

HIDING BEHIND GOVERNMENT: The Disposition of Almost All Men?

“You will never get me to support a measure which I believe to be wrong, although by doing so I may accomplish that which I believe to be right.” (Abraham Lincoln)

The War in Heaven

The War in Heaven was fought over the issue of agency. One side championed Man’s right to choose, the other promoted the philosophy of compulsion. A third part of the pre-earth hosts chose the latter. That’s a sizeable number and even more significant when we consider that there was no veil over the minds of the children of God at that time – and yet we are told that these spirits who followed Lucifer were deceived; whether that deception led directly to their fall or simply initiated it, the fact still remains that they were deceived at some point.

The Continuing War for Freedom

This War continues. The venue may have changed but the issue has not. Strip back any contention, any war, any struggle in the physical world and you will see it eventually comes down to freedom versus compulsion, and in the “spiritual work” (if you will) between agency and addiction. Evil itself may be defined as taking or attempting to take, freedom from another to surrender his own agency.

In the dedicatory prayer of the London Temple in 1958, David O. McKay uttered these words:

“Next to life, we express gratitude for the gift of free agency. When thou didst create man, thou placed within him part of thine Omnipotence and bade him choose for himself. Liberty and conscience thus became a sacred part of human nature.”

Imagine that, our individual agency is actually a part of the omnipotence of God, given us in the hope that we should be wise stewards over that supernal power and thus able to receive a fullness of it one day and become as He is.

Our agency (1) is critically important to the Plan, to our present happiness and to our future state. Satan wants to take that agency from us. He can do that in two ways. One is to have us surrender to addictions, to sin. Only we can do this. No one can take our agency from us. The second is to influence mankind to rob others of their freedom and thus the opportunity to exercise their agency. Perhaps many Church members believe they only struggle with the first (if any). This article, it is hoped, will cause us all to think twice about such an assumption.

Many Will Be Deceived in the Flesh

The question then is that in this new phase of the War, blind to an understanding of the first, will we fare so well as we did in our pre-earth life? Clearly, speaking collectively, we will not. Few will be saved. Most will be deceived. They will be deceived into following Satan's plan and not our Heavenly Father's. They will surrender their own agency and even act as agents in stripping their fellowman of his freedom.

Serious Consequences For Those Found on the Wrong Side

Ezra Taft Benson asked this thought-provoking question:

"As important as are all other principles of the gospel, it was the freedom issue which determined whether you received a body. To have been on the wrong side of the freedom issue during the war in heaven meant eternal damnation. How then can Latter-day Saints expect to be on the wrong side in this life and escape the eternal consequences?" (April, 1965, General Conference)

How then can we avoid being on the wrong side?

Unrighteous Dominion – The Violation of Freedom

*"We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen."
(D&C 121:39-40)*

The above scripture gives us insight into an unhappy truth about human nature. The words "disposition of almost all men" cannot be lightly passed over. Experience has indeed shown that few indeed handle power as they should, one need only look to history to see this truth.

Perhaps the most prevalent and clever way Satan has tricked even honorable people into violating the freedom of their fellowman is when a third party is involved. The "dirty work" is done by someone else, it's all at a distance. We don't have to worry about resources, our own ability, our own fears, our own shame – we can go about it in complete anonymity.

Perhaps many reading this article might think they would not rob someone of their freedom even through a third party. But what if that third party was the Government of your county? (2)

Our Political Attitude Gives a Clear Indication of our True Attitude Toward Freedom

Because of the ease of violating the freedom of others through government it is quite probably right to say that our "disposition" to exercise unrighteous dominion is most clearly revealed in our political attitude. It is this that makes most manifest our true nature, our true integrity, as regards the freedom (and by association the agency) of man.

Could this be one of the reasons the Lord allowed the Nephites, Israelites and, much later, the people of the United States to be established by revelation and inspiration as self-governing people; to see how they would deal with the temptation to so easily exercise unrighteous dominion?

Mormon, in recounting the establishment of the inspired Nephite republic, makes this observation...

