

Why Are We Here?

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Introduction

Nephi was shown by an angel that were *many plain and precious thing taken away from the Bible*. And "because of the many plain and precious thing which have been taken out of the book . . . an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi 13:29). Certainly the confusion of doctrine in the traditional Christian world gives much evidence that there has been something lost--something most fundamental and precious. The most significant of these losses relate to some of the very most important questions of life: *Who are we? Why are we here? Why does God care? Why is Satan here? Why does God allow evil? Why did God allow Adam to sin? What was the effect of the Fall? What must man do to receive salvation?* The Christian world has struggled with these questions and they have some answers.⁽¹⁾

What the Christian World Believes

Here is one protestant minister's explanation of the purpose of this life--God's plan for man, or what John MacArthur calls *Christianity's Big Picture*:

God created us so that there would be a group of people who would give Him the glory He deserves. A rebellion had begun in the Garden of Eden, yet God set out to redeem humanity. By His marvelous sovereign wisdom, He called rebellious humanity back to a place of giving Him glory. His goal in salvation is to bring believers to glory--to create an eternally redeemed community of people who are Christ like--and let Christ stand as the preeminent One, receiving worship and praise forever. . . The ultimate reason God is conforming you into Christ's image is so you will be able to give glory to the One who is most glorious. . . it's not our happiness or our holiness that is the apex of His divine purpose--glorifying His Son is.⁽²⁾

Another popular minister and writer, Dr. R. C. Sproul, uses an interesting and entertaining analogy to emphasize his belief that man is totally dependent on God for his salvation. He first reviews an analogy of salvation that pictures the sinner as a drowning man to whom God throws a life preserver. It's to this analogy that Sproul responds. He begins by referring to Paul's declaration in Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins," then declares:

Paul says the man is dead. He is not merely drowning, he has already sunk to the bottom of the sea. It is futile to throw a life preserver to a man who has already drowned. If I understand Paul, I hear him saying that God dives into the water and pulls a dead man from the bottom of the sea and then performs a divine act of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He breathes into the dead man new life.⁽³⁾

Sproul certainly sees God as proactive; He dives right in and gets the job done. Sproul says that this dead man is the *natural man*, any man or woman who has not yet been changed by God. Sproul's natural man is not just resistant to gospel truth, he is totally unresponsive--he's dead to Christ. Sproul teaches that in this *absolute bondage of sin* the man or woman cannot choose to accept Christ until they are first *changed* by God. Dr. Sproul continues his description of this *mighty change* by explaining how this process preserves man's free will:

Natural man does not want Christ. He will only want Christ if God plants a desire for Christ in his heart. Once that desire is planted, those who come to Christ do not come kicking and screaming against their wills. They come because they want to come. They now desire Jesus. They rush to the Savior. The whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens someone to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in his irresistible sweetness. Jesus is irresistible to those who have been made alive to the things of God. Every soul whose heart beats with the life of God within it longs for the living Christ. All whom the Father gives to Christ come to Christ (John 6:37).⁽⁴⁾

It is this change, described here by Sproul, that the Christian world teaches as the meaning of "born again." The *born again* Christian believes that they have been changed by God from a desire for sin to a desire for Christ.⁽⁵⁾ Some of my Evangelical friends have even told me that Satan can no longer tempt them--they say that they "are now in bondage to the will of Christ." In each case, man's will is called free because he continues to do exactly what he wants to do.

Lehi's Teachings

In his teachings, directed to his son Jacob, Lehi demonstrates a perspective on this life that is considerably different from that of Dr. MacArthur and Dr. Sproul. Lehi tells us that, "Man is that he might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). He tells us that far from the catastrophe seen by the Christian world, the Fall was a *necessary* part of God's plan for man's salvation. He even says that Satan is a required part of that plan! (2 Nephi 2:16-17.) That would blow the mind of most of the world's Christian scholars.

In these few verses Lehi teaches the truth of another part of our Father's plan which the world has rejected: "the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, *their state became a state of probation*" (2 Nephi 2:21). That man lives this life in "a state of probation" could not be acceptable to MacArthur or Sproul. Both claim that it is God who starts the process of salvation and "what God starts God will certainly finish." Man is just to go along for the ride. Yes, he must repent--that's the evidence that God is working in his life. They would claim that repentance does not come by the volition of the individual but is an act of God--it is by the grace of God. For man to exist in a *state of probation* he must be free to act for himself--free to direct his own desires--free to make a choice between God and Satan. And Lehi declares that man is *free*! (2 Nephi 2:26-27.)

