that is where the mission and mercy of Jesus Christ comes into full force and glory. He has taken upon himself the burden of all the world's risk. He has provided a mediating atonement for the wrong choices we make. He is our advocate with the Father and has paid, in advance, for the faults and foolishness we often see in the exercise of our freedom. We must accept his gift, repent of those mistakes, and follow his commandments in order to take full advantage of this redemption. The offer is always there; the way is always open. We can always, even in our darkest hour and most disastrous errors, look to the Son of God and live. ("The Golden Thread of Choice," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 19)

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I do not fully understand how it is done, but this divine current does not take away your moral agency. You can make the decisions you choose to make. Should your choices be wrong, there is a path back—repentance. When its conditions are fully met, the Atonement of the Savior provides a release from the demands of justice for the errors made. He said, "I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven" (D&C 1:31–32). ("He Lives," *Ensign*, Nov.

1999, p. 87)

**Marion G. Romney** (1897-1988) - First Presidency

By yielding to the temptation of Satan we become unclean. To the extent to which we yield we become carnal, sensual, and devilish. As a consequence, we are banished from the presence of God. Without being cleansed from the stain of our transgressions we cannot be readmitted into the presence of God because "no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom." (3 Ne. 27:19.) Men, in the exercise of their own free agency, having disqualified themselves for a place in the kingdom of God, are banished therefrom and cannot by their own unaided efforts return. If they are ever to return, atonement for their sins must be made by someone not himself banished: Jesus was that one. ("Christ's Atonement: The Gift Supreme," *Ensign*, Dec. 1973, p.3)

### ***Without Atonement Agency Would Be Fatal***

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Lucifer in clever ways manipulates our choices, deceiving us about sin and consequences. He, and his angels with him, tempt us to be unworthy, even wicked. But he cannot, in all eternity he cannot, with all his power he cannot completely destroy us; not without our own consent. Had agency come to man without the Atonement, it would have been a fatal gift. ("Atonement, Agency, Accountability," *Ensign*, May 1988, p. 71)

### ***Atonement is Key to Acting for Ourselves Instead of Being Acted Upon***

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Now, none of us are on the narrow path *all* of the time. All of us make mistakes. That is why Lehi, who understood the Savior's role in preserving and reclaiming our agency, taught Jacob—and us: "The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon." [2 Ne. 2:26] That is the key—"to act for themselves and not to be acted upon." ("To Act for Ourselves: The Gift and Blessings of Agency," *Ensign*, May 2006, 4–8)

### ***Atonement As a Means of Overcoming Mis-Used Agency***

***Though the following is in relation to abuse, the principles taught are universal to any situation of mis-used agency.***

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

**Agency** Moral agency is a vital element in our Father in Heaven's plan of happiness. He understood that some of His spirit children would use that agency improperly,

causing serious problems to others. Some would even violate sacred trust, such as a father or family member abusing an innocent child. Since our Heavenly Father is completely just, there has to be a way of overcoming the tragic consequences of such damaging use of agency for both the victim and the perpetrator. That secure healing comes through the power of the Atonement of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to rectify that which is unjust. Faith in Jesus Christ and in His power to heal provides the abused with the means to overcome the terrible consequences of another's unrighteous acts. When combined with complete repentance, the Atonement also affords the perpetrator a way to avoid the severe punishment the Lord has decreed for such acts.

***To the Victim*** I testify that I know victims of serious abuse who have successfully made the difficult journey to full healing through the power of the Atonement. After her own concerns were resolved by her faith in the healing power of the Atonement, one young woman who had been severely abused by her father requested another interview with me. She returned with an older couple. I could sense that she loved the two very deeply. Her face radiated happiness. She began, "Elder Scott, this is my father. I love him. He's concerned about some things that happened in my early childhood. They are no longer a problem for me. Could you help him?" What a powerful confirmation of the Savior's capacity to heal! She no longer suffered from the consequences of abuse, because she had adequate understanding of His Atonement, sufficient faith, and was obedient to His law. As you conscientiously study the Atonement and exercise your faith that Jesus Christ has the power to heal, you can receive the same blessed relief. During your journey of recovery, accept His invitation to let Him share your burden until you have sufficient time and strength to be healed.

