

I Know Not, Save the Lord Commanded Me

HAROLD GLEN CLARK

I pray that whatever I may say here this morning may be what my Father in heaven would have me say, and that you also will pray in your heart that I may do this.

Years ago, when my father was in the evening of his days on this earth, I encountered him reading his patriarchal blessing. He marveled that the old patriarch, John Smith, in the Sugarhouse Ward eighty years before, could have told him in outline what had come to pass in his life. "Everything has been fulfilled in my blessing," he said, "except one thing."

"What is that?" I asked.

He replied, "My blessing said that if I sought the will of the Lord I should preside over a stake in Zion."

I said, "Did the patriarch make a mistake, Dad?"

"No," he said abruptly. "The General Authorities called me to serve, but I'd just returned from a three-year mission to England. I was an older man. I had a large family that had worked to keep me there. My business partner, O. S. Stapley, had carried the burdens of our business, so I told the Authorities to let me get on my feet financially, and then I would be glad to serve, but I was never called again."

There was no further comment, but I sensed without any moralizing on my father's part that he wanted me to hear this story and draw my own conclusions.

What is the will of the Lord in our lives? How can one do many things of his own free will (D&C 58:27) and yet not let one's independence and thinking lead him away from an experience which the Lord would have him enjoy? This question is as old as the council in heaven, that day when Jesus Christ chose to do the will of his Father, and his brother Lucifer chose to go his own way. It is as new as yesterday, when a Mormon boy had to choose between a football contract with the Dallas Cowboys and a mission call to Tonga. To do or not to do something because the Lord or his servants ask you to do it is the question. When the angel asked Adam why he had just killed a firstling of the flock as a sacrifice to the Lord and Adam answered, "I know not, save the Lord commanded me" (Moses 5:6), didn't the Lord know that giving people a reason is a

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great motivator? Was this a blind faith that leads to nowhere or was it the smart thing for Adam to do?

Covenants in the Temple

One of the purposes of a temple of God is to help us answer these questions. The word *temple* is related to the noun *template*, which is defined as a “pattern” or “guide.” All temples, heathen, Greek, or Oriental, house the values men live by. Your temple houses the story of how life was started on this earth by Elohim, the living God—your God and mine. This university, our wards and our stakes, our homes and our teachings prepare us for the time when we can be found worthy to go to the temple and willingly make covenants with our Father in heaven. These covenants, in brief, bind us to say, “I will put him first in my life. I will find out what his will is concerning me and follow it.”

Jeremiah, standing at the gate of the Lord’s house, cried in vain for Israel not to walk after the imaginations of their own hearts but to counsel with the Lord. Otherwise they would face lamentation and desolation.

Harry Glick, a Mormon Jew, tells how his grandfather, Rabbi Louis Hersch, had one ambition more than anything else, and that was to go to Jerusalem and weep bitterly over the small, battered remains of an inaccurate replica of a wall—a part of the once glorious temple of Jerusalem. “Why,” he asked, “should this rabbi—a Ph.D. as far as worldly designations are concerned—why should he, a Levite, who could only sweep the floors and wash the sacrificial altars of the temple, want to go there? It was because he longed to see the return of the glory of those days when God’s chosen people talked with God and he led them by the hand. Grandpa Hersch died at seventy without ever making the trip,” Brother Glick went on to say, “but he would gladly have traded those seventy years for one moment that we spend in one session in our

temple, had he known that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had set those temples up.”

We learn in the modern temples of Israel that the main reason any of us is on this earth is to see if we will do “all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God [will] command [us]” (Abraham 3:25). Now note, the scripture doesn’t say “Do only the things that God first explains to you.” Thousands of Latter-day Saints are living their lives on the principle that doing God’s will first is the thing to do. All the understanding, believing heart wants to know is, What does God want? Then finding it, he goes and does it. This is not authoritarian. It is not a military order or blind faith. It’s the highest form of intelligence, for the temple story tells us that God created us. He is our Father. Literally, he conceived our spirit bodies in love and with great expectations. He brought us to this earth and gave us the opportunity to choose him or some other way. We see that he made the heavens, and that he made the earth on which we stand. It was he who said of us:

They are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

. . . and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father. [Moses 7:32–33]

Who has greater love, or who has a greater interest, or who has a greater right in commanding us, guiding us, and reigning over us? Why should he mince words or be permissive or sound anything but a certain note about going the way he has outlined? He set up *the* stairway, not *a* stairway; he gave us *the* iron rod on that stairway to take us to the precious fruit of this life. Who else, as Peter said, has words of eternal life? Where else should we go to find them (John 6:68)?

