

Mosiah 29

Vs 3 Speaking of the relative value of our choices, President Dallin H. Oaks taught: “We should begin by recognizing the reality that just because something is good is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives. . . . “We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families” (“Good, Better, Best,” 104–7).

Vs 20 - Elder David A. Bednar taught: “The Lord’s tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness, obedience, and humility invite tender mercies into our lives, and it is often the Lord’s timing that enables us to recognize and treasure these important blessings” “We should not underestimate or overlook the power of the Lord’s tender mercies. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live. When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance (see 1 Nephi 1:20)” (Bednar, “Tender Mercies of the Lord,” 100).

Vs 25–26 “There are various systems of government. The best is theocracy, which is government by divine guidance. . . . “At this point in Nephite history it was thought wise to shift to the rule of judges, a form of democracy. . . . Mosiah counseled, ‘it is not common that that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right.’ “Governments are only good when the people are good. As founding father John Adams observed, “Our constitution was made for a moral people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” (Federer, America’s God and Country, 10–11)” (Bytheway, Righteous Warriors, 33–34).

“This was a system of government which might be called theodemocratic, in the sense that the voice of the people as well as the word and will of the Lord would form the basis for decisions made and laws instituted. Theocratic governments trace their origin to the earliest ages. ‘Adam, our father, the first man,’ Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written, ‘is the presiding high priest over the earth for all ages. The government the Lord gave him was patriarchal, and from the expulsion from Eden to the cleansing of the earth by water in the day of Noah, the righteous portion of mankind were blessed and governed by a patriarchal theocracy.’ “This theocratic system, patterned after the order and system that prevailed in heaven, was the government of God. He himself, though dwelling in heaven, was the Lawgiver, Judge, and King. He gave direction in all things both civil and ecclesiastical; there was no separation of church and state as we now know it. All governmental affairs were directed, controlled, and regulated from on high. The Lord’s legal administrators on earth served by virtue of their callings and ordinations in the Holy Priesthood and as they were guided by the power of the Holy Ghost’ (New Witness, 35)” (McConkie and Millet, Doctrinal Commentary, 2:318).

Vs 25-26 – The Voice of the People

"I have complete confidence in the aggregate wisdom of the . . . people, if they are given and made to understand the facts.

"The wisdom of the mass is always greater than the wisdom of the individual or of the group. The few may be more subtle, more agile-minded, more resourceful; they may for a time push to the front and scamper ahead in the march; they may on occasion and for a time entice us down the wrong highway at the crossroads.

"But the great slow-moving deliberate-thinking mass plods along over the years down the Divinely appointed way. Led astray, they slowly, cumberously swing back to the right road, no matter what the toil or the sacrifice may be, and when they start the return, they crush whatever lies in their path. So has humanity come up through the ages." (J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Cited in Book of Mormon [Religion 121-122] student manual, pp. 209-10.)

With free agency, however, there comes responsibility. If man is to be rewarded for righteousness and punished for evil, then common justice demands that he be given the power of independent action. A knowledge of good and evil is essential to man's progress on earth. If he were coerced to do right at all times or helplessly enticed to commit sin, he would merit neither a blessing for the first nor punishment for the second. Man's responsibility is correspondingly

operative with his free agency. Actions in harmony with divine law and the laws of nature will bring happiness, and those in opposition to divine truth, misery. Man is responsible not only for every deed, but also for every idle word and thought.

(David O. McKay, *CR*, Oct. 1965, pp. 7-8.)

Vs 26-27 – The Majority Choose

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles warned that we must not be indifferent to wickedness in society, because destruction awaits nations that choose unrighteousness: “Speaking behaviorally, when what was once the lesser voice of the people becomes more dominant, then the judgments of God and the consequences of foolish selfishness follow (see *Mosiah 29:26–27*). “Cultural decline is accelerated when single-interest segments of society become indifferent to general values once widely shared. This drift is facilitated by the indifferent or the indulgent as society is led carefully down to hell (see *2 Nephi 28:21*). Some may not join in this drift, but instead they step aside, whereas once they might have constrained, as is their representative right. . . . “We actually have an obligation to notice genuine, telltale societal signs. . . . “For what happens in cultural decline both leaders and followers are really accountable. Historically, of course, it is easy to criticize bad leaders, but we should not give followers a free pass. Otherwise, in their rationalization of their degeneration they may say they were just following orders, while the leader was just ordering followers! However, much more is required of followers in a democratic society, wherein individual character matters so much in both leaders and followers” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 28–30; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 23–24).