This freedom to choose between God and Satan is called *agency*. Agency is the *opportunity* to choose between *truth* and *error*, *good* and *evil*, *God* and *Satan*.⁽⁶⁾ The declaration that God has given man *agency* is the affirmation that God always gives to His sons and daughters both the opportunity and obligation to make a choice between that which they know to be good and true and that which they know to be wrong. The doctrine of agency is a proclamation that *man's will is free*! His *desire* is his own responsibility to direct. True, the addiction of sin may fetter his desire, but he must come to *want* to be clean *before* he can be purified by the Spirit and set free. This is each man's choice as he makes his free determination of the path he will follow through life.

It is also important to note that the full exercise of this *agency* requires knowledge of the truth. Man can only choose between that error which he recognizes and that truth which he knows. I've heard some say that in our efforts to teach the gospel we are attempting to take away the agency of our friends and contacts. Nothing could be further from the truth. The limiting forces of agency are addiction and ignorance.

Though he has agency, no man is *free* to accept the gospel message until he has been given a proper understanding of that message. Isn't this exactly what Paul meant when he asked: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14.) When As we share the gospel message we only increase the agency of the recipient. True, they may use that agency to reject our message. But, they have not rejected the message, they cannot reject the message, until after they have been given that message.

The Fall and Satan are Part of the Plan

To the Christian world the most disturbing part of Lehi's view of God's plan is the clear implication that Satan is a necessary part of God's plan. As a missionary I was teaching a family who seemed to be very excited about our message. They were reading the Book of Mormon and they were prepared to start coming to church. But, on our third visit we received a very cold, even hostile welcome. The family had progressed in their reading to 2 Nephi 2:2. They understood Lehi's teaching. They asked us to leave saying, "We want nothing to do with a church that teaches that God wants Satan to tempt man." This is accurately what Lehi teaches. Satan is part of God's plan!

A focus of both Catholic and Protestant theology is the evil influence of Satan. They see Satan's power over men

as the most serious of the tragedies of Adam's Fall. Many of today's Christians see this as an enslaving power which binds man to Satan with an unconditional disposition for sin and an absolute rejection of Jesus Christ. Dr. Sproul, building on the traditional Christian understanding of this disposition, explains his view of Christ's "plan of redemption": "Without a desire for Christ we will never choose Christ. Therefore we conclude that before anyone ever will believe, before anyone can believe, *God* must first change the disposition of his heart."⁽⁷⁾ There is considerable truth in this. Satan deals in distortion and has here done little more than distort man's attitude about a truth regarding his nature. Man certainly is born with a disposition for sin; and it is only through the atonement of Christ and the influence of the Spirit that man can be freed from that disposition. However, far from seeing this disposition to sin as a curse, LDS theology regards this as one of mortality's greatest and most fundamental blessings. This disposition to sin is a necessary condition of *agency*. This understanding is beautifully expressed in the following excerpt from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*:

Opposition is a fundamental feature of mortality, where human actions and choices are made within the possibility of doing wrong, where acceptance of the commandments and teachings of God is done in the face of opposition and temptation.⁽⁸⁾

In a world view that sees this disposition to sin as the greatest evil, a world view that equates this disposition with Satan's power and Satan's realm, this LDS view of Adam's Fall is strange and almost incomprehensible. Even for many Latter-day Saints, this concept is difficult to accept. Yet, all can understand the necessity for opposition and challenge. A short anecdote might make these benefits and blessings of the Fall more apparent.