"[the people] became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins." (Mosiah 29:38)

Mosiah, a little earlier in this same chapter and after speaking of the potential evils of absolute rule, goes on to tell the Nephites that "the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part." (see Mosiah 29:34). In other words, self-government – a government where the people are accountable before God because there are no laws imposed upon them save those they have created.

The Book of Mormon is for Our Day

It is interesting that of the two and a half thousand years of Nephite/Jaredite history, almost half the Book of Mormon is dedicated to that time period between 92 BC and about AD 29; just a little over a century. Put another way: this period of history comprises 41% of the content of the Book of Mormon and yet totals but 12% of the Nephite history. If we factor in the Jaredite history, then this same period (92 BC to AD 29) covers less than 5% of the Nephite/Jaredite timeline!

So what was so special about this period of time? It was that era in which the Nephites had a form of self-government. Might the Lord have had Mormon focus on this point in history because He knew the Book of Mormon would come forth among a nation and people who would be in similar circumstances politically as were the Nephites at the beginning of their own republic?

Morality Applies to both Individuals and Groups of Individuals

So how well are we doing in avoiding the exercise of unrighteous dominion through government? Let's consider some principles.

First, let's think about this question: Does the same morality apply to an individual as it does to a group of individuals?

Most of us would say yes. It would be inconsistent indeed to allow people off certain crimes just because of the number of accomplices. If a man steals a horse it is wrong, if ten men act together to steal a horse it is still just as wrong. If a thousand men steal a horse it doesn't make it moral. Indeed, if everyone in a community banded together and stole a

horse from the only member of the population not in their band – the local ranch owner – it would still be wrong. Numbers don't change the nature of the morality of an act.

Why is it then that nearly all people will refuse to apply (subconsciously or consciously) this same principle to government? Government is nothing more than a group of people hired to protect us in our inalienable rights. They are not above the law – of man or God. Neither are the citizens of a nation above the laws of God when acting together (or in a majority). The same laws of morality apply. No reasonable argument could lend credibility to believing any different.

Here is what Ezra Taft Benson said on the matter:

“The same moral law which governs the actions of men when acting alone is also applicable when they act in concert with others... no citizen or group of citizens has any right to direct their agent, the government, to perform any act which would be evil or offensive to the conscience if that citizen were performing the act himself outside the framework of government.” (February 29, 1968, Utah Forum for the American Idea, Salt Lake City, Utah.)

Let's look at it another way: Governments derive their just powers from the governed. Government is the creature, the people are the creator. The creature cannot exceed the creator. Governments cannot do things that individuals cannot do. (3) For example, governments can only keep and bear arms and defend their land because this power first exists in the individual to do the same for his own home or land. If that power does not exist in the individual then that individual could not have authorized his servant, the government, to perform that act.

Ends Never Justify Means

Why is it, then, that almost all men acquiesce to accepting and even supporting immoral acts when carried out “legally.” Does legality make it any better in the eyes of heaven? Does it cause less suffering and grief to an individual to know his money has been taken by many people as opposed to a single thief?

The end may seem noble. Perhaps we feel we should support laws that force people to pay taxation that goes towards the medical care of others or to those struggling in poverty. But ends do not justify means. God does not want us to do good because we are forced; he wants us to do good because we want to do it. He does not force people to do good, neither should we – as individuals or through government.

Law is about punishing those who intentionally seek to infringe upon or rob us of our God-given rights to life (or person), liberty and property. Law is a negative, not a positive. (4)

Imagine for a moment that your child fell seriously ill and you went down your street and compelled people to pay for the much-needed treatment. How would you feel about that? You'd feel terrible, right? Now, if we support the very same method through government

we are doing the self-same thing except we are having a third party do it for us. It makes us feel less guilty (it is after all anonymous), but is it really any different? Is it more moral?

There is a Solution

I have spoken to many people on this subject and very many will come back with the response: "But if we don't use government to do these things they won't get done and people will "suffer."

Of course there are two points to be made here. Firstly, would I be justified in robbing banks if I sent the money off to worthy causes? I could argue that people will die if I am arrested and my bank-raiding spree halted. Perhaps people really would die. Nevertheless, the end does not make the means right.

