

# Agency

09/05

## Agency Defined

(D&C 93:30-31; 2 Nephi 2:5-29)

**01** – “Next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct our lives is God's greatest gift to man. Freedom of choice is more to be treasured than any possession earth can give. It is inherent in the spirit of man. It is a divine gift to every normal being. **Whether born in abject poverty or shackled at birth by inherited riches, everyone has the most precious of all life's endowments – the gift of free agency, man's inherited and inalienable right.** It is the impelling source of the soul's progress. It is the purpose of the Lord that man becomes like him. In order for man to achieve this, it was necessary for the Creator first to make him free. To man is given a special endowment not bestowed upon any other living thing. God gave to him the power of choice. Only to the human being did the Creator say: ‘. . . thou mayest choose for thyself for it is given unto thee; . . .’ (Moses 3:17) Without this divine power to choose, humanity cannot progress.” (David O. McKay, *CR*, October 1965, pg. 8)

**02** – “**To fully understand this gift of agency and its inestimable worth, it is imperative that we understand that God’s chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation.** He acts by gentle sollicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unfailing respect for the freedom and independence that we possess. He wants to help us and pleads for the chance to assist us, **but he will not do so in violation of our agency. He loves us too much to do that, and doing so would run counter to his divine character.**”

“Brigham Young once said: ‘The volition of [man] 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. . . . 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.’” (*JD*, 11:272)

“To countermand and ultimately forbid our choices was Satan’s way, not God’s, and the Father of us all simply never will do that. He will, however, stand by us forever to help us see the right path, find the right choice, respond to the true voice, and feel the influence of his undeniable Spirit. His gentle, peaceful, powerful persuasion to do right and find joy will be with us so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved (Moroni 7:36).” (Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, November 1989, pg. 18)

**03** – “**AGENCY = exerting power or a state of being in action.** (Webster Dictionary 1828)

**04** – “**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.**” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pg. 26)

– 2 Nephi 2:5-29 - NOTES –

### The Four Great Principles so that Agency May be in Force

(1) Law - 2 Nephi 5-26 (10 times)

**05** – “**One of Satan’s most frequently used deceptions is the notion that the commandments of God are meant to restrict freedom and limit happiness.** Young people especially sometimes feel that the standards of the Lord are like fences and chains, blocking them from those activities that seem most enjoyable in life. But exactly the opposite is true. The gospel plan is the plan by which men are brought to a fulness of joy. This is the first concept I wish to stress: The gospel principles are the steps and guidelines that will help us find true happiness and joy.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, October 1989, pg. 2)

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**06** – “Now to our young friends, **you may feel at times that the Lord’s commandments restrict your freedom as compared with others.** Freedom does not mean license, nor does it imply the absence of all restrictions and discipline. The Savior did not teach undisciplined, permissive-type freedom. When he said, know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32), he is telling us that his truth, if followed, would free us from falsity, from deception; that his gospel, if followed, would free us to gain eternal life.” (David B. Haight, *Ensign*, January 1974, pg. 41)

KITE ANALOGY – “Religion” (Latin) to hold back

(2) **Opposites** - 2 Nephi 2:11-12, 15-16

**07** – “The law of opposition makes freedom of choice possible...” (Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, May 1980, pg. 2)

(3) **Knowledge of Good and Evil** - 2 Nephi 2:5; Helaman 14:30-31

**08** – “Choice cannot exist unless both good and evil are an option.” (Boyd K. Packer, *BYU Symposium*, October 30, 1988)

**09** – “Satan... 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....

“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.” (Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, November 1992, pg. 61)

(4) **Freedom to Choose** - 2 Nephi 2:27; D&C 101:77-80

**10** – “Can the people comprehend that there is not, has not been, and never can be any method, scheme, or plan devised by any being in this world for intelligence to eternally exist and obtain an exaltation, without knowing the good and the evil – without tasting the bitter and the sweet? Can the people understand that it is actually necessary for opposite principles to be placed before them, or this state of being would be no probation, and we should have no opportunity for exercising the agency given us? Can they understand that we cannot obtain eternal life unless we actually know and comprehend by our experience the principle of good and the principle of evil, the light and the darkness, truth, virtue, and holiness – also vice, wickedness, and corruption?” (Brigham Young, *JD*, 7:237)