The story is told of a man who died and found himself in a wondrous place. On inquiry he learned that anything he wanted would be provided: any kind of food, any recreation, any entertainment; he needed only to ask and it was his. He was further told that he had no responsibilities, no work to do, no obligations of any kind. "What a wonderful place," he thought. However, as time passed, he grew restive with this life of ease and indulgence. It had no purpose. There was no achievement, no accomplishment, no satisfaction. Finally he said to the one who seemed in charge, "Give me something to do before I lose my mind!" He was told that this was the one thing that could not be given to him. He responded, "Then I don't want to stay in this place any longer. Send me to HELL!" At which the man in charge asked, "*Where do you think you are?*"

We are not here on earth just to relax and have fun. God intends us to become like His Only Begotten Son. But we will not just be automatically *changed* into "Christ like" beings. We are here to *learn* how to *live like Christ*. While Christ lived a sinless life, He did not live a life without temptation or trouble. A life of ease and enjoyment can never produce a Christlike character. Challenges in the form of tasks to do and pleasures to shun are necessary if we are to become the men and women our Father would have us be. Christ was tempted both to do and to not do, and He overcame. We are here to *learn* to do the same. He became perfect. We are *commanded* to do the same. Challenges, opposition, the trials of life, and our sinful nature *are* the fruits of the Fall and *they are our teachers*. It is to give us the opportunity to endure these experiences that this earth was created and man placed here in mortality. Joseph Smith expressed the value of these *blessings* of the Fall in this reflection on his own life:

I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priest-craft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women--all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty.⁽⁹⁾

Of course, Satan must be part of God's plan. If God didn't want Satan on this earth tempting man, he wouldn't be here. Man is here to learn to obey God and God has made man:

. . . free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself (2 Nephi 2:27).

In Bondage to Satan?

The Christian world teaches that man is born in sin--more accurately, born a slave of sin, or a *slave of Satan*. They see all mortals, except Christ, having been born this way. They teach that only Christ can rescue us from this slavery. Abinadi expressed a similar view of mankind's mortal dilemma when he said, "all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God *redeemed* his people from their lost and fallen state" (Mosiah 16:4). *Redeemed*, as used here by Abinadi, is an interesting word. While *redeemed*, *redemption* and *redeemer* are comfortable staples of the LDS vocabulary, how clear is the symbolism associated with these terms? Why do prophets speak of the atonement as a *redemption*?

In the Bible both the Hebrew and Greek words translated "*redeemed*," "*redeemer*," and "*redemption*," refer to the act of paying a ransom, or buying back from a creditor. What *ransom* did Christ pay? Stephen Robinson reminds us that the scriptures frequently call Christ the *Master* and refer to His disciples as *servants*. He then makes an observation, which many of us might consider foreign to Latter-day Saint teachings:

Though some find it offensive, it is still true that the relationship alluded to by the biblical terms "servant" and "master" is the institution of slavery. In fact, the term "redeem" means literally "to buy back." Satan owned us, we were his slaves, and Christ bought us back⁽¹⁰⁾.

"*Satan owned us!*" Is this what Abinadi meant by a "*lost and fallen state*"? Jacob also taught this principle when he said that without the atonement "our spirits must have become like unto him [Satan], and we become devils . . ." (2 Nephi 9:9). Satan owned us and Christ, by His atonement, *bought us back!* This was the purpose of His sacrifice. Pat Robertson echoes this same teaching:

The word *redeemed* means to buy back a slave in the marketplace. Mankind was in bondage to the curse of the law, which is death. Under this analogy, the death of Jesus was the "ransom" needed to set us free from the bondage of the law, sin, and death.⁽¹¹⁾

Christ paid our ransom! With His own blood He bought us back from our bondage to Satan. We were slaves and Christ redeemed us. But, what does this really mean? Brother Robinson provides this profound observation regarding the significance of this redemption:

Jesus didn't buy us with his own blood so that we could belong to ourselves--we now belong to him. That's why he is the Master and we are his servants. And we therefore *owe* him our service; and we owe *him*. . . We are his servants, bought and paid for with his precious blood (1 Corinthians 6:20).⁽¹²⁾

He is the Master and We are His Servants

The Christian world is very much aware of the Biblical teaching regarding Christ role as our *master*. They point out that the title, "Lord," refers directly to this relationship. Christ is our *Savior*, he is also our *Lord*. He is our ruler, our Master. How then can we claim that we are *free*?

