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*Freestone Park
Ward
Constitution
Week Newsletter*

Today's topic:

What is the Proper Role of Government?

As we have learned thus far, the Constitution was inspired by God in order to guarantee the freedoms he has given us. How is this best accomplished? Put another way - What is the Proper Role of Government? Much of what the government should and should not do, is self evident. The government has not always followed those precepts, however, and the prophets have spoken out in defense of our freedoms. There have been whole talks given on the subject and a couple of those are attached as well.

Principles: The government must protect our religious right, we must be able to observe them and laws need to put in place to enforce that protection

Joseph Smith -

I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on the earth. In my feelings I am always ready to die for the protection of the weak and oppressed in their just rights. The only fault I find with the Constitution is, it is not broad enough to cover the whole ground.

Although it provides that all men shall enjoy religious freedom, yet it does not provide the manner by which that freedom can be preserved, nor for the punishment of Government officers who refuse to protect the people in their religious rights, or punish those mobs, states, or communities who interfere with the rights of the people on account of their religion. Its sentiments are good, but it provides no means of enforcing them. It has but this one fault. Under its provision, a man or a people who are able to protect themselves can get along well enough; but those who have the misfortune to be weak or unpopular are left to the merciless rage of popular fury.

The Constitution should contain a provision that every officer of the Government who should neglect or refuse to extend the protection guaranteed in the Constitution should be subject to capital punishment; and then the president of the United States would not say, "Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you."

Spencer W. Kimball -

Those who oppose all references to God in our public life have set themselves the task of rooting our facts, tributes, and symbols so ingrained in our nation that their elimination could only be interpreted as an official act of hostility toward religion. Our Constitutional law forbids that.

Wilford Woodruff -

A great deal has been said about the form of government, and the constitution under which we live. They have been the praise of all Americans, and perhaps of people living in other portions of the earth. We consider that we have been blessed as a nation in possessing the freedom and privileges guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. They have been a rich legacy from our fathers. We consider our form of government superior to any other on the earth. It guarantees to us "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And while the inhabitants of many other governments have been tyrannically bound up, and their minds controlled in certain channels, and they have been deprived of the right of liberty of speech and of many other rights valued by freemen, ours has guaranteed unto us all the liberty that can be enjoyed by man. Still, I have many times thought that we, as American Citizens, have not prized the gifts and blessings guaranteed to us by the Constitution of our country. For the last few years, especially, the Constitution at times, has been looked upon as a matter of the smallest consequence. In some respects, however, it has been a blessing to us as a people, and it is to the whole nation, as far as it is carried out. But in order to fully receive its blessings we have to honor its precepts.

I would to God that the rulers of our land—the President of the United States, the Congress of the United States, the Supreme Court of the United States—would learn the responsibility the God of heaven will hold them to in the administration of those glorious principles laid down in the Constitution of the government of this country. The God of heaven will hold this nation, as well as all other nations, responsible for the manner in which these principles are used. If they misuse them, it will be their loss. If they trample the Constitution under foot; if they undertake to deprive any portion of citizens of the rights the Constitution guarantees unto them, they will be held responsible, and will have to pay the bill. When innocent blood is shed, it costs something; and I would to God that our nation could understand the blessings they enjoy. There is no nation on the face of the earth that has the same liberty that is guaranteed to us by the Constitution of our country

I feel to bear my testimony to these things. They are true. God is with this people. And we say to our nation—maintain the Constitution and we are satisfied. Give us the rights of that Constitution and we are satisfied. It is an instrument inspired by the power of God. Our forefathers were inspired when they framed it. Yet it is marvelous to reflect upon some principles that have been laid down—perhaps I ought not to allude to these things, but I am only expressing my own reflections—even by the supreme court of the United States. In effect it has said that we may think as we please, but must not act. I would ask, in the name of the Lord, was that all Thomas Jefferson, and others had in their minds when they framed the clause in reference to religious liberty? What about men acting? If it was only intended that men should think and not act, why not say so in the instrument? Why should it be stated that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free *exercise* thereof," [U.S. Constitution Amendment I] if men were not to be allowed to act? Why, in the exercise of their religion, men must act: and it is straining points, it is overstepping the bounds of the Constitution to pass laws taking away the rights and privileges of any people because of their religion—because they happen to differ from their neighbors. Where will such a course land our government? I will tell you what it will do. It will rend the government in twain like unto a potter's vessel. It will lay the nation in the dust. It will overthrow the government. When they get through with the Mormons there will be somebody else to deal with. The Constitution is good enough for anybody. It is good enough for the Latter-day Saints. We have no principles but what are in accord with the Constitution of the United States and the laws of God. We are perfectly willing to trust ourselves and our interests in the hands of God, and to leave our nation in His hands also; for God will judge our nation; He will judge us; He will judge all the children of men and He will judge righteous judgment. What men sow they will reap. What measure they mete, it shall be measured to them again.

I pray God to bless this nation. I pray God to give our legislators wisdom, that they may maintain the Constitutional principles of the government, the only government on the face of God's earth where the Lord could have established His Church and Kingdom.

Principle: The government must protect our Economic Freedom

Ezra Taft Benson -

Our Constitution and Bill of Rights guarantee to all our people the greatest freedom ever enjoyed by the public of any great nation. This system guarantees freedom of individual enterprise, freedom to own property, freedom to start one's own business and to operate it according to one's own judgment so long as the enterprise is honorable. The individual

has power to produce beyond his needs, to provide savings for the future protection of himself and family. He can live where he wishes and pick any job he wants and select any educational opportunity.

Principle: The government is our servant, not our master or provider

David O. McKay -

Governments are the *servants*, not the *masters* of the people. All who love the Constitution of the United States can vow with Thomas Jefferson, who, when he was president, said, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." ...

David O McKay -

You are not just a cog in the state. To be such I think is the greatest danger in the world today, and I find some in our Church who rather favor that. They think the state is our protector. It isn't. The state is a servant, is here to protect you in your work, on your farm, and in your business, and to see that justice is administered, and you have a right to that protection. The state has not anything that you do not give it. The government has no means but that which you give it, and we give it to the government so that it will protect each individual in his right. That is a fundamental principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Spencer W. Kimball -

We don't believe in government welfare systems! We teach our people to be thrifty, so that if they get into financial trouble they can look to their family, then to the church, but never to the government.

Principle: The government must not branch out into areas beyond its Constitutional authority

Ezra Taft Benson -

The proper function of government is limited only to those spheres of activity within which the individual citizen has the right to act. By deriving its just powers from the governed, government becomes primarily a mechanism for defense against bodily harm, theft and involuntary servitude. It cannot claim the power to redistribute the wealth or force reluctant citizens to perform acts of charity against their will. Government is created by man. No man possesses such power to delegate. The creature cannot exceed the creator.

In general terms, therefore, the proper role of government includes such defensive activities, as maintaining national military and local police forces for protection against loss of life, loss of property, and loss of liberty at the hands of either foreign despots or domestic criminals.

It also includes those powers necessarily incidental to the protective function such as:

1. The maintenance of courts where those charged with crimes may be tried and where disputes between citizens may be impartially settled.
2. The establishment of a monetary system and a standard of weights and measures so that courts may render money judgments, taxing authorities may levy taxes, and citizens may have a uniform standard to use in their business dealings.

My attitude toward government is succinctly expressed by the following provision taken from the Alabama Constitution:

That the sole object and only legitimate end of government is to protect the citizen in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property, and when the government assumes other functions it is usurpation and oppression.

From the Scriptures -

We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society.

We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life...

We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience. (D&C 134: 1-2,5.)