### Premortal Agency

(Jeremiah 1:5; JST Revelation 12:11; Alma 13:4-5, 10; Moroni 7:15-18; 2 Nephi 2:13; D&C 29:36; D&C 88:34-35; D&C 93:38; Moses 4:3; Abraham 3:1-23;)

**11** – “**In the spirit birth he obtained not only an eternal organization, but power and intelligence by which he can determine and understand light from darkness, truth from error, and choose between that which is right and that which is wrong.**” (Charles W. Penrose, *CR*, October 1914, pg. 40)

**12** – **AGENCY AND PROGRESSION IN PRE-EXISTENCE.** “God gave his children their free agency even in the spirit world, by which the individual spirits had the privilege, just as men have here, of choosing the good and rejecting the evil, or partaking of the evil to suffer the consequences of their sins. Because of this, some even there were more faithful than others in keeping the commandments of the Lord. Some were of greater intelligence than others, as we find it here, and were honored accordingly.... The spirits of men were not equal. They may have had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more

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**intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to think for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it.”** (Joseph Fielding Smith, *DS*, 1:58-59)

13 – “Among the two-thirds who remained, it is highly probable, that, there were many who were not valiant in the war, but whose sins were of such a nature that they could be forgiven through faith in the future sufferings of the Only Begotten of the Father, and through their sincere repentance and reformation. **We see no impropriety in Jesus offering Himself as an acceptable offering and sacrifice before the Father to atone for the sins of His brethren, committed, not only in the second, but also in the first estate.** Certain it was, that the work which Jesus was to accomplish, was known in the Grand Council where the rebellion broke out; it was known that man would sin in his second estate; for it was upon the subject of his redemption that the assembly became divided, and which resulted in war. John, the revelator, speaking of a certain power, says, ‘And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’

“Christ suffered, not only in body, but also in spirit. By the sufferings of His body He atoned for the sins of men committed in and by the body: by the sufferings of His spirit, He atoned for the sins committed by the spirit; hence, the atonement redeems both body and spirit. **It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that as spirits in the first estate sinned, they might be forgiven through their faith and repentance, by virtue of the future sufferings of Christ.”** (Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, pg. 55-56)

14 – “**The ‘spirits of the eternal world’ are as diverse from each other in their dispositions as mortals are on the earth. Some of them are aspiring, ambitious, and even desire to bring other spirits into subjection to them As man is liable to [have] enemies there [in the spirit world] as well as here [on the earth] it is necessary for him to be placed beyond their power in order to be saved.** This is done by our taking bodies (keeping our first estate) and having the Power of the Resurrection pass upon us whereby we are enabled to gain the ascendancy over the disembodied spirits. (pg. 208)

“The design of God before the foundation of the world was that we should take tabernacles that through faithfulness we should overcome & thereby obtain a resurrection from the dead, in this wise obtain glory honor power and dominion for this thing is needful, **inasmuch as the Spirits in the Eternal world, glory in bringing other Spirits in Subjection unto them,** Striving continually for the mastery, He who rules in the heavens when he has a certain work to do calls the Spirits before him to organize them. They present themselves and offer their Services. (pg. 207)

“**God is good and all his acts [are] for the benefit of inferior intelligences God saw that those intelligences had not power to defend themselves against those that had a tabernacle therefore the Lord calls them together in counsel and agrees to form them tabernacle so that he might gender the spirit and the tabernacle together so as to create sympathy for their fellowman for it is a natural thing with those spirits that [have] the most power to [bear] down on those of lesser power so we see the devil is without a tabernacle and the Lord [has] set bo[un]ds to all Spirits.** (pg. 68)

