

Moral agency – on our shoulders

The Prophets continue to urge the importance of obedience to the whisperings of the spirit. In the following metaphor an effort will be made to help you understand how the soul of man is orchestrated within the body. It is also hoped that the metaphor will help you define the precise meaning of moral agency more clearly.

You've seen it, haven't you? A cartoon with a light angel on one shoulder and a dark angel on the other? Cartoonists draw it all the time. And they use it as a metaphor to describe the war that goes on within all mortals whenever they are in a moral dilemma. They picture the light angel, smiling and standing tall, while he urges the mortal to help someone, or to do the right thing; while at the same time the dark angel is cavorting about on the other shoulder striving to draw attention from the light angel, striving, somehow, to defeat or disable any desire that the mortal may have to do good.

The cartoon is indicative of the internal conflicts that beset us when we make a decision that will help to determine our eventual salvation.

It is obviously a graphic metaphor meant to describe the Holy Ghost on one shoulder and Satan on the other; and it effectively demonstrates the ongoing battle between good and evil that takes place within all mortals. The metaphor does not illustrate the entire truth, however, for it fails to identify the dual nature of mortals—the inner spirit within the physical body. With a little imagination, however, we can correct this deficiency. With your mind's eye trace within that mortal body a mental picture of a figure in a light grey that corresponds to the outline of the mortal body precisely. This cloned grey figure represents the inner spirit of man.

Look again to the light angel and notice that the Holy Ghost speaks only to the inner spirit, and never to the mortal body directly. The inner spirit, then forwards the message to body, or natural man. Thus the pathway of revelation begins with God, then to the Holy Ghost, then to the inner spirit, and from the inner spirit to the body.

The body is now aware of God's wishes; though in his or her desire for sensual pleasure and ease he or she may not recognize them as such. But the Devil knows, and is obligated by his nature to resist God's wishes, and strive to convince the body to rebel against them. In doing so, Satan speaks through no intermediary, but speaks directly to the carnal, sensual and devilish tendencies of the natural man.

In that moment of indecision, the body must choose whether to be obedient to the spirit, or to follow the inclinations of the natural man and rebel against it. The mortal's decision, whether about a matter that is relatively insignificant, or a matter of importance, is a moral one; and it will have an impact on his or her salvation.

The choice that mortals make in answer to that moment of indecision is called MORAL AGENCY.

And in that moment, for that one single act, we choose who we will follow, Satan or Christ.

Our agency is activated when the thought *first* comes to our minds. At the very earliest moment possible.

Agency is actually choosing who we will follow, Christ or Satan!

2 Nephi 2:16 - *"Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself [agency]. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other [either Satan or Christ]."*

DC 93:31 - *Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them [by Christ], and they receive not the light.*

Moses 6:56 - *And it is given unto them to know good and evil [both Christ and Satan entice us with their whisperings continually]; wherefore they are agents unto themselves...*

Helaman 14:30 - *And now remember, remember...that whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, 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. [This scripture seems to indicate that our agency is in the choosing, and our freedom is in the acting. That is: we choose whom we will willingly follow, and we are then free to act as we choose.]*

2 Nephi 2:28,29

And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator...and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh...which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell...

After meditating upon these scriptures, it was realized that the name of this principle was not preventative repentance at all...

This is AGENCY!

Our agency is activated when the thought *first* comes to our minds. At the very earliest moment possible.

Agency is actually choosing who we will follow, Christ or Satan!

We often call our agency *free agency*, but there is no such scriptural term.

Are the only thoughts that come from Satan thoughts that tempt us to steal or cheat? [no]

That's right! No!

Any thought that makes you feel that you are less than an important son or daughter of God, comes from Satan.

Any thought that causes you to doubt the inspiration of the Spirit comes from Satan. This sometimes causes us to discredit the revelation received by our leaders.

Anyone who shares their own evil thoughts - (which come from Satan) - with someone else, is a

missionary for Satan. If we do this, we act as Satan's disciples.

Think of the implications of this story told by Millie B. Farrimond of Clearfield, Utah:

"Among the gifts of the spirit which have been mine is the gift to dream true dreams...I have seen many things in them that have later come to pass. I wish to share one of these experiences with you...It was my great privilege to labor for many years with the youth of the Church...I learned to love them deeply...and [had] the power to look into their hearts and see [their temptations and struggles]...

