

## President Tanner

I think, President Kimball, the voting has been unanimous in the affirmative.

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Before presenting the Tabernacle Choir officers, President Tanner made the following statement:

Just a note before I present them; we have a letter from the doctor of Isaac

Stewart suggesting that he be relieved of his responsibilities at this time. He has been released and the Choir has accepted his release to take effect September 1, and his successor will take over on September 1.

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## President Tanner

Elder Delbert L. Stapley will now speak to us.

## Elder Delbert L. Stapley

Of the Council of the Twelve

My brothers, sisters, and friends, one of God's most precious gifts to man is the principle of free agency—the privilege of choice which was introduced by God the Eternal Father to all of his spirit children in the premortal state. This occurred in the great council in heaven before the peopling of this earth. The children of God were endowed with freedom of choice while yet but spirit beings. The divine plan provided that they be freeborn in the flesh and become heirs to the inalienable birthright of liberty to choose and act for themselves in mortality. It was essential for their eternal progression that they be subjected to the influences of both good and evil.

Lehi, an early American Nephite prophet, taught:

"For it must needs be, that there is 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 Ne. 2:11.)

### Gift of free agency

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.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie made this statement about free agency:

"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 . . . 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.

"Agency is given to man as an essential part of the great plan of redemption." (*Mormon Doctrine*, Bookcraft, Inc., 1966 ed., p. 26.)

### Two parties

All things good come from God. All things evil come from Satan. Brigham Young explained it this way:

"There are but two parties on the earth, one for God and the other for the

world or the Evil One. No matter how many names the Christian or heathen world bear, or how many sects and creeds may exist, there are but two parties, one for heaven and God, and the other will go to some other kingdom than the celestial kingdom of God." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe, 1966 ed., Deseret Book Co., p. 70.)

Free agency is an everlasting principle which has existed with God from all eternity. It is a gift from him given with the hope that we will apply it wisely in the conduct of our personal lives. Freedom of choice is a moral agency which we should keep uppermost in our minds in all our activities and decisions. "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." (Wilford Woodruff, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, Bookcraft, Inc., 1969, pp. 8-9.)

### Wrong attitude

We cannot use our free agency as a justification to do evil. Man is free to choose the good or the evil in life, and to obey or disobey the Lord's commands as he may elect. He can choose to act without compulsion or restraint.

Free agency doesn't suggest we do wrong or infringe upon the rights and privileges of others. We often hear a person who transgresses console himself by saying, "I am only hurting myself." If a man chooses to commit adultery, he must pay a penalty for his sin. Because of his transgression, he is infringing upon the rights of his wife and family, overlooking those who love him and look to him for guidance, good example, and eternal blessings of family unity and togetherness. He hurts others in the process of doing what he calls "exercising my free agency."

Too many people have the wrong attitude about free agency. They use it as a negative force in their lives rather

than as a positive one. Perhaps you have heard this statement: "I can smoke and drink if I want to. I have my free agency." But why not think in terms of eternal values and say, "I can smoke and drink if I want to. I have my free agency, but I choose to use my agency in bettering my life—in choosing the right and not the wrong." This can apply to any vice in one's life. Have the right attitude and a vice can turn to a virtue, and virtue has its own reward. To use our agency for good, we must set aside the defensive, arrogant, and haughty attitude of a transgressor.

Brigham Young taught: "Men should not be permitted to do as they please in all things; for there are rules regulating all good societies. . . , the violation of which cannot be countenanced either by civil or religious usages. . . . Men . . . should not be free to sin against God or against man without suffering such penalties as their sins deserve." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 65.)

### Limits to agency

How far does our agency extend? Brigham Young answered this question by saying: "There are limits to agency, and to all things and to all beings, and our agency must not infringe upon that law. A man must choose life or death . . . the agency which is given to him is so bound up that he cannot exercise it in opposition to the law, without laying himself liable to be corrected and punished by the Almighty.

"It behooves us to be careful, and not forfeit that agency that is given to us. The difference between the righteous and the sinner, eternal life or death, happiness or misery, is this, to those who are exalted there are no bounds or limits to their privileges, their blessings have a continuation . . . they increase through all eternity; whereas, those who reject the offer, who despise the proffered mercies of the Lord, and prepare themselves to be banished from his presence, and to become com-

panions of the devils, have their agency abridged immediately, and bounds and limits are put to their operations." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, pp. 63-64.)