“**Before [the] foundation of the earth in the Grand Counsel that the spirits of all men were subject to oppression and the express purpose of God in giving it a tabernacle was to arm it against the power of Darkness.** (pg. 62)

“The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. God has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted [like] Himself. (pg. 346)

“**All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God the Devil takes power.”** (pg. 60) (Joseph Smith; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*)

### **Agency - the Principle Fought Over in the War in Heaven**

(D&C 29:36-38; D&C 76:25-28; Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:26-28; JST Revelation 12:6-11; Isaiah 14:12-15; Moroni 7:17; Alma 11:34, 37; Helaman 5:10-11)

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15 – **“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.”** (Joseph Fielding Smith, *DS*, 2: 20)

16 – **“He commenced his observations by remarking that the kindness of our Heavenly Father called for our heartfelt gratitude. He then observed that Satan was generally blamed for the evils which we did, but if he was the cause of all our wickedness, men could not be condemned. The devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary.** Those who resisted the Spirit of God, would be liable to be led into temptation, and then the association of heaven would be withdrawn from those who refused to be made partakers of such great glory. **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.** The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but Christ subjected the same in hope all are subjected to vanity while they travel through the crooked paths and difficulties which surrounded them. Where is the man that is free from vanity? None ever were perfect but Jesus: and why was He perfect? Because He was the Son of God, and had the fullness of the Spirit, and greater power than any man. But notwithstanding their vanity, men look forward with hope (because they are "subjected in hope") to the time of their deliverance.” (Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, pg. 187)

17 – **“Lucifer lost his [first estate] by offering to save men in their sins on the honor of a God, or on his Father’s honor.”** (W.W. Phelps, *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1844, vol. 5, pg. 758)

18 – **“And so, in the courts of heaven, the war of wars was waged. Christ and Michael and a mighty host of noble and great spirits preached the gospel of God and exhorted their brethren to follow the Father. Lucifer and his lieutenants preached another gospel, a gospel of fear and hate and lasciviousness and compulsion.** They sought salvation without keeping the commandments, without overcoming the world, without choosing between opposites.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man*, pg. 667)

19 – **“He [Satan] sought to turn them away and convert them to his plan. But he did not succeed. He did succeed in leading away about one-third part of that great family of spirits, because of their agency. They hearkened to his proposition; they thought it would be a very great and important thing to destroy the agency of man in the future creation that was about to be made, and to redeem them all in their sins,** and consequently they joined with this rebellious character; hence came the fallen angels.” (Orson Pratt, *JD*, 21: 290-291)

20 – **“Satan (it is possible) being opposed to the will of his Father, wished to avoid the responsibilities of this position, and rather than assume the consequences of the acceptance of the plan of the Father, he would deprive man of his free agency, and render it impossible for him to obtain that exaltation which God designed.** It would further seem probable that he refused to take the position of redeemer, and assume all the consequences associated therewith, but he did propose, as stated before, to take another plan and deprive man of his agency, and **he probably intended to make men atone for their own acts by an act of coercion, and the shedding of their own blood as an atonement for their sins.”** (John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement*, pg. 96-97)

21 – **“When the Eternal Father announced his plan of salvation – a plan that called for a mortal probation for all his spirit children; a plan that required a Redeemer to ransom men from the coming fall; a plan that could only operate if mortal men had agency – when the Father announced his plan, when he chose Christ as the Redeemer and rejected Lucifer, then there was war in heaven. That war was a war of words; it was a conflict of ideologies; it was a rebellion against God and his laws.** Lucifer sought to dethrone God, to sit himself on the divine throne, and to save all men without reference to their works. He sought to deny men their agency so they could not sin. He offered a mortal life of carnality and sensuality, of evil and crime and murder, following which all men would be saved. **His offer was a philosophical impossibility.** There must needs be an opposition in all things. Unless there are opposites, there is nothing. There can be no light without darkness, no heat without cold, no virtue without vice, no good without evil, no salvation without damnation.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, pg. 666-667)

