

## GOD AND GOVERNMENT

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## SCRIPTURE READING:

And again I say unto you, Those who have been scattered by their enemies, it is my will that they should continue to importune for redress and redemption, by the hands of those who are placed as rulers, and are in authority over you, according to the laws and constitution of the people which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles, that every man may act in doctrine, and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto them, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another. And for this purpose have I established the constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood.

(Section 98, Paragraph 10, Book of Doctrine and Covenants. This revelation was given to the Saints who were driven out of Jackson County in November 1833, instructing them as to their attitude towards government.)

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"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,  
 and unto God the things that are God's."

God is interested in government. He himself is the great ruler of heaven and earth and sky and sea -- the ruler of the universe about us. He has never abdicated nor surrendered his right to rule in the affairs of men and of nations. When he chose Israel to be his people, the government which he instituted among them was a theocracy -- a government of God as King and Ruler, through his prophets and judges. When the people clamored for Gideon to be a king and rule over them, after his victory over the Midianites, Gideon said, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." (Judges 8:23) Later, when the people demanded that Samuel should choose them a king, Samuel at first refused, but then was given this instruction from God: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." (I Sam. 8:7) Samuel chose a king, but charged the people: "Ye have this day rejected your God;" (I Sam. 10:19) and have demanded a king to reign over you "when the Lord your God was your King." (I Sam. 12:12) As late as Daniel's day, it was still recognized that God was above all kings and thrones and empires, for Daniel said, "He removeth kings, and setteth up kings." (2:21)

Because God is ruler over all, every earthly ruler and every earthly government exists by his sufferance; and each one is judged as to the way worldly government is administered and executed. Nations and their rulers rise and stand, or crumble and fall according to whether or not they rule wisely, righteously, and well -- in keeping with the laws of the great overseeing Ruler, God.

Why do governments exist? There are three principal theories which we want to examine briefly. The first is that governments exist for the benefit of the rulers, who because God gave them their strength, their cunning, and their wealth assume that God meant them to rule, and use their gifts and their position to enrich themselves

and entrench themselves in power for their own selfish aggrandizement.. A second theory of government is that the state is the all-important thing, that the citizen exists only to serve, to support, to defend, and to enrich the state -- that the state is the end and aim and purpose of all human existence. And the third theory of government, which is the theory upon which all democracy is based, is that -- governments are instituted among men for the sole purpose of preserving, protecting, and defending the rights, privileges, liberties, freedoms, and prerogatives which are an inherent part of every man's birthright. The Declaration of Independence asserts; "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Latter Day Saints feel that their sacred literature has something worth while to contribute to the world's philosophy of government. The hard central core of this philosophy is a firm and unswerving belief in man's free moral will or agency. No other church can believe in agency and free moral will in quite the same way or to quite the same extent that we do, because our sacred books contain much teaching about this principle which is not available to those who receive only the King James or Authorized Bible as Scripture. The Bible hints at, but does not give us very many of the facts about the war in heaven before the creation of earth, in which Lucifer and one third of the hosts of heaven were cast out. What was the cause of that war? What was the issue at stake?

The Inspired Version of the Scriptures, corrected by the Spirit of Inspiration through Joseph Smith, has some added information which answers those questions. In Chapter III of the Book of Genesis in this Inspired Version, we are told that Lucifer, or Satan, came before God with a proposal that he would go to earth to redeem mankind, and would guarantee that not one soul should be lost; but as reward for this service, he demanded that he should receive the glory and honor of God himself. Now notice carefully this verse on agency: "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 him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten 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." In other words, AGENCY was the cause of the war in heaven. Satan exercised his agency to become what he was. The war in heaven was about agency. Satan wanted to destroy agency; God was so concerned about conserving it that he resisted with force, and cast the rebellious would-be tyrants out of his presence. Ever since that day, Satan has been trying to destroy and take away man's agency on the earth, as he once tried to do in heaven before the earth was created. Jesus offered rather to come to earth on God's terms, inviting men to believe in and obey him and his gospel law, asking no glory or honor for himself, but willing always to say, "Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine for ever."