The Christian world's problem with man's free will is very closely related to their views of God's Sovereignty and Omnipotence. *Omnipotence* means that God has the *power* to do whatever He wants to do and *Sovereignty* means that He's in charge. Since God is both sovereign and omnipotent, He *always* gets to have His own way! This is a clear biblical doctrine with which Latter-day Saints agree. Why, then, is there no LDS *free will* dilemma? The difference is the LDS understanding of "*God's way*," what *God wants to do*. Remember John MacArthur's *Big Picture*: "it's not our happiness or our holiness that is the apex of His divine purpose--glorifying His Son is."

With this view of God's purpose, it should be easy to see why traditional Christians might be concerned about the status of their *free will*. As men and women, they want to be free, but they doubt that their freedom is in God's best interest. Remember, *God always gets His way*. If God wants men and women who will glorify His Son, why should He give them the agency to make their own decisions and behave contrary to His will? *Why would He give them free will?*

Christianity has not derived this view of the *will of God* versus the *will of man* from the Bible. It is totally the product of philosophers and theologians attempting to answer the Psalmist's question, "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (Psalms 8:4.) The question is not trivial. Why *did* Christ pay our ransom? Why *did* Christ *redeem* us? Traditional Christian theology teaches that man is no more than an evil and rebellious product of God's creative handiwork. From this perspective they have struggled with these questions: "Why does God care about man?" "Why did Christ condescend to come to earth?" "Why did He allow His creation to condemn Him, spit upon Him, and crucify Him?" Theologians have found part of their answer in Ephesians 1:3-5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath . . . chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, *according to the good pleasure of his will.*

From this teaching of Paul they conclude that the *saved* have been *chosen* for salvation by God "*according to the good pleasure of his will.*" But, again, *why does He care?* John MacArthur believes he knows why:

There is no other way to explain why He does it other than that He simply wants to. . . God gives us joy, peace, and a future in heaven. Those are all elements of His grace to sinners. But it's not our happiness or our holiness that is the apex of His divine purpose--glorifying His Son is. Christ is the central point of redemptive history--not us.⁽¹³⁾

They ask the question of God: "*Why art thou mindful of man?*" Not having God's answer, they have provided their own: "*To give Glory to My Son.*" But, God has answered this question. To His latter-day Prophet He has revealed a glorious BIG PICTURE, teaching us what God really wants to do: "*For behold, this is my work and my glory--to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man*" (Moses 1:39). The goal of Christ's redemption *is* our happiness and holiness. He redeemed us that He might glorify us. He has redeemed us that we might become, both *physically* and *spiritually*, like His son. *This* is His work and His Glory!

Yes. God is *sovereign*. Everything is done the way God wants it done, and *God wants man to be free*. Nephi's brother, Jacob, prophetically declared, "ye are free to act for yourselves" (2 Nephi 10:23). Samuel, the great Lamanite prophet, gives us this same assurance: "ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free" (Helaman 14:30). We do have a *sinful nature*, yet, we are *free!* We are free to acknowledge our sins. We are free to recognize good. We are free to understand truth. We are free to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives and through that Spirit receive a testimony of Jesus Christ. We are also free to reject God's truth and stay mired in a life of sin.

Agency is one of God's most precious gifts. Yes, Christ is our Lord and Master and we are *free*. All Christ wants of us is that we be *willingly to surrender that agency back to Him*. Elder Boyd K. Packer, testifies of the power and blessing of this surrender:

Obedience--that which God will never take by force--He will accept when freely given. And He will then return to you freedom that you can hardly dream of--the freedom to feel and to know, the freedom to do, and the freedom to *be*, at least a thousand fold more than we offer Him. Strangely enough, the key to freedom is obedience.

I would expose you this morning to some tender, innermost feelings on this matter of agency. Perhaps the greatest discovery of my life, without question the greatest commitment, came when finally I had the confidence in God that I would loan or yield my agency to Him--without compulsion or pressure, without any duress, as a single individual alone, by myself, no counterfeiting, nothing expected other than the privilege. In a sense, speaking figuratively, to take one's agency, that precious gift which the scriptures make plain is essential to life itself, and say, "I will do as thou directs," is afterward to learn that in so doing you possess it all the more.⁽¹⁴⁾

In Romans 8:17, Paul declares man's potential: to become "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." To be **heirs of God!** Now, there's a **BIG PICTURE!** Understanding this big picture the prophet Lehi could declare, "**Men are, that they might have joy**" (2 Nephi 2:25). God's will is to glorify man. Man is His offspring. Man is God's heir. Christ, our elder brother, is the example of both man's potential and obligation. Jesus Christ, our exemplar, the most capable of the inhabitants of this mortal sphere, said: "I can of mine own self do nothing; because I seek not

mine own will, but the will of the Father who hath sent me." Yes, God is *sovereign* and His *will* and His *work* and His *glory* is to help man to rise to his exalted potential--to become like Christ (1 John 3:2), *who is like his Father*.