"...This is the case of a very young girl. People misjudged her and a terrible scandal arose. There was much malicious gossip. I was greatly troubled about the things I heard [not knowing whether she was guilty or innocent]...then one night I dreamed I saw Satan. He had set a trap for this beautiful girl. I saw him standing there by his terrible trap; he had his eyes on the girl and was beckoning to her. She seemed not to see the danger and was about to enter the trap when all of a sudden she realized [her] mistake and turned and ran away in the opposite direction. I saw Satan in his anger and disappointment...sending out a vicious bulldog after her. The dog overtook her and tore her into tiny bits. I could see those tiny particles flying in all directions, and yet the girl [still] stood there before me: I wondered at the meaning of it. Then I heard a voice say [this]: "The bulldog you see is Satan's most vicious tool. It is known as malicious gossip. What you saw him tear into tiny bits and scatter to the far winds, and you thought was the girl, [was] her reputation." I shall never forget the pain in my heart as I looked upon this girl stripped of her reputation which had been [as] much a part of her as her very body, and saw the look of helplessness and anguish in her face[;] yet...relief and joy...came to me to know that she was...innocent of the things she had been so harshly accused of.

"I was now able to...give [the girl] the honest friendship and support that she needed so desperately...with this strength, she was able to combat her problems and...the devil's campaign was defeated."

Was the girl innocent or guilty? [Innocent]

Who was the bulldog? Who it who stripped her of her reputation? [It was the people who spread malicious gossip about her.]

Who were these people serving, God or Satan? [Satan]

[Point to the drawing] Where did the thoughts come from? [Satan]

On August 16th an event occurred that is unequalled in recent memory. Three stakes and 22 Wards had their boundaries changed in one short hour.

The Spirit that was there. Everyone who I spoke to felt it. It was obvious that it was an inspired decision.

But pain was there too. In many ways, changing boundaries is a lot like a death. It is painful to lose our dear friends and close associations. It hurts!

Does Satan know that? Will he use it to his advantage? [Yes]. Since most people resist change, Satan and his hordes will be very active at a time like this:

Have you heard anything like this lately?

"Why can't they just leave things alone. We were happy the way things were."

"This whole thing just isn't fair. I've lived in the same spot for 40 years and have been in four stakes and seven wards."

"They can't do this. We built that building. It's ours. They can't just move us and give it to somebody else!"

"So you know what? They split me and my friend up. God wouldn't do that."

"It's obvious that there was no inspiration here. Nobody in their right mind would put a boundary there."

Since the decisions were made, prayed about, and unanimously supported by three stake presidencies, the Area Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve and The First Presidency. Which of you is willing to say that the boundary change was not inspired? [Nobody]

Where, then, do the thoughts come from that deny this inspiration? [Satan]

Where do the thoughts come from that lead us to rebel in some way, such as staying in the ward we now live in, or staying home from Church or maligning our leaders? [Satan]

We must be very careful in how we use our agency!

I met with the Lee Ward on August 16th, and participated as their ward met for the very last time. The members, after that meeting were split into five separate wards.

I was filled with joy as I observed those who had the greatest reason for pain and sorrow. They spoke of the Spirit, and how the move was the right one; and that they needed to follow the Lord's direction and make the most of it. They pledged themselves to make their new ward better because they are there. What courageous men and women. How proud I was of them!

For they used their agency to follow the Lord.

I bear my witness that God inspired those who set the boundaries, and that nothing was done except His approval was both sought and received.

If we will unify behind our leaders, great things will occur:

- . The members - all of us - will be blessed,
- . Members will be brought back from inactivity into the joy of Christ,
- . Spirituality will be increased,
- . Each of us will have a better opportunity to overcome our terrestrial natures and truly "Come Unto Christ".

May we unite into a common brotherhood - receiving one another as true brothers in Christ - and sustain one another in our quest for Eternal Life. As new members come among us, welcome them as long lost family members.

DC 38:24

And let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practise virtue and holiness before me...For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there--and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just? Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable ...*I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.*

And again, I say unto you that the enemy in the secret chambers seeketh your lives...I tell you these things...lest the wickedness of men reveal these things unto you by their wickedness,

Testimony