God continued to follow the principle of free moral will and agency when he placed man and woman in the garden of Eden. He placed before them there a choice; eat of any tree in the garden except one, and live. Eat of that one forbidden tree, and die. Adam and Eve made their choice, disobeyed God, and brought death into the world -- death which because of its physical nature was inherited by all their posterity.

What was the effect of this single tragic choice? Listen carefully and think through this statement carefully, because at first it sounds like nonsense. This one choice made all other possible choices meaningless and worthless, because this one

all-important choice made it impossible ever to choose life again, unless God should miraculously intervene and provide some plan by which some kind of life might again be made possible and available through some other choice. Unless God did perform this miracle of grace, man could spend his whole lifetime in making foolish and wicked choices, and the end would be death. But if he spent his whole lifetime making wise and righteous choices, and trying to obey God, the end would likewise have been death, unless God had intervened to provide a way of life, so that men by their choices could find that way. This is the crux, the most highly significant and most often overlooked aspect of Christ's atonement. By that atonement which was preached to Adam in the beginning, Jesus provided a way of life, so that men now had an alternative to death, and by choosing to believe in and follow him, could escape from the inevitability of death. Note these words from the Book of Mormon, in which the principle is beautifully expressed: "The Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free for ever, knowing good from evil; To act for themselves, and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the Lord, at the great and last day.....Wherefore, men are free....to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil." (II Nephi 1:116-120) In other words, man's right of agency and free choice is so important that Christ gave himself in the atonement that this right of agency might be preserved for all time.

If this be true (and every Christian cannot but admit that it is) then it is not difficult at all to see why God is interested in government, and why he is concerned that government should be of the type which will conserve, protect, safeguard, and cherish this freedom. Government at its best should be a free and voluntary association of free men, united to protect and conserve their freedom, their rights, and their free moral agency. It is not right that any man should be in bondage to another. It is not right that any man should be compelled by another, unless he must be compelled to respect the freedoms and rights of others. There is no accountability for acts, unless they are done of a person's own free will -- no commendation due for good acts -- no condemnation due for bad acts, unless they are acts freely done, of one's own free moral will and agency. Rights and freedoms must therefore be preserved in order that there may be accountability for the deeds done in the flesh.

We believe that the state, or the government, has no right to interfere in any man's religious worship, so long as that worship does not jeopardize the rights or freedoms of others; in other words, there should be a complete separation of church and state. Not only should there be no dictation from the state as to religious observances, but there should be no dictation of the church to the state in an attempt to purchase for any church or sect special privileges or preferment in the treatment accorded by the government. The church's members should be actively interested in politics, in good government and in the affairs of the state, to the extent that they will habitually seek for, uphold, and sustain good and honorable men in office, and will help to create and maintain the pressures of an informed public opinion on vital issues which the people, through their representatives in government, must decide.

We believe that it is the right and duty of each citizen of a state who receives the protection of its government to keep its laws. "Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land." (Doctrine and Covenants 58:5) When a citizen does break civil law, it is the duty of the church and of her individual members to deliver the offender up to the state for prescribed legal punishment. The only punishment which the church may administer for crime is excommunication.

We believe that it is the duty of government to protect its citizens -- individually and collectively -- against crime or violence or loss of rights and freedoms, whether the threat comes from within or without the state. And since the state is not some nebulous entity completely separate from its citizens, but is actually the citizens themselves, it is the right of all citizens to protect and preserve the government that protects and preserves them and their families -- not only the right, but their duty to do so, even to the point of bearing arms to put down civil insurrection at home, or foreign aggression from abroad,

In this generation when we have seen so many desperate and clever attempts to destroy the agency of whole nations and peoples, to deprive them of life, liberty, property, and all possibility of happiness, to bind them in chains behind the iron curtain, in concentration and slave camps, and in extermination camps, we need to think through carefully again the relationship between Christ's atonement and sacrifice for us, and the freedoms we enjoy. Every freedom we have stems from and is made significant by the right to choose life or death, which Christ's atonement made possible. God's way is always the way of freedom and agency. The devil's way is always the way of captivity, of slavery, of the denial of every human right, and eventually of death. Let us then uphold every government, every church, every organization of whatever kind, which seeks the freedom of men, for freedom is the way of God, and this way was purchased for us with the life of God's own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.