To find relief from the consequences of abuse, it is helpful to understand their source. Satan is the author of all of the destructive outcomes of abuse. He has extraordinary capacity to lead an individual into blind alleys where the solution to extremely challenging problems cannot be found. His strategy is to separate the suffering soul from the healing attainable from a compassionate Heavenly Father and a loving Redeemer.

If you have been abused, Satan will strive to convince you that there is no solution. Yet he knows perfectly well that there is. Satan recognizes that healing comes through the unwavering love of Heavenly Father for each of His children. He also understands that the power of healing is inherent in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Therefore, his strategy is to do all possible to separate you from your Father and His Son. Do not let Satan convince you that you are beyond help.

Satan uses your abuse to undermine your self-confidence, destroy trust in authority, create fear, and generate feelings of despair. Abuse can damage your ability to form healthy human relationships. You must have faith that all of these negative consequences can be resolved; otherwise they will keep you from full recovery. While these outcomes have powerful influence in your

life, they do not define the real you.

Satan will strive to alienate you from your Father in Heaven with the thought that if He loved you He would have prevented the tragedy. Do not be kept from the very source of true healing by the craftiness of the prince of evil and his wicked lies. Recognize that if you have feelings that you are not loved by your Father in Heaven, you are being manipulated by Satan. Even when it may seem very difficult to pray, kneel and ask Father in Heaven to give you the capacity to trust Him and to feel His love for you. Ask to come to know that His Son can heal you through His merciful Atonement.

It was Satan's proposal that Father's children be forced to obey, that there be no moral agency and therefore no personal growth. To preserve moral agency, the Lord does not restrain individuals from improper use of that agency. However, He will punish them for such acts unless there is full repentance. Through the Holy Ghost, He sends warning promptings to the abuser, but often that individual's degrading appetite is so powerful that it blocks out that spiritual guidance. That is why our Father provided a way to heal the consequences of acts that, through force, misuse of authority, or fear of another, temporarily take away the agency of the abused.

The beginning of healing requires childlike faith in the unalterable fact that Father in Heaven loves you and has supplied a way to heal. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, laid down His life to provide that healing. But there is no magic solution, no simple balm to provide healing, nor is there an easy path to the complete remedy. The cure requires profound faith in Jesus Christ and in His infinite capacity to heal. It is rooted in an understanding of doctrine and a resolute determination to follow it.

Healing may begin with a thoughtful bishop or stake president or a wise professional counselor. If you had a broken leg, you wouldn't decide to fix it yourself. Serious abuse can also benefit from professional help. There are many ways to begin healing, but remember that a full cure comes through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master and Redeemer. Have faith that with effort His perfect, eternal, infinite Atonement can heal your suffering from the consequences of abuse.

As impossible as it may seem to you now, in time the healing you can receive from the Savior will allow you to truly forgive the abuser and even have feelings of sorrow for him or her. When you can forgive the offense, you will be relieved of the pain and heartache that Satan wants in your life by encouraging you to hate the abuser. As a result, you will enjoy greater peace. While an important part of healing, if the thought of forgiveness causes you yet more pain, set that step aside until you have more experience with the Savior's healing power in your own life.

If you are currently being abused or have been in the past, find the courage to seek help. You may have been severely threatened or caused to fear so that you would not reveal the abuse. Have the courage to act now. Seek the support of someone you can trust. Your bishop or stake president can give you valuable counsel and help you with the civil authorities. Explain how you have been

abused and identify who has done it. Ask for protection. Your action may help others avoid becoming innocent victims, with the consequent suffering. Get help now. Do not fear-for fear is a tool Satan will use to keep you suffering. The Lord will help you, but you must reach out for that help.

