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Free Agency

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CHAPTER IV

Free Agency

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS A FREE PEOPLE. We will now present before the conference the names of the general authorities of the Church, with the earnest desire that all the members of the Church present, who by reason of their good standing before the Lord are entitled to the privilege, will express their will according to the God-given agency that every man in the world enjoys, and which is not lessened, but rather increased, in all those who have made covenant with God by sacrifice and through obedience to the principles of the gospel. The freedom of the Latter-day Saints has never been curtailed nor lessened one whit by their becoming members of the Church of Christ. Rather has it been enlarged. There are no freer people upon the face of the earth today than the Latter-day Saints. They are bound to the Church by no ties or strings, but their own conviction of the truth. And whenever a man makes up his mind that he has had enough of what is called "Mormonism," all he has to do is to make it known, and we will sever the bond that unites him with the body and let him go his own way, only bearing toward him the feeling of sympathy and of true brotherly kindness, and wishing him still the mercies of God. We will cry, "Father, have mercy upon him," because he knows not what he is doing. For when a man denies the truth, when he departs from the right way, when he rejects the right of God to counsel in the affairs of men, he is either ignorant or wilfully wicked, and it only excites our pity for him. As the Savior cried upon the cross, so we will cry in the same spirit, Father, forgive him; have mercy upon him; for he knows not what he does.

Therefore, we expect only those to vote at this time who are members of the Church in good standing; but all such we do expect to vote, according to their own free will, whether it be yea or nay. However, we wish it distinctly understood that no questions upon these matters will be discussed in this conference; for this is not the place to discuss questions of difference or of feeling that we may possess one towards another. Still we can manifest our approval or our disapproval by the uplifted hand; and if there are any disapprovals, we will have them heard and adjusted later on, but not here.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1903, p. 84.

THE USE OF FREEDOM AND HUMAN JUDGMENT. I think that in the realms of liberty, and the exercise of human judgment, all men should exercise extreme caution, that they do not change or abolish those things which God has willed and has inspired to be done. It has been in this realm of freedom, and the exercise of human judgment that most of the evils that have occurred in the world have been done—the martyrdom of Saints, the crucifixion of the Son of God himself, and much of the apostasy and departure from the work of righteousness, and from the laws of God, have occurred in this realm of freedom and the exercise of human judgment. God in his boundless wisdom and gracious mercy has provided means, and has shown the way to the children of men whereby, even in the realms of freedom and the exercise of their own judgment, they may individually go unto God in faith and prayer, and find out what should guide and direct their human judgment and wisdom; and I do not want the Latter-day Saints to forget that this is their privilege. I would rather that they should seek God for a counselor and guide, than to follow the wild harangues of political leaders, or leaders of any other cult.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1912, p. 41-42.

LATTER-DAY SAINTS SHOULD EXERCISE FREE AGENCY. We desire that the Latter-day Saints will exercise the liberty

wherewith they have been made free by the gospel of Jesus Christ; for they are entitled to know the right from the wrong, to see the truth and draw the line between it and error; and it is their privilege to judge for themselves and to act upon their own free agency with regard to their choice as to sustaining or otherwise those who should exercise the presiding functions among them. We desire the Latter-day Saints at this conference to exercise their prerogative, which is, to vote as the Spirit of the Lord prompts them on the measures and the men that may be presented unto them.—*Apr. C. R.*, 1904, p. 73.

HOW TO OBTAIN BLESSINGS OF GOD. There are blessings which pertain to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the world to come, which cannot be secured by personal influence, nor be bought with money, and which no man by his own intelligence or wisdom can obtain except through compliance with certain ordinances, laws and commandments which have been given. And it is well, in my judgment, for the Latter-day Saints to continue to bear in mind that the inestimable blessings of the gospel have been bestowed upon them through their faith, that a remission of sins has been obtained by baptism and repentance, and that it is only through continuing faithful that they can retain the gifts and blessings which pertain to eternal life. There are many blessings, however, which are common to the human family, which all enjoy, without regard to their moral status or religious convictions. God has given to all men an agency, and has granted to us the privilege to serve him or serve him not, to do that which is right or that which is wrong, and this privilege is given to all men irrespective of creed, color or condition. The wealthy have this agency, the poor have this agency, and no man is deprived by any power of God from exercising it in the fullest and in the freest manner. This agency has been given to all. This is a blessing that God has bestowed upon the world of mankind, upon all

