

DEMOCRACY AND THE KINGDOM

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
 of Latter Day Saints
 Independence, Missouri

All Rights Reserved

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 18:1-8

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you c eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, for all the earth is mine; And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Respect for human life and personality, although it is still not fully believed in or perfectly practiced by all Christians, is nevertheless a peculiarly Christian concept or doctrine. All of the other great world religions lack in some degree this concept. Some of them teach their adherents to ignore the suffering of others, because it is the will of God. Some of them teach that some men were born inferior to others, and were made to be slaves or menials. Some teach that the greatest good any human personality can hope to achieve is to have that personality swallowed up and extinguished in some great Over-soul, which blots out all desire and all striving, together with all that distinguishes one personality from another, and bring peace.

On the other hand Jesus taught that God is the Father of all men; that he has love and respect for every creature of his creation; that each personality is sacred, inviolable; that men who claim to be sons of God and followers of his Son must respect the personalities and the rights of all other men, of whatever race or status or nation, and that salvation is the ultimate perfection and preservation of the total personality for eternity.

God himself respects the personality, of each being he has created. He exerts no compulsion to force men to serve him or obey him, or give allegiance to him. He invites all men to enter into his kingdom, to obey his laws, and to find freedom therein, but there is no compulsion. He gives promise of certain desirable and beneficial results if man will obey and cooperate with God and the laws of his kingdom. He promises and warns also that rebellion against these laws, or a careless failure to keep them will mean a withholding of those benefits which might have ensued. But as someone has said, "With God there are no punishments -- only consequences." Men get the consequences they choose. If they do not choose the kingdom of God and his righteousness, they have chosen some other kingdom, and that is the kingdom they must have; for the kingdom of God is composed exclusively of willing subjects. There are no unwilling, rebellious subjects in God's kingdom.

Because they cherished this concept of the worth of every man, the founders of our government boldly asserted that all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that all men are endowed with certain inalienable rights, which come not from government, nor from other men, not even by right of conquest, but rights which are an endowment from God himself. Among these rights are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Liberty is freedom to choose; it is freedom of choice and action. It is stated in the Christian doctrine of free moral will a agency.

This principle of freedom, or free moral will or agency, is an eternal principle. It is inherent in God himself; for God is free. He is free to choose; he does choose. To say that he does not choose is to say that there is someone superior to him who chooses for him, or that he is so hemmed in and restricted that he could not do anything else except what he does. That, of course, is a denial of one of the most basic attributes of God -- his omnipotence. If God cannot choose for himself -- if he is not free to choose for himself -- if he does not actually exercise choice -- then he is not omnipotent. And if he is not omnipotent, he is not God.

However, we do not need to fear that God will some day choose evil. He is free to choose evil if he likes, but he always likes to choose good. None of his choices have ever been, or ever will be wrong; therefore he is never denied or frustrated. Because he always works in harmony with his own perfect nature and with the inviolable laws which he has created as an outgrowth of that nature, his choices always result in good, in satisfaction. Because his actions are never denied or frustrated, he is omnipotent; and because he is omnipotent, he is God.

Those who would be like God must also be free to choose, as God is free to choose. As we follow the promptings and the counsels of God's Spirit, we shall find ourselves making more and more decisions in line with God's purpose, God's nature, God's laws. Not only does this result in our becoming more and more like God in our nature, but it results also in an increasing liberty. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," because liberty is to be found only in obedience to law. "Obedience to law is the highest liberty." We are free only to the extent that we choose to be free by following the Spirit of God, and choosing to obey God's law in God's kingdom. Any other sort of freedom is not freedom, but license and anarchy which the inviolable laws of the universe cannot tolerate.

God's kingdom is a kingdom, in the sense that it is ruled by God, the great King. But his kingdom is also a democracy -- a theocratic democracy -- a government in which the King makes the laws and gives them to his subjects, but always leaves to every man conscience the decision as to whether or not the laws should be obeyed. God is King, but he rules by love, by persuasion, not by force.

Historically, God has always asked for and waited for the democratic consent of those to be governed in the Kingdom of God. He has offered them citizenship on conditions of obedience, but has always waited for a free and willing obedience, not one forced or compelled. God gave the covenant and the law to Moses at Sinai. Then, in the words of our scripture reading from the 18th chapter of Exodus: "Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.'" The people in democratic assembly freely and willingly ratified the covenant.

Later in the history of God's kingdom in Israel, the people grew weary of their covenant, and demanded a king to rule over them, rejecting God as their King. God permitted them to have their way. When it came time to choose a king according to the desires of the people, it was God, speaking through the prophet Samuel, who chose Saul. This was theocracy. But before Saul could be anointed, the people again were given opportunity to ratify God's choice. This was democracy. Still later when Saul was disobedient, Samuel deposed him by command of God, and chose David. Again the choice was not arbitrary, but was ratified by the people. Always in the government of the Kingdom of God, God speaks; and having heard him, man may listen and obey, or turn away his ear, ignore God, and disobey.

Our degree of progress toward the kingdom, and the speed with which we realize it in our personal and corporate lives depends absolutely upon our free choices. We may choose to have it now, and have it; for it is available now. The coming of the kingdom of God on earth waits on us, for the kingdom of God is a democracy which waits always on the consent of the governed.

There may come a time when God will wait no longer, but will proceed to establish his kingdom on earth with those who are ready, willing, and obedient, leaving some of us outside in our unconcern and careless disobedience and rebellion. If you are seeking true liberty, choose today to follow slavishly the laws of God's kingdom and the guidance of God's Spirit; for where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, and in obedience to law we find our highest freedom in God's kingdom.