Secondly, government officers are not endowed with more intelligence, business-mindedness, or compassion than private citizens and organizations. Charities, churches, private businesses and organizations have proved themselves far more effective than governments in solving a whole host of problems. America fared extremely well under a full free enterprise system until it began to be corrupted by government intervention in the first part of the Twentieth Century.

In this connection let's look back at Satan's plan again. He, the devil, taught in the pre-existence that mankind would not choose correctly if given freedom. Here's how Ezra Taft Benson put it – and its modern-day meaning in *this* life; note well his words as they are the crux of the whole argument:

"Satan argued that men given their freedom would not choose correctly; therefore he would compel them to do right and save us all. Today Satan argues that men given their freedom do not choose wisely; therefore a so-called brilliant, benevolent few must establish the welfare government and force us into a greater socialistic society." (Ezra Taft Benson, General Conference, April 1965)

Forsaking Our Political Sins as a People

This puts current political practices in a very bad light – and, more to the point, our support of them might be putting us in a very dangerous position, a position where, though called, we may not be chosen. Could we be in danger of losing our eternal reward just as those who were deceived by Lucifer in the pre-existence forfeited their reward? Those spirits, unwittingly perhaps, threw everything away because they did not want to lose anything. Today are we falling into the trap of imperiling our eternal blessings by trading our own freedoms (and those of others) for a security which is in reality as vain as the promise of the premortal Satan, that he would save all souls that not one should be lost.

Listen to these sobering words from Marion G. Romney:

"We who hold the priesthood must beware concerning ourselves, that we do not fall into the traps [Satan] lays to rob us of our freedom. We must be careful that we are not led to accept or support in any way any organization, cause or measure which in

its remotest politics, government, religion, employment, education, or in any other field. It is not enough for us to be sincere in what we support. We must be right!"
(Marion G. Romney, Conference, October 1960)

Notice he says we should not support any measure which in its "remotest efforts" jeopardizes free agency. Could it be that most of us are actually falling foul of this deception and supporting the wrong side? (5)

David O. McKay clarified the modern meaning of this War in Heaven thus:

"Those [two contending forces] are known and have been designated by different terms throughout the ages. In the beginning they were known as Satan on the one hand, and Christ on the other... In these days, they are called 'domination by the state' on one hand, 'personal liberty' on the other... two forces are at work. There might be a conflagration such as the world has never known." (David O. McKay, BYU, May 18, 1960)

J. Reuben Clark made a similar statement when he said:

*"Reduced to its lowest terms, the great struggle which now rocks the whole earth more and more takes on the character of a struggle of the individual versus the state."
(J. Reuben Clark, as quoted by Ezra Taft Benson, April 5, 1965, General Conference)*

As Latter-day Saints, as people who believe in political and spiritual freedom, we need to think carefully about our decisions. Some feel that we should leave politics alone, that we have no need to worry about this subject. But politics is really the name for the battle over free agency today. Can we honestly say that the pre-existent cause we once were soldiers in now no longer needs our support? Has agency become less valuable?

Conclusion: Our Responsibility

John Taylor proclaimed:

"Besides the preaching of the Gospel, we have another mission, namely, the perpetuation of the free agency of man and maintenance of liberty, freedom and the rights of man." (Journal of Discourses, 23:63)

We must step back from the political beliefs (i.e. our beliefs about freedom and government) that have originated from our culture and our education and take the brave course of measuring them against eternal truths concerning agency and the God-given rights of all God's children. We must act in faith and not fear. We must accept that it is better that a person do something badly for himself (so they can learn and grow) than it is to have it done for them by others (no matter how efficient, convenient or even how well they do it). We must realize, in short, that the whole Gospel Plan is about individual liberty, about nurturing that little bit of omnipotence that is in us all. Do we have the courage to do so or will we hide behind government?

"...the Lord has so endowed this matter of freedom with such everlasting repercussions that it sifted the spirits of men before this world in the Great War in heaven. And it

seems today to be the central issue that is sifting those who are left in the world.” (Ezra Taft Benson, July 4, 1966, New England Rally for God, Family and Country)

Let’s make sure that, when the sifting is done, we are found on the right side.