Obeying of Our Own Free Will

Jesus was far ahead of us in exercising deference, respect, and love where it is deserved, and by doing this he became our Creator and our God. He set the example. He saw, very clearly, what a great privilege it was to glorify his Father. Without our Father we wouldn't get very far, for Jesus said:

The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: . . .

For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: And he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.
[John 5:19–20]

The truth is, God gives us plenty of room to do many things of our own free will, if we will just listen to and follow him in the first place. Call this blind obedience if you wish, but it is truly the key that opens the door to all blessings. Our Father is the source of all power. Jesus said, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Because of his obedience, Christ was given power over all life or death. Yet he said, "I can of mine own self do nothing: . . . and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). Now, if we want to be like the Son of God, the best start is to seek to do the will of our Father, and then in due time we too will be given a measure of "life in ourselves" in our kingdom. The temple story tells us that we may be heirs with our Father.

Apparently giving a by-line when and where due, showing respect and love, and acknowledging what someone has done for us are the greatest virtues we can have. Not doing so is not just a fault; it is a base crime that we must pay for. As far as God our Father is concerned, it is really the only offense that we can give to him. In a small, vestibular example, I find myself going the extra mile in love to any of my eight children when one of them slips

his hand into mine and says, "I'll always be indebted to you, Dad, for what you did for me," or to the independent thinker in the family who says, "I don't understand what you want me to do, but I'll do it because you're my father and I love you." Even though I may not deserve these words, in that moment, somehow, they really become my children. Before that, they were my respected offspring. But in those things in which they show love and faith in me, their father, they truly become my sons and my daughters. I would go to the ends of the earth for that child. I would be inclined to trust him with all I had. I would call him my beloved son.

This is why, when God gives us the priesthood, the power to do things in his name, we should honor it. This is why, when he gives us temples and great promises to make and keep with him, we should make and keep them. Everything in the endowment in the temple, according to President Brigham Young, is a gift from a loving father and is necessary to bring us back one day into his presence, to rule and reign with him. Everyone who comes out of the temple does so with a bona fide working agreement with his Father in heaven. This agreement, in essence, is based on the premise that we will do his will. Now, it is wonderful for all of us to sing "I Am a Child of God," but we are not really such until we do his will. Just being conceived by him is not enough. Just being sent to the earth by him is not enough. Just thinking beautiful thoughts is not enough. Just being an honorable man is not enough. The terrestrial kingdom of God is filled with the honorable men of the earth who are blinded by the philosophies of men—philosophies described by Kenneth Rexroth as "complicated methods of avoiding all the important problems of life." The temple shows Adam and Eve facing up to conditions, not theories. If we do not face the problem of knowing God and his wishes and knowing why we should keep his commandments, and then if we do not

keep them, we stand in our own light and choke the channels of communication with him. He can well say when we meet him, "Depart from me, for I never knew you" (cf. Matthew 7:23). We *know* God by knowing what he asks us to do and then by doing it. And if we know him and his Son, Jesus Christ, in this manner, we may have life eternal, which is to live with him forever, because we will feel comfortable in his company and he in ours.

The Word of Wisdom

It is so easy to drift inadvertently into something less than this kind of attitude. I recall a manuscript on *Reasons for Observing the Word of Wisdom*, produced by one of our BYU professors. He wanted us to print it. So we took the manuscript to one of the Brethren, President Spencer Kimball, who pronounced it one of the finest treatments of the subject that he had ever read. Convincing economic, health, and other reasons for following the Word of Wisdom were clearly set forth. "But," he said, "you left out the most important reason."

"What is that?" the author asked.

"Because God asked us to," he replied.