President Boyd K. Packer also spoke of the recent trends of distorting tolerance: “The virtue of tolerance has been distorted and elevated to a position of such prominence as to be thought equal to and even valued more than morality. It is one thing to be tolerant, even forgiving of individual conduct. It is quite another to collectively legislate and legalize to protect immoral conduct that can weaken, even destroy the family. “There is a dangerous trap when tolerance is exaggerated to protect the rights of those whose conduct endangers the family and injures the rights of the more part of the people. We are getting dangerously close to the condition described by the prophet Mosiah [in *Mosiah 29:26–27*]” (“Children of God,” *BYU Women’s Conference*, May 5, 2006, 6).

Mr. Frank Stanton, CBS president emeritus, told a Brigham Young University audience that network television standards will continue to decline because they are based on society’s standards. He said, “Standards come from the audience . . . ; the audience determines the programming and program content.” Further, he said, “I believe there will be more infractions with respect to [immorality] and violence and it will get a lot worse before it gets better because of the changing standards of our society.” (The Daily Universe, 2 Feb. 1989, p. 1.)

What a sad commentary on our society! Again we can learn a great principle from the Book of Mormon. When King Mosiah proposed that judges should rule instead of kings, he said: “It is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; . . .

“And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you.” (*Mosiah 29:26–27*.) That time of iniquity came about sixty years later and at several other times. In the book of Helaman we read that “they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good.” (*Hel. 5:2*.) If television viewing choices serve as a valid measure of our society, they who choose evil surely are more numerous than they who choose good.

(Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Ensign*, May 1989, p. 9)

That which is right does not become wrong merely because it may be deserted by the majority, neither does that which is wrong today become right tomorrow by the chance circumstance that it has won the approval or been adopted by overwhelmingly predominant numbers. Principles cannot be changed by nor accommodate themselves to the vagaries of popular sentiment.

(Albert E. Bowen, *CR*, April 1941, 85.)

I’ll tell you how to vote. You read the 134th section of the Doctrine and Covenants and the 29th chapter of Mosiah, and then pray about it and you’ll know exactly whom you should vote for at the election. That’s how to vote.

(Harold B. Lee, address to Seminary & Institute Personnel, BYU, July 8, 1966)

If the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity

More than a century ago Alex de Tocqueville, a French philosopher, visited America and out of the impressions of that tour wrote these interesting words: "I sought for the greatness and genius of American in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good America will cease to be great." (Gordon B. Hinckley, *Be Thou an Example*, 17)

If we would most truly enjoy the gift of Heaven, let us become a virtuous people; then shall we both deserve and enjoy it. While, on the other hand, if we are universally vicious and debauched in our manners, though the form of our Constitution carries the face of the most exalted freedom, we shall in reality be the most abject slaves.

Samuel Adams

(William O. Nelson, *The Charter of Liberty: The Inspired Origin and Prophetic Destiny of the Constitution*, 99 - 100.)

Gordon Wood, prize-winning historian, provided this insight into the eighteenth-century perspective:

In a republic, . . . each man must somehow be persuaded to submerge his personal wants into the greater good of the whole. This willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community—such patriotism or love of country—the eighteenth century termed "public virtue." A republic was such a delicate polity precisely because it demanded an extraordinary moral character in the people. Every state in which the people participated needed a degree of virtue; *but a republic which rested solely on the people absolutely required it.* Although a particular structural arrangement of the government in a republic might temper the necessity for public virtue, ultimately "no model of government whatever can equal the importance of this principle, nor afford proper safety and security without it."

"Without some portion of this generous principle, anarchy and confusion would immediately ensue, the jarring interests of individuals, regarding themselves only, and indifferent to the welfare of others, would still further heighten the distressing scene, and with the assistance of the selfish passions, it would end in the ruin and subversion of the state." The eighteenth-century mind was thoroughly convinced that a popularly based government "cannot be supported without *Virtue*." Only with a public-spirited, self-sacrificing people could the authority of a popularly elected ruler be obeyed, but "more by the virtue of the people, than by the terror of his power." Because virtue was truly the lifeblood of the republic, the thoughts and hopes surrounding this concept of public spirit gave the Revolution its socially radical character—an expected alteration in the very behavior of the people, "laying the foundation in a constitution, not without or over, but within the subjects."

(William O. Nelson, *The Charter of Liberty: The Inspired Origin and Prophetic Destiny of the Constitution*, 99-100.)

George Washington:

The general Government . . . can never be in danger of degenerating into a . . . despotic or oppressive form, so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the People.

There is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and advantage, between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity.

John Adams:

Statesmen . . . may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand. . . . The only foundation of a free Constitution, is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People, in a greater Measure, than they have it now, They may change their Rulers, and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting Liberty.

(William O. Nelson, *The Charter of Liberty: The Inspired Origin and Prophetic Destiny of the Constitution*, 101.)