22 – **“NO NEUTRALS IN HEAVEN. There were no neutrals in the war in heaven. All took sides either with Christ or with Satan.** Every man had his agency there, and men receive rewards here based upon their actions there, just as they will receive rewards hereafter for deeds done in the body.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *DS*, 1: 65)

23 – **“There [were] no neutral spirits in heaven. At the time of the rebellion all took sides...”** (Joseph Smith; Brigham

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Young; Elden J. Watson, *Brigham Young Addresses*, 4:196)

**24 – “There were, of course, no neutral spirits in the war in heaven, any more than there are or can be neutrals in this life** where choices between righteousness and unrighteousness are involved. ‘He that is not with me is against me,’ saith the Lord, ‘and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.’” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pg. 828)

### **Agency - The Right of Good Over Evil**

(Alma 12:31-32)

**25 – “I have heard people say... I have the 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 you have and that is ... keep the commandments of Jesus Christ. He has the privilege. He is not compelled to receive it, because... 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.”** (Joseph Fielding Smith, *CR*, April 1967, pg. 120-121)

**26 – “Agency is freedom to choose right against wrong, not a choice between two equal forces.”** (S. Dilworth Young, *BYU Speeches of the Year*, October 28, 1959, pg. 3)

### **Moral Agency**

(D&C 101:78; D&C 58:28; D&C 59:23)

**27 – “Moreover, we live in an age when many simply refuse to feel responsible for themselves. Thus, a crystal-clear understanding of the doctrines pertaining to desire is so vital because of the spreading effluent oozing out of so many unjustified excuses by so many. This is like a sludge which is sweeping society along toward ‘the gulf of misery and endless woe’ (Hel. 5:12). Feeding that same flow is the selfish philosophy of ‘no fault’, which is replacing the meek and apologetic ‘my fault’. We listen with eager ear to hear genuine pleas for forgiveness instead of the ritualistic ‘Sorry. I hope I can forgive myself.’”** (Neal A. Maxwell, *CR*, October 1996, pg. 26)

**28 – “No agency without choice, no choice without freedom, no freedom without risk, nor true freedom without responsibility”** (Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 1992, 66-68)

**29 – “We are free to choose, but we are not free to alter the consequences of the choices.”** (Ezra Taft Benson, *Come Unto Christ*, pg. 40)

**30 – “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.”** (Russell M. Nelson, *Ensign*, November 1988, pg. 7)

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## FREE AGENTS

Consider how the words *agent* and *agency* are commonly used in the realm of normal experience. Frequently in the sports section of the newspaper we read about a professional athlete who has fulfilled the terms of his contract with a particular team and so has become a free agent. As a free agent, he can invite other teams to bid for his services. It is the athlete's right to choose the offer that best suits him. Once he has made that choice and signed a contract, however, he is no longer a free agent but rather has become an agent for the team he has agreed to become a part of.

Having committed himself to that team, he accepts certain responsibilities. He has a responsibility to attend practice and to abide by team training rules. He can no longer say, "Well, I have my agency, and I don't have to do that." Of course he has to do whatever is required, and in most cases he is compensated very handsomely to do so.

The point here is that a free agent can do what he or she wants; and an agent cannot. An agent is committed to a particular purpose. An agent has exhausted his freedom for the agreed-upon compensation.

(Joseph Fielding McConkie, Understanding the Power God Gives Us, pg. 18-19)

We made vows, sacred vows, in the heavens before we came to this mortal life....

**We have made covenants.** We made them before we accepted our position here on the earth [Abraham 3:25]. Now we made this commitment, "...all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us. We committed ourselves to our Heavenly Father, that if He would send us to the earth and give us bodies and give to us the priceless opportunities that earth life afforded, we would keep our lives clean and would marry in the holy temple and would rear a family and teach them righteousness. This was a solemn oath, a solemn promise. He promised us an eventful mortal life with untold privileges and providing that we qualified in the way of righteousness, we would receive eternal life, and happiness and progress. **There is no other way to receive these rewards.** (Spencer W. Kimball, *Be Ye Therefore Perfect*, U of U devotional [January 10, 1975])