Now, I wondered why I hadn't thought of this reason. I had to confess that, as a professor, I just wasn't in the habit of using this approach. It seemed like a reason you talked about only in church. Was it because the approach was too sacred or was I afraid the learned would not understand? I began to feel like the salt that had lost its savor. I read the eighty-ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants over again. Sure enough, it said, "the word of wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God." And here and there God said, "I warn you," or "it is pleasing unto me if you don't do this," or "I ordain this grain for you," and finally, "I give unto you the promise that the destroying angel shall pass by you." Then I began to see it as wise counsel from the heart of a loving God, the God of all health and happiness.

His words are full of love and concern. He knew more about health than all the learned doctors. He made the human body in his image. Hundreds of years before, he knew more than any of us what tobacco and liquor and intemperance would do in our day. He wanted to warn us. The first reason for observing the Word of Wisdom is that God our Father told us to leave tobacco and liquor alone, eat right, and be temperate. I remember Nephi's words:

O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they thing they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom . . . profiteth them not. . . .

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God. [2 Nephi 9:28–29]

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned . . . who are puffed up because of their learning. . . are they whom he despiseth. [2 Nephi 9:42]

We can partially conceive of how upset God would be with those of us who "walk in darkness at noonday." When we have so great a light, how stupid not to walk by it, and still more stupid to never even give him honorable mention for providing the light.

Follow the Spirit

I wonder if any of us are worthy of working for BYU if we are not governed by the desire to always acknowledge God in our work. I wonder if we as students don't need a jolt right at the very first of our four years here, such as losing our 116 pages or having some other similar experience, so that we could really listen to the Lord, as he teaches us what he taught Joseph Smith on that occasion:

Although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he . . . sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will, . . . he must fall . . .

How often you have . . . gone on in the persuasions of men. For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. [D&C 3:4, 6–7]

And then after we have learned our lesson as Joseph Smith did, and we love our Father for his will concerning us, then we are ready to graduate, produce that book, build a successful business, marry a wonderful companion in the temple, keep great promises, and fill our life's mission and glorify our Father.

The founder of this university, President Young, pointed the way when he said not to teach anything here without the Spirit of God. He meant, too, that the learners here are not to learn anything without the Spirit of God. We're not to take on any learning that won't lead us back into the presence of God. One of the great architects of this school, Karl G. Maeser, said, "let your first good morning be to your Father in heaven." He reminds me of Alma, who said:

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. [Alma 37:37]

Dr. Maeser said over and over again, in the writings given us by his son Reinhard, that this university would be what the Lord designed it to be, avoiding the pitfalls and old grooves into which so many universities fall as they acquire the notion that they can go it alone without God. I believe we are avoiding this pitfall in this university.

When a new dean was chosen to fill the post I had occupied here at BYU, I was anxious for the future of that division. For a quarter of

a century I had prayed and worked with this stepchild of the University—the Extension Division of Continuing Education. The Lord poured out his blessings upon it over the years to make it one of the most respected extension programs among the institutions of higher learning in this country. There were several promising young men as candidates for the deanship. We could have honestly recommended several. In the office of the new and young president of Brigham Young University we discussed the choice. Then I heard President Oaks say, "This is a most important decision. I think we should kneel in prayer and ask the Lord for guidance." I knelt down with him and another Ph.D., Vice-President Thomas. The prayer was simple and direct. He asked for light and discernment in whatever course of action we were about to take. And when we arose, I knew by the manifestations of the Spirit that the Lord would not fail us. I didn't see the name of the next dean written on the wall, but I felt good about whatever might be done. I knew that we would not make a bad choice. And isn't this feeling the most important blessing that God could give anyone? When President Oaks mentioned a name, we all agreed. And there was a good spirit present.

Now I'm just simple enough to believe that the Lord will stand by that feeling which he gives us. The new dean may stay a short or a long time. The blessings we ask for come in unexpected ways, but if the will of the Lord is done what is there to fear? I'm simple enough to believe that any decision made in this university by any teacher, administrator, or student will be a good decision if he does his homework first and then asks the Lord to accept or modify what he may present and thus not let him do anything contrary to the Lord's will. Just wanting to be on God's side is a great start. Notice I did not say wanting God to be on our side; I said wanting to be on his side. Peace of mind, serenity, and the feeling

that God's hand is over you is his greatest gift to us, for it releases all of the best that is within us.