Do not be discouraged if initially a bishop hesitates when you identify an abuser. Remember that predators are skillful at cultivating a public appearance of piety to mask their despicable acts. Pray to be guided in your efforts to receive help. That support will come. Rest assured that the Perfect Judge, Jesus the Christ, with a perfect knowledge of the details, will hold all abusers accountable for every unrighteous act. In time He will fully apply the required demands of justice unless there is complete repentance. Your preoccupation with a need for justice only slows your healing and allows the perpetrator to continue his abusive control. Therefore you should leave punishment for the diabolic acts of abuse to civil and Church authorities. ("To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 2008, 40-43.)

## ***Things That Aid the Proper Use of Agency***

### ***Teaching Correct Principles Necessary to Correct Use of Agency***

**John Taylor** (1808-1887) - President

What is it that will enable one man to govern his fellows aright? It is just as Joseph Smith said to a certain man who asked him, "How do you govern such a vast people as this?" "Oh," says Joseph, "it is very easy." "Why," says the man "but we find it very difficult." "But," said Joseph, "it is very easy, for I teach the people correct principles, and they govern themselves." (*The Gospel Kingdom* [1987], p.323)

**Erastus Snow** (1818-1888) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

This is the explanation the Prophet Joseph Smith gave to a certain lawyer in his time who came to see him and his people and expressed astonishment and surprise at the ease with which he controlled the people, and said it was something that was not to be found among the learned men of the world. Said he: "We cannot do it. What is the secret of your success?" "Why," said the Prophet, "I do not govern the people. I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." (*Journal of Discourses*, 24:158-159)

**Orson F. Whitney** (1855-1931) - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I am convinced that of all governments the greatest and the best is that government in which the people govern themselves. The Prophet Joseph Smith was asked by a stranger visitor at Nauvoo, "How do you govern these people, these Americans, these Britons, these Scandinavians, these men from all parts of the world, all nationalities, speaking different languages,

having different customs and traditions,—how do you govern them, that they live together in peace, with a common purpose, and in the spirit of unity?" The Prophet sagely answered--and he never said a wiser thing--"I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves." That government in which the people can and do govern themselves by obedience to correct principles, is manifestly superior to any government that depends upon one man's will. The word of God declares, "It is a slothful servant who waits to be commanded in all things." Even in a government where God might command and direct in everything, the condition would be inferior to what it would be in a community of enlightened freemen, enjoying the fullness of the Gospel, filled with the knowledge of the heavens, doing good of their own accord, governing themselves, loving their neighbors and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God. (Conference Report, April 1909, p.76)

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Several weeks ago I had in my office a four-star general and his wife; they were very impressive people. They admire the Church because of the conduct of our youth. The general's wife mentioned her children, of whom she is justly proud. But she expressed a deep concern. "Tell me," she said, "how you are able to control your youth and build such character as we have seen in your young men?"

I was interested in her use of the word 'control'. The answer, I told them, centered in the doctrines of the gospel. They were interested; so I spoke briefly of the doctrine of agency. I said we develop control by teaching freedom. Perhaps at first they thought we start at the wrong end of the subject. A four-star general is nothing if

not a disciplinarian. But when one understands the gospel, it becomes very clear that the best control is self-control.

It may seem unusual at first to foster self-control by centering on freedom of choice, but it is a very sound doctrinal approach.

While either subject may be taught separately, and though they may appear at first to be opposites, they are in fact parts of the same subject.

Some who do not understand the doctrinal part do not readily see the relationship between obedience and agency. And they miss one vital connection and see obedience only as restraint. They then resist the very thing that will give them true freedom. There is no true freedom without responsibility, and there is no enduring freedom without a knowledge of the truth. The Lord said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32.)

The general quickly understood a truth that is missed even by some in the Church. Latter-day Saints are not obedient because they are compelled to be obedient. They are obedient because they know certain spiritual truths and have decided, as an expression of their own individual agency, to obey the commandments of God.

We are the sons and daughters of God, willing followers, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and "under this head are [we] made free." (Mosiah 5:8.)

Those who talk of blind obedience may appear to know many things, but they do not understand the doctrines of the gospel. There is an obedience that comes from a knowledge of the truth that transcends any external form of control. We are not obedient because we are blind, we are obedient because we can see. The best control, I repeat, is self-control.