On another occasion, Adams wrote: "Liberty can no more exist without virtue and independence, than the body can live and move without a soul." The constitution, he emphasized, "was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

(William O. Nelson, *The Charter of Liberty: The Inspired Origin and Prophetic Destiny of the Constitution*, 101.)

James Madison:

The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.

Later in the Virginia Ratifying Convention he said:

Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks, no form of government, can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea. If there be sufficient virtue and intelligence in the community, it will be exercised in the selection of these men; so that we do not depend upon *their* virtue, or put confidence in our *rulers*, but in the *people* who are to choose them.

(William O. Nelson, *The Charter of Liberty: The Inspired Origin and Prophetic Destiny of the Constitution*, 101.)

Virginia's Richard Henry Lee, who said, "A virtuous people make just laws, and good laws tend to preserve unchanged a virtuous people. A virtuous and happy people by laws uncongenial to their characters, may easily be gradually changed into servile and depraved creatures."

(William O. Nelson, *The Charter of Liberty: The Inspired Origin and Prophetic Destiny of the Constitution*, 101.)

Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. (John Schroeder, *Maxims of Washington*, p. 286-287)

Freedom must be earned

The history of the people of ancient America, recorded in the Book of Mormon, teaches that civilizations are built on moral foundations; that when people are morally strong, they do well; that when they are morally weak, they suffer. It teaches us that freedom cannot outlive morality and that freedom is not free—it must be earned. (Royden G. Derrick, *Ensign*, May 1981, 66)

Vs 30-31 "Once we have accepted responsibility for our own actions, the grace of God is extended to us. For freedom implies not only accountability but also the ability to repent (see *D&C 20:71*), and repentance, grounded upon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, brings sanctification and holiness—the ability to transcend the consequences of our actions and to be restored as children of our Father in Heaven" "Today many people manifest the desire for such a rescue in small and large ways: the student who, having failed to study during the term, prays for assistance in an examination; the teacher who opens a lesson by saying that, having made no preparations, he or she intends to rely on the Spirit; the individual who, having abused his or her body through lack of exercise and violation of the Lord's law of health, expects to be delivered, sometimes through priesthood administration, from the ravages of self-induced ill health; the drunken or reckless driver who prays for a 'second chance'; the individual who, having violated the commands of God or rules of society, expects mercy to utterly suppress the requirements of justice." "The psychologist Erich Fromm called the wish to escape the consequences of one's actions a desire to escape from freedom. For being free requires being responsible. The very word freedom connotes the ability to judge rationally between alternatives and the willingness to accept the consequences of one's decisions." "The prophet Lehi, in his counsel to his son Jacob, stressed that life poses real alternatives with different consequences (see *2 Ne. 2*). Adherence to divine commandments will protect us from those consequences that are most damaging to our quest for sanctification and exaltation. If we abide strictly by the commands of our Heavenly Father, we may not necessarily be protected from adversity, but we will be protected from that which is most deadly—the weakening of our integrity, alienation from God, the surrender of our divine destiny as children of God, and the destruction of our soul. Consequently, when we disobey the commands of God and the counsels of the living prophets, we always pay a price. No rationalization, no excuse, no complaining will alter the consequences." "As Alma observed, 'There is a law given, and a punishment affixed' (*Alma 42:22*). Moses preached the same doctrine: 'I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live' (*Deut. 30:19*)" (Wood, "On the Responsible Self," 28).

Vs 32-34 – Stand and let your voice be heard – protect others in their rights and freedoms

In Germany, the Nazis first came for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, but I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me,...and by that time there was no one left to speak for me. (Written by the Rev. Marin Niemoeller, a German Lutheran pastor who was arrested by the Gestapo and was sent to Dachau, a concentration camp, in 1938. He was freed by Allied Forces over six years later – in 1945!)

The Saints can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for my brethren. If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a "Mormon," I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves. (Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 313.)

Vs 39 “Elder James E. Talmage, in 1899, gave this counsel to the Saints for dealing with conflicts between religion and state:

“It is the duty of the saints to submit themselves to the laws of their country. Nevertheless, they should use every proper method, as citizens or subjects of their several governments, to secure for themselves and for all men the boon of freedom in religious service. It is not required of them to suffer without protest imposition by lawless persecutors, or through the operation of unjust laws; but their protests should be offered in legal and proper order. The saints have practically demonstrated their acceptance of the doctrine that it is better to suffer evil than to do wrong by purely human opposition to unjust authority. And if by thus submitting themselves to the laws of the land, in the event of such laws being unjust and subversive of human freedom, the people be prevented from doing the work appointed them of God, they are not to be held accountable for the failure to act under the higher law’ (*Articles of Faith*, 422–23).