Inquire of the Lord

Just one word to the hundreds who, in their secret hearts, have come here to find someone with whom they can share companionship and a love which will last forever. Let me tell you that you too *must* do your homework. So many storm the Lord to get him on their side, with all his blueprints. This is a poor start, especially when we've never "studied it out first in our own minds," to quote the Lord's word to Oliver Cowdery. Let not that person think that he should receive anything from the Lord, for the Lord will leave him alone with his problems. He is not teachable by the Lord or anyone else, and he will be driven by the wind and tossed while waiting in vain for the Lord to give him a picture of the girl he's to marry. One of our great prophets, Jacob, said:

Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works. [Jacob 4:10]

When we have lived the commandments, when we have learned to know and follow his will, and the person we want to marry does the same thing, we will both be drawn together in the Lord because we have much to share with our Father and with each other. We put ourselves beyond serious doubts and fears and foolish errors. Our whole bodies will be filled with light when our eyes are single to the mind and will of our Father in heaven, and we will comprehend all we need to know to make a good choice, and our companion will also (D&C 88:67). Why is this so? It is because our affections are based on eternal principles. When are two Latter-day Saint people in love worthy of each other? When can a couple be

truly sealed for time and all eternity in the temple? It is when they love their Father in heaven enough to say, "Father, we have thought through our marriage, we have our own ideas, but we know that you ordained marriage, you made us male and female, you told us to leave father and mother and twain be one, and we want to be guided by you. We want to know, for we love you. We want to keep and make, make and keep sacred promises with you in your house, and in your own way."

Is it possible to love any woman, or any man, any more than we, or they, can love God, covenant with him, and follow his will? The answer is no. That's why marriage in the temple has so much potential for those who come here with an eye single to his glory. The successful temple marriage begins when two people want God's blessings in the way he has ordained. Then our Father in heaven can promise these two everything that he has and deliver it. He knows that with this spirit the couple will say more than just "Lord, Lord." They will wait to back it up by being worthy of all the requirements found on the temple recommend. Eternal love, as Erich Fromm says, is more than a feeling, for feelings come and go. How can we be sure on this basis alone that love will last forever? You can be sure only when feelings are supported by a judgment, a decision, a meaningful promise before God. Everything in our lives falls into place when we continually ask and answer the questions "What does my Father in heaven want me to do?" And "What did I do today to fulfill his will?"

In the scriptures, in the quiet of our study, in a clean body and mind, and in the busy and anxious bustle of good causes in our priesthood and Church and civic and home duties, God answers our inquiry. But until we find him and his will, and until he finds us and our will, we begin, as H.G. Wells says, "at no beginning and work to no end," and nothing in the universe or in our lives will fall into place.

How easy it would make President Oaks's administration if, when problems are placed on his doorstep, and teachers and students want to know why the General Authorities said this or that, he could say, as Nephi said to his brothers, "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 15:8). Why should our leaders have to tell us whether the course of our bishop or stake president is the right one? We must get our own testimonies and then live by them. And we have no right to push off this responsibility of knowing onto our parents, or President Lee, or our teachers, or anyone else.

Once when I was secretary to a congressman, I felt that President J. Reuben Clark, a Republican, was injecting politics into the Church because of his prejudice against the Democrats. I was a bishop, and I felt guilty because I wanted to think well of my Church leaders. I prayed earnestly to know from the Lord whether my observations were justified, and if not, what attitude the Lord would have me take. I went to general conference at Salt Lake in this spirit of inquiry. President Clark rose to speak. He gave some of the soundest advice I ever heard, and a witness came into my heart that said, "This man is a servant of God; you won't get off the track if you follow him." Now it didn't say that he wasn't an ardent Republican, but all I wanted to know was whether I should not in my heart accept him as my leader. Later I worked intimately with him on a Church manual, and my love and respect for him is one of my choicest possessions. But my choicest possession was the knowledge that this member of the First Presidency, in whom I could have great trust, put the Lord first in his life and was accepted by my Father in heaven.

What if we didn't try to argue loud and long as parents to convince our children, but had trained them and ourselves to inquire of the Lord on matters of importance that we hope they and we would understand together in the home? How it would help us to refine

our thoughts as parents, and what a choice gift we would give each of our children. It would be an iron rod in his hand, which we could both use in our hands also to carry us through, to eventually eat together the precious fruits of life eternal.