The general knew then why we teach our children the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ and where they get the resolute determination to protect individual freedom. ("Agency and Control," *Ensign*, May 1983, p.66)

## ***Following the Light of Christ Helps Us To Remain Free to Exercise Agency Properly***

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The promptings that come to us to flee evil reflect our Heavenly Father's understanding of our particular strengths and weaknesses and His awareness of the unforeseen circumstances of our lives. When these promptings come, they will not generally stop us in our tracks, for the Spirit of God does not speak with a voice of thunder. The voice will be as soft as a whisper, coming as a thought to our minds or a feeling in our hearts. By heeding its gentle promptings, we will be protected from the destructive consequences of sin. ...

To all who desire to enjoy the supernal blessings of agency, I testify that agency is strengthened by our faith and obedience. Agency leads us to act: to seek that we may find, to ask that we may receive guidance from the Spirit, to knock on that door that leads to spiritual light

and ultimately salvation. I bear special witness that our Savior Jesus Christ is the source of that light, even the Light and Life of the World. As we use our agency to follow Him, His light will grow within us brighter and brighter until that perfect day [D&C 50:24] when we are welcomed into the presence of our Father in Heaven for all eternity. ("To Act for Ourselves: The Gift and Blessings of Agency," *Ensign*, May 2006, 4-8)

## ***Word of Wisdom Helps Us Keep Our Agency***

**Boyd K. Packer** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Narcotic addiction serves the design of the prince of darkness, for it disrupts the channel to the holy spirit of truth. At present, the adversary has an unfair advantage. Addiction has the capacity to disconnect the human will and nullify moral agency. It can rob one of the power to decide. Agency is too fundamental a doctrine to be left in such jeopardy. ("Revelation in a Changing World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p.14)

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Warning lights of a personal nature are activated for many reasons. For example, the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or pornography would turn on warning lights, because when we choose to use these substances, we become slaves and our moral agency is limited. We must be prepared with preconditioned responses to reject these things when they are offered to us, or we will jeopardize our right to have the Spirit to guide us and direct us and our ability to return to our Heavenly Father with honor. ("Return with Honor," *Ensign*, June 1999, p. 10)

## ***Resources to Guide Us in the Wise Use of Agency***

**Spencer J. Condie** - of the Seventy

Our loving Father in Heaven has given us many indispensable resources and means to guide us in the wise exercise of our agency.

**The Gift of the Holy Ghost.** In D&C 33:16, the Lord revealed that "the power of [his] Spirit quickeneth all things." I believe that "all things" means all things. He will not usurp or override our moral agency, but when given an invitation, his Spirit will augment and accelerate our agency. When the Spirit, the gift of the Holy Ghost, is given a chance to influence us, decisions become easier and despair dissipates as solutions to our challenges become clearly evident.

The Book of Mormon prophets make it very clear that the Holy Ghost is willing to exert a very powerful influence in our lives when we are responsive to his promptings. Nephi, Mormon, and Ether explained that the Spirit strives with us to guide our lives on righteous paths (see 2 Ne. 26:11; Morm. 5:16; Ether 2:15). Moroni proclaimed that the Spirit persuades us to do good (see Ether 4:11-12). Amulek taught that the Holy Ghost contends with us to do that which is right (see Alma 34:38), and

King Benjamin explained that the Holy Ghost entices us to be righteous (see Mosiah 3:19).

The promptings of the Spirit were never intended to supplant our moral agency, but the Spirit will underscore preferable options in our behavior and clarify a certain course of action in our hearts and minds.

**The Savior's Example.** Jesus Christ set the perfect example for us. Without boasting, he acknowledged that "the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). He has extended to each of us the invitation to "learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23).

