

Agency & Accountability in Families **Outline – Mike Baird**

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Doctrines & Principles of Agency

What is Agency?

- Ability to choose

Who has agency?

- Joseph F Smith
"This is a blessing that God has bestowed upon the world of mankind, upon all his children alike. " (*Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, compiled by John A. Widtsoe, pg 48.)

When did we have our agency given to us?

- 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*, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;"
- D&C 29:35
" And it came to pass that Adam, being tempted of the devil—for, behold, the devil was before Adam, for he rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power; and also *a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency*"

To Exercise our agency what must exist?(Opposites)

- 2 Nephi 2:11-16
"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 or the other"
- D&C 29:39
"And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves"
- Bruce R McConkie
" Agency underlies all things—all advancement, all progression, even existence itself. It is based on the presence of opposites between which a choice must be made. If there were no opposites, there would be nothing. " (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 90)

What makes our agency possible? (Atonement)

- 2 Nephi 2:26-7

"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.

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"

- Bruce R McConkie

"Agency is given to man as an essential part of the great plan of redemption. As with all things appertaining to this plan, it is based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ." (Mormon Doctrine, 2d ed., pg 26)

Satan tried to destroy our agency

- 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, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;"

We are free to choose but must accept consequences of our choices

- 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."

- D&C 93:31-32

"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.

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

- 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"

- Joseph F Smith

"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, and as it was said of Cain, so it will be said of us; "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door" (Gen. 4:7)." (*Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, compiled by John A. Widtsoe, pg 48.)

God does not force us (neither can Satan)

- Joseph Smith

"God would not exert any compulsory means, and the devil could not; and such ideas as were entertained [on these subjects] by many were absurd" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pg 187)

- Howard W Hunter

"God does not force us to do right, and Satan does not have the power to force us to do wrong. They may stand at the door and knock, but we have the power to open it to whomsoever we wish" (The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter, pg 86.)

Application of Principles & Doctrines of Agency

Agency and your Family

Agency & Maturity

- Do children have your agency in your family?
 - Are they allowed to do anything they wish?
 - We are commanded to teach them
 - D&C 68:25-28
" ...And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to *walk uprightly before the Lord*"
 - Deut 6:5-7
" ... And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart;
And *thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children*, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."
- How does exercising our agency and maturity go together?
 - At what age are you as a parent still making all their choices
 - At what age are you as a parent making none of their choices
 - Can you give too much too soon?
 - "Reeling out the slack"
 - Driving the car example
- "This is who we are and this is what we do"

Learning by "trying"

- Must we only learn through our own experiences?
 - "I only learn through my own experiences"
 - Do we have to try everything to know if it is good or not?

- Dallin H Oaks

"We do not have to have a personal experience with the effects of a serious transgression to know that they are injurious to our souls and destructive of our eternal welfare.

Some years ago one of our sons asked me why it was not a good idea to try alcohol and tobacco to see what they were like. He knew about the Word of Wisdom, and he also knew the health effects of these substances, but he was questioning why he should not just try them out for himself. I replied that if he wanted to try something out he ought to go to a barnyard and eat a little manure. He recoiled in horror. "Ooh, that's gross," he reacted.

"I'm glad you think so," I said, "but why don't you just try it out so you will know for yourself? While you are proposing to try one thing that you know is not good for you, why don't you apply that principle to some others?" That illustration of the silliness of "trying it out for yourself" proved persuasive to one sixteen-year-old." ("Full Purpose of Heart", pg 128)

Sins vs Mistakes

Principle - we are directed in the scriptures to treat mistakes different from sins

- D&C 20:80
"Any member of the church of Christ transgressing, or being overtaken in a fault, shall be dealt with as the scriptures direct."
 - Dallin H Oaks
"The clear implication of this verse is that "transgressing" is different from being "overtaken in fault, but that either type of action should be dealt with as the scriptures direct." ("Full Purpose of Heart", pg 134)
- D&C 1:25-27
"Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.
And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;
... And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;"
- Dallin H Oaks
"Under these verses, "Transgressing" is different from being at "fault," and to err is different than to sin.... I believe that in these scriptures and for the purpose of the subject of this chapter, "sin" and "transgression" mean the same thing. Similarly, to "err" or to be at "fault" are also equivalent. In referring to this second category I will use the more familiar description, "to make a mistake"." ("Full Purpose of Heart", pg 135)
- We are directed to treat mistakes different from sins
 - Mistakes – make it known so that it may be corrected - do so with love and mercy
 - Sin – chasten, repent - do so with love and mercy
- *Application to Agency* - letting our children make mistakes vs letting them sin
 - Should we let our children sin?
 - Should we let our children make mistakes?
 - Example of tying a knot wrong vs right
 - Some mistakes can have severe consequences
 - We should apply this principle in decisions we make
 - We should let our children know we will apply this principle

Applying Moroni 7

Doctrine – through the light of Christ we may know good from evil

- Moroni 7:12-18

"Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil;...

(14)Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.

(15) *For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil;* and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil;

(18)And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged."

- *Application to Agency* - Teach our children so that they know how to judge
- *Application to Agency* - Teach our children that we will be guided by this doctrine in our choices
 - Henry B Eyring

"The warning not to judge what is of God to be evil nor what is from the devil to be good is a helpful caution to those of us who would help the young learn to choose the right. They will see some choices as good, or at least neutral, which we may see at first as evil. Before we begin to force a choice with what authority we may have, it will be wise to apply the test found in Moroni ourselves. More than once I have been restrained and more than once I have been energized to action by those practical rules. What I at first thought was evil became clear to me as being neutral. And what I had thought was neutral was revealed to me as inviting to do evil. And when the teenager knew I would apply the test myself in humility, it was more likely that they would try the test for themselves." (Henry B. Eyring, "A Life Founded in Light and Truth," Ensign, July 2001, 6)

Anger & other emotions

- Can anyone make you angry? - No

- Lynn G. Robbins (Quorum of 70)
"A cunning part of his (Satan's) strategy is to dissociate anger from agency, making us believe that we are victims of an emotion that we cannot control. We hear, "I lost my temper." Losing one's temper is an interesting choice of words that has become a widely used idiom. To "lose something" implies "not meaning to," "accidental," "involuntary," "not responsible"—careless perhaps but "not responsible."
"He made me mad." This is another phrase we hear, also implying lack of control or agency." ("Agency and Anger," Ensign, May 1998, pg 80)
- If God does not force us and Satan can't then who is "making us angry"?
 - Lynn G. Robbins (Quorum of 70)
"This is a myth that must be debunked. No one makes us mad. Others don't make us angry. There is no force involved. *Becoming angry is a conscious choice, a decision; therefore, we can make the choice not to become angry. We choose!*" ("Agency and Anger," Ensign, May 1998, pg 80)

Agency & other feelings & reactions

- Don't *WE* decide then on how we deal with everything?

Agency and keeping the commandments

- Isn't my agency restricted by keeping the commandments?
 - Example of speeding tickets

Agency and Foreordination

- Does God's foreknowledge take away our agency?
 - Neal Maxwell

"As to the questions asked—even by faithful Saints—such as, "If what is going to happen is 'all set,' why pray?," the answer is that God foresees, but He does not compromise our agency. All the outcomes are not, for our purposes, "all set." True, God's foreseeing includes our prayers, our fasting, our faith, and the results that will thereby be achieved. But until our mortal actions occur and our decisions are made, things are not "all set." The Father foresaw the Atonement, but the Atonement was not wrought until the very moment of Christ's death when He gave up His spirit, which He had the power to retain." ("All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience" pg 97)