

Freedom to Choose

Chapter 4

Agency Is an Eternal Principle

- If someone asked you why it is important to have agency, what would you say?

“Thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee” (Moses 3:17).

God has told us through His prophets that we are free to choose between good and evil. We may choose liberty and eternal life by following Jesus Christ. We are also free to choose captivity and death by following Satan. (See 2 Nephi 2:27.) The right to choose between good and evil and to act for ourselves is called agency.

In our premortal life we had moral agency. One purpose of earth life is to show what choices we will make (see 2 Nephi 2:15–16). If we were forced to choose the right, we would not be able to show what we would choose for ourselves. Also, we are happier doing things when we have made our own choices.

Agency was one of the principal issues to arise in the premortal Council in Heaven. It was one of the main causes of the conflict between the followers of Christ and the followers of Satan. Satan said, “Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). In saying this, he “rebelled against [God] and sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3). His offer was rejected, and he was cast out of heaven with his followers (see D&C 29:36–37).

Agency Is a Necessary Part of the Plan of Salvation

Agency makes our life on earth a period of testing. When planning the mortal creation of His children, God said, “We will prove



[test] them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25). Without the gift of agency, we would have been unable to show our Heavenly Father whether we would do all that He commanded us. Because we are able to choose, we are responsible for our actions (see Helaman 14:30–31).

When we choose to live according to God’s plan for us, our agency is strengthened. Right choices increase our power to make more right choices.

As we obey each of our Father’s commandments, we grow in wisdom and strength of character. Our faith increases. We find it easier to make right choices.

We began to make choices as spirit children in our Heavenly Father’s presence. Our choices there made us worthy to come to earth. Our Heavenly Father wants us to grow in faith, power, knowledge, wisdom, and all other good things. If we keep His commandments and make right choices, we will learn and understand. We will become like Him. (See D&C 93:28.)

- How does making right choices help us make more right choices?

Agency Requires That There Be a Choice

- Why is opposition necessary?

We cannot choose righteousness unless the opposites of good and evil are placed before us. Lehi, a great Book of Mormon prophet, told his son Jacob that in order to bring about the eternal purposes of God, there must be “an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad” (2 Nephi 2:11).

God allows Satan to oppose the good. God said of Satan:

“I caused that he should be cast down;

“And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice” (Moses 4:3–4).

Satan does all he can to destroy God’s work. He seeks “the misery of all mankind. . . . He seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:18, 27). He does not love us. He does not want any good thing for us (see Moroni 7:17). He does not want us to be happy. He wants to make us his slaves. He uses many disguises to enslave us.

When we follow the temptations of Satan, we limit our choices. The following example suggests how this works. Imagine seeing a sign on the seashore that reads: “Danger—whirlpool. No swimming allowed here.” We might think that is a restriction. But is it? We still have many choices. We are free to swim somewhere else. We are free to walk along the beach and pick up seashells. We are free to watch the sunset. We are free to go home. We are also free to ignore the sign and swim in the dangerous place. But once the whirlpool has us in its grasp and we are pulled under, we have very few choices. We can try to escape, or we can call for help, but we may drown.

Even though we are free to choose our course of action, we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions. The consequences, whether good or bad, follow as a natural result of any choice we make (see Galatians 6:7; Revelation 22:12).

Heavenly Father has told us how to escape the captivity of Satan. We must watch and pray always, asking God to help us withstand the temptations of Satan (see 3 Nephi 18:15). Our Heavenly Father will not allow us to be tempted beyond our power to resist (see 1 Corinthians 10:13; Alma 13:28).

God’s commandments direct us away from danger and toward eternal life. By choosing wisely, we will gain exaltation, progress eternally, and enjoy perfect happiness (see 2 Nephi 2:27–28).

- What are some examples of actions that limit our choices? What are some examples of actions that give us more freedom?

For teachers: A simple picture can help learners focus their attention. If you discuss the analogy of a warning sign as it is presented in this chapter, you may want to draw a picture of such a sign on the board or on a large piece of paper.

Additional Scriptures

- Moses 7:32 (freedom of choice)
- Abraham 3:24–25 (earth life a test)
- Alma 41:3; Moroni 7:5–6 (works judged)
- 2 Nephi 2:11–16 (opposition is necessary)
- Moroni 7:12–17 (choosing good and evil)
- 2 Peter 2:19; John 8:34 (sin is bondage)
- 2 Nephi 2:28–29; Alma 40:12–13 (reward according to works)