**Scripture.** Another indispensable resource that assists us in using our agency wisely is holy scripture. The Apostle Paul explained, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Nephi gave the additional prophetic promise that when we "feast upon the words of Christ, ... the words of Christ will tell [us] all things what [we] should do" (2 Ne. 32:3). In short, the scriptures are our life script, our instruction manual in mortality, if you will. But of course, if the universal teachings in holy writ are to benefit us, we must follow Nephi's additional counsel to "liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Ne. 19:23).

**Testimony.** We learn in the book of Revelation that during the war in heaven, those who overcame Satan and his followers did so "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (see Rev. 12:7–11). A testimony was an invaluable weapon in the war in heaven, and it is an indispensable weapon here on earth.

A testimony that is continually being nourished and is continually growing will help us at every crossroad when important decisions are made. Indeed, a testimony supplants the need to make certain decisions under fire, because we already know well in advance the course of action we will take.

**Power of Prayer.** The Apostle James eloquently observed that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Alma the Elder would certainly be an ardent advocate of this statement by James, for when the angel appeared to Alma's wayward son, he explained to Alma the Younger that "the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee" (Mosiah 27:14).

All prayers are, indeed, answered, and it is well to remember that sometimes the answer is not in the affirmative. As the Son of God prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that the bitter cup might pass, an affirmative reply would have thwarted the entire plan of salvation. But the Only Begotten Son demonstrated his meekness and humility and obedience as he added: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). The divine answer was no, but "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43). This is certainly a prototype and a promise for each of us as we too are required to drink from bitter cups in our lives. We

will not be left comfortless.

**Fasting.** There are great blessings promised to those who fast. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord posed an important question, followed by profound promises: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" (Isa. 58:6.)

When we subordinate our physical needs and desires to the dictates of the Spirit, we tap into a spiritual strength beyond our own. If we are in bondage to bad habits or unkind thoughts, we can break the bands of weakness or wickedness through fasting. Our hearts will be filled with love and forgiveness, and we can get on with our lives after having broken "every yoke."

**Ordinances.** Ordinances are outward manifestations of inner covenants, commitments, and promises. Ordinances are not optional on the pathway to perfection. These include baptism and confirmation (see John 3:5; 2 Ne. 31:5–12); ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood, for all males (see D&C 84:33–42); the temple endowment and the sealing ordinance (see D&C 132:15–24).

Participation in ordinances helps us use our agency wisely and well, and a constant commitment to covenants spares us the emotional energy required to decide and re-decide what we are going to do each time we face temptation. Each week, through the ordinance of the sacrament, we solemnly covenant to "always remember him" (Moro. 4:3; Moro. 5:2; emphasis added).

**Living Prophets.** A loving Heavenly Father has provided us with living prophets to receive and to help us understand his mind and will. In speaking of his servants, the Savior said: "And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (D&C 68:4). Elsewhere he declared that "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

We sustain the fifteen men serving today in the First Presidency and in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. They are watchmen on the tower who point out the course of action we should take and who see beyond the bend in the road and beyond the horizon.

**Patriarchal Blessings.** President Ezra Taft Benson encouraged every youth to receive a patriarchal blessing and admonished, "Study it carefully and regard it as personal scripture for you—for that is what it is. A patriarchal blessing is the inspired and prophetic statement of your life's mission, together with blessings, cautions, and admonitions as the patriarch may be prompted to give" (*Ensign*, May 1986, p. 43). [From "Agency: The Gift of Choices," *Ensign*, Sept. 1995, pp. 21-22]

## Enemies of Agency

**Spencer J. Condie** - of the Seventy

Satan would have us waste our time in activities that impede our progress on the pathway to perfection. Following are some of the many enemies of agency.

**Addiction.** Many people lead empty lives completely devoid of purpose, meaning, and direction. Empty lives must be filled with something, anything, so some people fill their empty lives with endless hours of television, while others become addicted to pornography, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Still others develop an unhealthy capacity for overeating. And ever so surely these individuals trade their moral agency for their addiction until they are no longer able to exercise their agency. All of their decisions are now on automatic pilot, with seemingly little hope of changing the direction of their lives. There is little advantage to living in a free country if we are in bondage to personal habits.

