

Agency

I suppose this essay wanders beyond the “musings” theme and into the realm of “pet peeve.” Please bear with me.

I don't know how many times I have heard someone comment that people who live under totalitarian regimes do not have their agency, or one who feels he is being unjustly used¹ may claim that someone else is limiting his agency. Both of these arguments make me want to scream loudly. They misrepresent what agency truly is. I think the clearest definition of what agency means to the Lord is found in 2 Nephi 2:26,27.

And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given. Wherefore, men are 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.

The freedom which the Lord has given us – the freedom of will² implied in agency – has nothing to do with temporal freedom, or the ability to choose one's circumstances. The freedom is to choose one's salvation – eternal life or eternal death. Nothing more or less is implied.

In this context, and as the verses cited indicate, agency is a consequence of Christ's atonement. As such it cannot be taken from us by anyone. Each individual has power over his or her own agency, preserving it by making correct choices, or limiting it by making incorrect choices. I can be forced to any action by physical power greater than my own, but only I control the thoughts and desires of my heart; and on these will I be judged. If my whole desire is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, then his atonement is sufficient to deliver me from any earthly circumstance.

And that, Charlie Brown, is what agency is all about.

1 This frequently means a teenager.

2 As long as I am airing peeves; if agency is free will, what is free agency?