End Notes...

1. “I refer to the fundamental principle of the gospel, free agency. References in the scriptures show that it is essential to man’s salvation and may be a measuring rod by which the actions of men, of organizations and of Nations may be judged.” (David O. McKay, General Conference, April 1940)
2. “The war that began in heaven over this issue [freedom of choice] is not yet over. The conflict continues on the battle field of mortality. And one of Lucifer’s primary strategies has been to restrict our agency through the power of earthly governments.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *The Constitution – A Glorious Standard*, BYU devotional, 1968)
3. “Government activity which...poses a grave danger to our continued freedom, is the activity not within the proper sphere of government. No one has authority to grant such power as welfare programs, schemes for redistributing the wealth, and activities which coerce people into acting within accordance with a prescribed code of social planning. There is one simple test. Do I as an individual have a right to use force upon my neighbor to accomplish this goal? If I do have such a right, then I may delegate that power to my government to exercise on my behalf. If I do not have that right as an individual, then I cannot delegate it to government, and I cannot ask my government to perform the act for me... An important test I use in passing judgment upon an act of government is this: If it were up to me as an individual to punish my neighbor for violating a given law, would it offend my conscience to do so?” (Ezra Taft Benson, February 29, 1968, Utah Forum for the American Idea, Salt Lake City, Utah).
4. “When the law, by means of its necessary agent, force, imposes upon men a regulation of labor, a method or a subject of education, a religious faith or creed – then the law is no longer negative; it acts positively upon people. It substitutes the will of the legislator for their own wills; the initiative of the legislator for their own initiatives. When this happens, the people no longer need to discuss, to compare, to plan ahead; the law does all this for them. Intelligence becomes a useless prop for the people; they cease to be men; they lose their personality; their liberty, their property.” (Bastiat, *The Law*, p. 25).
5. Consider this in light of the Church Statement on Communism of 1966: “No member of this Church can be true to his faith...while lending aid, encouragement, or sympathy to any of these false philosophies [communism/socialism/welfarism.]” Commenting upon this, Elder H. Verlan Andersen wrote, “almost all men may be guilty of such disloyalty.” (*The Book of Mormon and the Constitution*, p. 17).

Recommended Primers

The Proper Role of Government by Ezra Taft Benson. A short and powerful essay on the fundamental principles of what government is and is not, what it should do and what it should not. Read an online version at Zionbest.com.

The Law by Frederic Bastiat. Classic work on the proper role of law in a just society; often quoted by Ezra Taft Benson and other Church leaders. Get a free electronic copy (or the print version) by subscribing to the *Constitutional Broadside Newsletter* at <http://www.thecbn.net>.

The Book of Mormon and the Constitution by H. Verlan Andersen (get a free electronic copy of the companion to this book, *The Moral Basis of a Free Society*, at <http://www.ldsfreedomportal.net>).

Recommended Further Reading

Persuasion versus Force by Mark Skousen. Of this excellent article Gordon B. Hinckley wrote: "I have read with appreciation your talk... Would the world and its leaders might follow the philosophies set forth therein... keep speaking along these lines. It is a message that needs constant repetition." Read it at <http://www.mskousen.com/Books/PvF/pvftest.html>

Cliches of Politics, Mark Spangler, editor. Contains over 80 articles by varying authors each of whom address and eloquently answer the most common arguments and sophistries of Big Government adherents. "Anyone concerned with dispelling the myths that fuel endless pleas for political solutions will find this volume invaluable." (Congressman Ron Paul, M.D.). An interesting site is being set up at cliches.org but if this is not working try fee.org and do a search for the book.

About the Author

Darren Andrews is a writer and publisher who also dabbles in Internet marketing. He began studying the words of LDS leaders on political matters in 1992 and, realizing that this was an area of the gospel that few members knew anything about, set up a resource for LDS at <http://www.ldsfreedomportal.net> and for freedom-loving people generally at www.freedom-central.net. He later founded the *Constitutional Banner Newsletter* (<http://www.thecbn.net>). He lives in England where he is currently serving as his ward's executive secretary. You can contact him through the above websites.