**Debt.** The accumulation of financial debt is another dangerous incursion upon our moral agency. A poignant description of the enslaving power of debt was provided by the late President J. Reuben Clark: "Interest never sleeps nor sickens nor dies; it never goes to the hospital; it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation ... it has no love, no sympathy; it is as hard and soulless as a granite cliff. Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot shun it or slip away from it; you cannot dismiss it; it yields neither to entreaties, demands, or orders; and whenever you get in its way or cross its course or fail to meet its demands, it crushes you" (in Conference Report, 6 April 1938, p. 103).

There are, of course, justifiable occasions when one incurs debt, such as for the purchase of a house or a major business investment. But even then, great wisdom should be used.

**Discouragement.** Discouragement and its fellow travelers of depression, despair, and hopelessness are much like the proverbial rocking chair: they keep us busily occupied, but they do not take us anywhere.

I have found through personal experience that whenever I am discouraged and start thinking only of myself and how hard hit I have been, when I kneel down and count my blessings, all of a sudden my personal problems do not seem large at all.

President Spencer W. Kimball provided us with excellent counsel in overcoming discouragement and finding meaning to our lives: "When we concern ourselves more with others, there is less time to be concerned with ourselves. In the midst of the miracle of serving, there is the promise of Jesus, that by losing ourselves, we find ourselves (see Matt. 10:39). ... The more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our souls. ... Indeed, it is easier to 'find' ourselves because there is so much more of us to find!" (*Ensign*, Dec. 1974, p. 2.)

**Cultural Traditions.** A recurrent theme throughout

the Book of Mormon is the constraining influence of the false "tradition of their fathers" passed down from Laman and Lemuel through subsequent generations (see Mosiah 10:11–12; Alma 37:9; Alma 60:32; Hel. 5:51; Hel. 15:4; Hel. 16:18–20). Tradition can be a double-edged sword. When based upon the perpetuation of righteous principles, tradition can become a marvelous support system in helping us employ our moral agency wisely. On the other hand, many traditions find their origins in the false pride and foibles of mankind. In modern-day revelation, the Lord has taught: "Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning. ... [But] that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers" (D&C 93:38–39; emphasis added).

Cultural customs and traditions often provide a useful map for the members of a given society, but if we are to become members of a celestial culture, we must overcome the natural man reflected in earthly cultures (see Mosiah 3:19; D&C 88:22). Indeed, some cultural enticements—such as following the crowd in matters of fashion and acceptance of worldly standards—are spiritually, and sometimes even physically, destructive. John the Revelator admonished us to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:15; emphasis added; see James 4:4). ("Agency: The Gift of Choices," *Ensign*, Sept. 1995, pp. 20-21)

### Choosing To Be Offended Diminishes Our Moral Agency

**David A. Bednar** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

When we believe or say we have been offended, we usually mean we feel insulted, mistreated, snubbed, or disrespected. And certainly clumsy, embarrassing, unprincipled, and mean-spirited things do occur in our interactions with other people that would allow us to take offense. However, it ultimately is impossible for another person to offend you or to offend me. Indeed, believing that another person offended us is fundamentally false. To be offended is a *choice* we make; it is not a *condition* inflicted or imposed upon us by someone or something else.

In the grand division of all of God's creations, there are things to act and things to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:13–14). As sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity for independent action and choice. Endowed with agency, you and I are agents, and we primarily are to act and not just be acted upon. To believe that someone or something can *make* us feel offended, angry, hurt, or bitter diminishes our moral agency and transforms us into objects to be acted upon. As agents,



however, you and I have the power to act and to choose how we will respond to an offensive or hurtful situation. ...

You and I cannot control the intentions or behavior of other people. However, we do determine how we will act. Please remember that you and I are agents endowed with moral agency, and we can choose not to be offended. ("And Nothing Shall Offend Them," *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, p. 89)

## *How to Regain Lost Agency*

**Richard G. Scott** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

You may be tired of others trying to run your life—always telling you what to do. After all, you have the right to make your own choices. That is correct. You have that right. It is your agency. The secret to solve problems in your life will be found in understanding and using the eternally beneficial interaction of your agency and His truth.