It might sound ridiculous to you, but if President Oaks, before he handed your sheepskin to you, would ask the question, "Have you learned to inquire of the Lord while in this university, and did you inquire of him?" and if you could sincerely answer, "Yes, it is one of my most valued possessions. I not only made the resolution, but I took the action required to bring it into being," he would say with pride, "Take this diploma. We won't ever worry about your honoring this university with success, for this will be a lantern in your hand, and a song in your heart, and, incidentally, money to the alumni. It is better than any other skill or knowledge we could have given you at BYU, for God will exalt you, or in other words, there will be no bounds or limits to the privileges that he will give you."

A Personal Witness

To those who are strong and independent thinkers and yet able to say, "I will follow him," then that portion is given them at the right hour of their need. I know this, because he has gone before my face so many times when I have trusted in him implicitly. He has been on my right hand and on my left and borne me up and raised up friends to help me. I keep thinking at this moment of Minnie Louise Haskins' words:

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put thine hand into the hand of God. That shall be to thee better than a light, and safer than a known way." [John Bartlett, comp., *Familiar Quotations* (Toronto, 1955), p. 881]*

Early in my life, from somewhere, perhaps from my conversation with my father about his patriarchal blessing, I had a desire to find out and then to do what the Lord wanted me to do. This was only a seed, planted in weakness, but somehow watched over by some guardian angel, for my mind was never so clear as when I was up and doing something about this seed. I tried to follow Elder Hugh B. Brown's admonition by starting the day right by reading some appropriate scripture or making some covenant and then asking God to help me remember it, and then, during the day, remembering that I was going to talk with him again that night and report what I had done and how well I'd kept the covenant. This helped me to try to do his will (*Conference Report*, October 3, 1964, p. 100).

I ended up as a student at BYU because I'd heard that teachers here taught with the Spirit. The day after I graduated one of my physical education teachers, Miss Jeppson, got me a job sailing between New York and London on great ocean liners as a recreation director. Later I fell in love and married a returned lady missionary. We prayed and laughed and worked our way into having six children, education degrees, and finally into Washington, D.C., where I worked with a congressman and in other government agencies. I served as a bishop of the Washington, D.C., Ward and then came to BYU to teach. Each day I found more and more rich dividends when I sought to put my hand in the hand of my Father in heaven. This belief was tested severely when the lovely companion of my youth died of cancer, leaving me with five children. Oh, how I prayed that I might be spared such a bitter cup! The Lord never promised me that he would spare me; he only said, "Don't worry, things will turn out all right." And I found again and again that the most precious of all gifts is the gift of faith, serenity, peace, and the untroubled mind.

When I looked for someone who would be a mother to my five children and be my

companion, I said to myself, "I want someone who loves and trusts the Lord." So when I saw a smiling young widow, I fell in love again. But presumptuously I asked her bishop if she had a temple recommend. I knew this was only one straw in the wind, but it was one on which I felt I could depend. Not many people would go to the temple unless they want to do what the Lord wants them to do, I reasoned. She qualified for the recommend, so we were married. And it turned out that she did deeply love the Lord. How much we had to share together! How much to have faith about! How much to repent about! Our marriage has been "one long conversation which seems all too short." I looked at the family picture we took a few months ago of our eight children. I counted the twenty-six grandchildren, and more and more on the way. Some of them write and say, "Dad, we want a home like the one we had with you."

Now in conclusion, I just want to bear witness that in spite of all the risks of people trusting God in the wrong way—in spite of the Hitlers who think they do the will of God (I remember Finley Peter Dunne said, "A fanatic is a man that does what he thinks the Lord would do if He knew the facts of the case" [Bergen Evans, *Dictionary of Quotations* (New York, 1968), p. 224])—in spirit of all the young people who have plain heartburn instead of a true burning in their bosom to tell them the right way, I testify that if we just plug ahead, living a clean life and doing God's will as he gives us the light to do it, he will bless us. I testify to you that placing your hand in the hand of the living God is better than a known way. So, of your own free will, go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. It is better than anything *you* can think of, and far more exciting. I tell you, you won't ever be sorry. It will be the most intelligent thing you ever did. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.