## Obedience

God has given commandments with promise of blessings for compliance with his laws, and penalties for violation of them. The late James E. Talmage said: "Obedience to law is the habit of free men. The transgressor fears the law, for he brings upon himself deprivation and restraint, not because of the law which would have protected him in his freedom, but because of his antagonism to the law. It is no more a part of God's plan to compel men to work righteousness than it is his purpose to permit evil powers to force his children into sin." (*The Great Apostasy*, Deseret Book Co., 1958, pp. 34-35.)

A person's freedom should never be suppressed by men, by Satan, nor by our Lord. Men should never be in bondage one to another. While Satan would like us under his control, God does not control the actions of men. He has given us our agency to combat the trials, temptations, and evils of every kind. However, he gives certain principles that, if followed, will lead us back to his presence. God's kingdom is founded upon perfect liberty. Every man, woman, and child has the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Each person alone is responsible to his creator for his individual acts.

God gave us the everlasting gospel, the principles of life and salvation, and has left it up to each of us to choose or reject, with the understanding that we become responsible to him for the results of our acts. The Lord does not force anyone to embrace the gospel, and he will not force them to live it if they have embraced it. "They act for themselves, and act from choice." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 57.)

## Satan's power

Satan exerts his greatest power when God has a work to do among his children on earth. Every dispensation of the gospel since the beginning of time has come to a close, not because God has failed, but because man has failed God by the improper use of his free agency.

It is most evident in the world today that Satan is raging in the hearts of men. It is a day, according to the Lord, when Satan shall have power over his own dominions. He began his deceitful promotions upon our first parents, Adam and Eve, and has continued his beguiling and enticing practices constantly since then. It is being done most effectively and alarmingly in our present generation.

No one is immune from Satan's power. Even the Savior was sorely tempted by him three different times, and each time refused to submit to his deceitful temptations.

As part of our test, we also may be subjected to temptation as was Christ, for the Lord has said:

"And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet." (D&C 29:39.)

Be aware and warned of the subtle workings of Satan, for he never stops trying to lead us astray. He is an expert on making things seem appealing and right, when actually they can bring about our moral destruction. He does not believe in free agency, and would like to control our minds, thoughts, and acts. We can see his workings more and more in the movies, television shows, magazines, and in the actions of men and nations. If our thoughts are turned to sensual things, we will be strongly tempted to use our free agency wrongfully.

Once a person yields to sin, he is under Satan's control and it is not easy to break away.

Be suspicious of those who would put you in a compromising position. Never compromise the right, for compromise can lead to sin, sin to regret, and regret can hurt so very much.

### Serve one master

No man is free who is not master of himself. True freedom of agency exists with the observance of God's laws. Keep in mind that good and evil can never be amalgamated into one. They are at opposite ends. They do not abide in harmony within a person. One tendency will prevail over the other, for as Jesus taught:

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24.)

*There is no middle road.* Our position must be one of strength in order to overcome the evil that Satan would have us do.

Man cannot receive the exaltation God has provided for him without exercising his free agency in righteousness and in obeying His laws and commandments.

### Heavenly blessings

Free agency, if properly and wisely used, can bring opportunities for service in the kingdom of God. It will provide us with many choice heavenly blessings and an eternal celestial life of joy and happiness.

President Wilford Woodruff stated: "We are in a great school; and it is

a profitable one, in which we are receiving very important lessons from day to day. We are taught to cultivate our minds, to control our thoughts to thoroughly bring our whole being into subjection to the spirit and law of God, that we may learn to be one and act as the heart of one man, that we may carry out the purposes of God upon the earth." (*Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, pp. 10-11.)

### Christ's example

Christ is our teacher; he has shown by example the way to use our free agency to gain eternal life.

What are we doing with our agency? Are we drawing close to God, or away from him? Are we satisfied and happy in what we are doing with this God-given endowment? Can we improve in the use of it?

Think carefully about the promises and benefits available to us by using our free agency in obeying and keeping God's laws, as against failure to do so.

May God bless us all that we will have the desire and courage to exercise our free agency in righteousness and in truth, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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### President Tanner

Elder Delbert L. Stapley of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us. We shall now hear from Elder ElRay L. Christiansen, Assistant to the Twelve.

## Elder ElRay L. Christiansen

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

I stand before you in deep humility, my brothers and sisters, and with a prayer in my heart that what I say may give encouragement to all who are

here, or all who need that encouragement, and most of us do. I should like to base my remarks upon a divine truth that is found in the book of Proverbs. It