The Master said: "He that keepeth [the] commandments receiveth truth and light. ...

"Light and truth forsake that evil one, ...

"And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men." (D&C 93:28, 37, 39; emphasis added.)

He also declared, "Every man may act in doctrine and principle, ... according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable ... in the day of judgment" (D&C 101:78; italics added).

These scriptures teach how to overcome the effects of wrong choices, whether they be lying, stealing, gambling, addiction to alcohol or drugs, immorality, inflicting abuse, or anything like it. Simply stated, one must use his agency to *obey truth*. ("Healing Your Damaged Life," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, p.60)

**Robert D. Hales** - Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

If, through our unrighteous choices, we have lost our footing on that path, we must remember the agency we were given, agency we may choose to exercise again. I speak especially to those overcome by the thick darkness of addiction. If you have fallen into destructive, addictive behaviors, you may feel that you are spiritually in a black hole. As with the real black holes in space, it may seem all but impossible for light to penetrate to where you are. How do you escape? I testify the only way is through the very agency you exercised so valiantly in your premortal life, the agency that the adversary cannot take away without your yielding it to him.

How do you reclaim that agency? How do you begin again to exercise it in the right way? You choose to act in faith and obedience. May I suggest a few basic choices that you can begin to make now—this very day.

*Choose* to accept—truly accept—that you are a child of God, that He loves you, and that He has the power to help you.

*Choose* to put everything—literally everything—on the altar before Him. Believing that you are His child, decide

that your life belongs to Him and that you will use your agency to do His will. You may do this multiple times in your life, but never, never give up.

*Choose* to put yourself in a position to have experiences with the Spirit of God through prayer, in scripture study, at Church meetings, in your home, and through wholesome interactions with others. When you feel the influence of the Spirit, you are beginning to be cleansed and strengthened. The light is being turned on, and where that light shines, the darkness of evil cannot remain.

*Choose* to obey and keep your covenants, beginning with your baptismal covenant. Renew these covenants weekly by worthily partaking of the sacrament.

*Choose* to prepare to worthily attend the temple, make and renew sacred covenants, and receive all of the saving ordinances and blessings of the gospel.

Finally, and most importantly, *choose* to believe in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Accept the Savior's forgiveness, and then forgive yourself. Because of His sacrifice for you, He has the power to "remember [your sins] no more." [D&C 58:42] You must do likewise.

After you are on the path and are "free to choose" again, choose to reject feelings of shame for sins you have already repented of, refuse to be discouraged about the past, and rejoice in hope for the future. Remember, it is Satan who desires that we be "miserable like unto himself." [2 Ne. 2:27] Let your desires be stronger than his. Be happy and confident about your life and about the opportunities and blessings that await you here and throughout eternity.

Finally, remember our agency is not only for us. We have the responsibility to use it in behalf of others, to lift and strengthen others in their trials and tribulations. Some of our brothers and sisters have lost the full use of their agency through unrighteous choices. Without exposing ourselves to temptation, we can and should invite others to receive the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through friendship and love, we may lead them along the path of obedience and encourage them to use their agency to make the right choices once again.

As Father Lehi testified to his family of the blessings of agency, I also desire to testify to you, my beloved brothers and sisters throughout the world and to my family. Agency was manifested in the Council in Heaven as we chose to follow our Heavenly Father's plan and come to mortality for this probationary period. Agency

allows us to be tested and tried to see whether or not we will endure to the end and return to our Heavenly Father with honor. Agency is the catalyst that leads us to express our inward spiritual desires in outward Christlike behavior. Agency permits us to make faithful, obedient choices that strengthen us so that we can lift and strengthen others. Agency used righteously allows light to dispel the darkness and enables us to live with joy and happiness in the present, look with faith to the future, even into the eternities, and not dwell on the things of the past. Our use of agency determines who we are and what we will be. ("To Act for Ourselves: The Gift and Blessings of Agency," *Ensign*, May 2006, 4–8)