Plain and Precious

Yes, there have been many plain and precious truths lost from the record of the Jews. These are significant truths. Truths which must be understood if God's plan for man is to make sense. These missing truths include:

Agency	The Nature of God
The Necessity of the Fall	The Nature of Man
The Place of Satan in the Plan	The Preexistence of Man
The Purpose of Mortality	The Potential of Man

The angel said to Nephi: "These last records [the Book of Mormon], which thou has seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first [the Bible] which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, **and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them**" (1 Nephi 13:40). This might lead one to believe that all of these truths must be taught in the Book of Mormon--but they're not!

The Book of Mormon is the Keystone!

The keystone of an arch is that stone on which the integrity of the whole structure depends. It doesn't carry all the weight; it may even be one of the smallest stones; but, remove it and the structure becomes unstable and may even fall. In the arch of modern revelation the Book of Mormon is the keystone. While all of the essential doctrines of the restoration are not presented there, the Book of Mormon is the witness.

For example, in this dispensation we first learned of the nature of God when a young boy knelt and prayed in a grove we now call *sacred*. The knowledge learned there is plain, precious, and essential to our understanding of our Father and His plan for the exaltation of man. While essential, this knowledge is not found in the Book of Mormon. Oh, having received that knowledge we might recognize that it was also understood by Book of Mormon prophets, just as we also recognize that it was understood by Paul and John. But, we really have to take that understanding to the book if we are to see it there. But the angel told Nephi that the Book of Mormon would "make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away." What evidence has God given for the truth of Joseph Smith testimony of his Sacred Grove vision? Isn't it the Book of Mormon? If the Book of Mormon is the word of God then Joseph saw and conversed with that heavenly being. If the Book of Mormon is the word of God then the Father and the Son have similar corporeal bodies and man has been created in the physical image of that Father.

The Book of Mormon is the *keystone*. If the Book of Mormon is the word of God then the Doctrine and Covenants is also the word of God and God has revealed to a later-day prophet that "*Man was also in the beginning with God*" (D&C 93:29). If the Book of Mormon is the word of God then God has also declared to that same prophet the plain and precious truth that men have the potential to become "*gods, even the sons of God*" (D&C 76:58). If the Book of Mormon is the word of God then the Book of Moses is the word of God, and the Book of Abraham is the word of God, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God's church and the men who have and do now lead this church are *prophets of God*! The Book of Mormon is the keystone!

Conclusion

The great Book of Mormon prophet, Nephi, saw the coming forth of the Bible and was able with spiritual eyes to assess the content of this sacred record. He gave this prophetic warning:

"Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God--because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an

exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi 13:29).

Throughout Christian history there have been many good men who have diligently searched for truth. Unfortunately, the source on which they have been taught to rely is incomplete. Many *plain and precious things have been taken away!* Thus, in their attempts to understand the effect of Adam's Fall, they have postulated warped concepts of God's purpose, man's nature, and man's ability to act as an agent in his own salvation.

One of the foremost of these missing truths is a clear understanding of *agency*. Free agency--that keystone in the gospel arch, the knife edge that separates Christ's way from Satan's way, the very foundation principle of the Plan of our Father--only a distorted shadow of its glory is yet visible in the sacred pages of the biblical text. Not only is the meaning of agency distorted, the knowledge of our pre-earthlife relationship to our Heavenly Father and His purposes for our earthly existence have been almost totally removed.