his children alike. But he will hold us strictly to an account for the use that we make of this agency, and as it was said of Cain, so it will be said of us: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." There are, however, certain blessings which God bestows upon the children of men only upon the condition of the rightful exercise of this agency. For instance, no man can obtain a remission of his sins but by repentance and baptism by one having authority. If we would be free from sin, from its effects, from its power, we must obey this law which God has revealed, or we never can obtain a remission of sins. Therefore, while God has bestowed upon all men, irrespective of condition, this agency to choose good or evil, he has not and will not bestow upon the children of men a remission of sins but by their obedience to law. Therefore, the whole world lies in sin and is under condemnation, inasmuch as light has come unto the world and men will not place themselves in a proper position before the Lord. And this condemnation rests with tenfold force upon all who have yielded obedience to this law, and have once received a remission of their sins, but have returned unto sin, and have forgotten or disregarded the covenants they made in the waters of baptism. All men are blessed with the strength of their bodies, with the use of their minds, and with the right to exercise the faculties with which they are endowed in a way that seemeth good to their sight, without regard to religion. But God has not and will not suffer the gift of the Holy Ghost to be bestowed upon any man or woman, except through compliance with the laws of God. Therefore, no man can obtain a remission of sins; no man can obtain the gift of the Holy Ghost; no man can obtain the revelations of God; no man can obtain the priesthood, and the rights, powers and privileges thereof; no man can become an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ, except through compliance with the requirements of heaven. These are uni-

versal blessings, they are great and inestimable privileges which pertain to the gospel and to the plan of life and salvation, which are open and free to all on certain conditions, but which no persons beneath the heavens can enjoy, but through walking in the channel that God has marked out by which they can obtain them. And these privileges and blessings when obtained may be forfeited, and perhaps lost for all eternity, unless we continue steadfast in the course that is marked out for us to pursue. It is well, in my judgment, that the Latter-day Saints do not lose sight of the great privilege that has been bestowed upon them. No man can become a citizen of the kingdom of God but by entering in at the door; there are thousands and tens of thousands, aye, millions of people who will never become citizens of the Kingdom of God in this world, because they fail to exercise the agency and the power that have been given to them, in the right direction. Nevertheless, they enjoy many of the blessings that are bestowed upon the world in common. The sun shines upon the evil and the good; but the Holy Ghost descends only upon the righteous, and upon those who are forgiven of their sins. The rain descends upon the evil and upon the good; but the rights of the priesthood are conferred, and the doctrine of the priesthood distils as the dews of heaven upon the souls of those only who receive it in God's own appointed way. The favor of heaven, the acknowledgment of the Almighty of his children upon the earth as his sons and his daughters, can only be secured through obedience to the laws which he has revealed. Riches, or the wealth of the world, cannot purchase these things. Simon Magus desired to purchase the power to cast out devils with money, but Peter said unto him, "Thy money perish with thee." These blessings, powers and privileges are not to be purchased except by the atonement of Christ; they are not to be obtained by personal influence, wealth, position or power, or in any other way except the direct way

in which God has decreed that they should be obtained. Now, so long as the Latter-day Saints are content to obey the commandments of God, to appreciate the privileges and blessings which they enjoy in the Church, and will use their time, their substance, in honor to the name of God, to build up Zion, and to establish truth and righteousness in the earth, so long our heavenly Father is bound by his oath and covenant to protect them from every opposing foe, and to help them to overcome every obstacle that can possibly be arrayed against them, or thrown in their pathway; but the moment a community begins to be wrapt up in themselves, becomes selfish, becomes engrossed in the temporalities of life, and put their faith in riches, that moment the power of God begins to withdraw from them, and if they repent not the Holy Spirit will depart from them entirely, and they will be left to themselves. That which was given them will be taken away, they will lose that which they had, for they will not be worthy of it. God is just, as well as merciful, and we need not expect favors at the hand of the Almighty except as we merit them, at least in the honest desires of our hearts, and the desire and intent will not always avail unless our acts correspond. For we are engaged in a literal work, a reality; and we must practice as well as profess. We must be what God requires us to be, or else we are not his people, nor the Zion which he designs to gather together and to build up in the latter days upon the earth.—*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 24, 1884, pp. 173-178.