Beginning from a distorted view of man's relationship to God, many of these searchers for truth have interpreted the scriptural doctrine of man's bondage to Satan to mean that man does not have agency. They teach that man cannot choose Christ unless God *decides* to change that man and free him from Satan's grasp. They teach that salvation from his fallen state does not, can not, come as a result of any action or merit by man, but is a decision by God, made according to His good pleasure, for His own glory and that of His Son. They say that this is God's show here on earth and claim that the scriptural declaration that God is *sovereign* means that only God's will is *free*. These "truth seekers" say that God has *decided* who He will save and all the rest are damned--"all have sinned and none *deserve* salvation." It's that simple. If you're chosen to be one of the saved, you'll be saved--you can't prevent it. If you're not chosen to be saved, you'll be damned--you can do nothing to gain salvation. Yet, man's *will* is still said to be *free*, for all who are saved *will want to be saved* and all who are damned *will have no desire for salvation*. Thus, each gets what he or she wants: *Is not that free???*

In these latter days, in just four enlightening verses, the Lord has restored the kernel of those plain and precious truths so necessary to our understanding the significance of the Fall and the purpose of God's plan for His children. He has said:

- | ***Man was also in the beginning with God*** (D&C 93:29).
- | ***Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy*** (2 Nephi 2:25).
- | ***This is my work and my glory--to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man*** (Moses 1:39).
- | ***Ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free*** (Helaman 14:30).

The purpose of this life is to begin the process of making each of us like Jesus Christ. John said it clearly, "when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*" (1 John 3:2). Our mission, our work, is to become like Christ. Christ is our Savior and our exemplar. He came to teach us not only about God but also about ourselves--*to teach us our true nature and potential*.

There is no growth without choice; there is no choice without opposition, knowledge, and agency. Yes, we have been born *natural men*, and "because of the fall our natures have become evil continually" (Ether 3:2). Nevertheless, our Father has not abandoned us to the bondage of Satan. He has provided a sacred guide: "For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil" (Moroni 7:16). Our task is to yield to the promptings of that *light* within us. We will then receive the greater light of the Holy Spirit and put "off the natural man and [become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord" (Mosiah 3:19).

While we must accept the Spirit as our guide, we are not His slaves. If we are to be the *heirs of God*, we must want to follow the whisperings of that holy guide. We must, *ask* for His direction, we must *seek* to understand His prompting, we must *knock* upon the door of service and give of ourselves to our Father's children. We must *yield* our agency to Him who would never take that agency from us. All things have been given us which are expedient; and we are free to choose liberty and eternal life, or to choose captivity and death (See 2 Nephi 2:27).

References:

1. The material presented in the paper draws heavily from the author's book, *Understanding These Other Christians*, chapter 10, "What Are the Effects of the Fall?"
2. John MacArthur, *Save Without a Doubt*, pp. 57-8.
3. R. C. Sproul, Op., Cit., pp. 116.
4. Ibid., p. 122-3.
5. It is universally acknowledged that some who claim this "born again" change have not been changed. They may continue to pursue a worldly lifestyle. They may continue to have little interest in church and Christ. There are two responses: 1) They weren't really changed-- they just thought they were. 2) They will eventually be changed in the Lord's own due time.
6. Elder McConkie defines *agency* as: "the ability and freedom to choose good or evil" (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, AGENCY). Compare this with an Evangelical definition of free will: "The belief and feeling that the individual is capable of making uncaused decisions and actions which are devoid of external compulsion. The belief that the will is not determined or caused by anything but itself" (Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion*, p. 86). This definition of *free will* expresses well the sense of Elder McConkie's one word, "freedom." However, Elder McConkie's definition includes much more than *freedom*. Agency is also *the ability to choose good or evil*. *Ability* is more than *capability*. The *ability* to choose good or evil requires the *knowledge* of good and evil. (See Moroni 7:15-16, 2 Nephi 2:5, 26; Alma 29:5; Helaman 14:31. Also, study the full text of Elder McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* article, titled AGENCY.)
7. Sproul, *Chosen By God*, pp. 118-119.
8. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 2, MORTALITY.
9. *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Section Six ,1843-44, p. 304.
10. Robinson, *Following Christ*, pp. 81-82.
11. Robertson, Op. Cit., pp. 78-79.
12. Robinson, Op. Cit., p. 82.
13. Ibid., pp. 53, 57-58.
14. Boyd K. Packer, *"That All May Be Edified,"* pp. 256-57. This chapter, Obedience, is the transcript of a talk given to the BYU student body in December 1971. This talk has frequently been referred to under the title "I Want to Obey." I consider it the finest instruction I have ever heard or read on this subject.