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Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Seek to Know and Follow the Will of Christ Just as He Sought the Will of the Father

First, remembering the Lord certainly means doing His will. The sacramental blessing on the bread commits us to be willing to take upon us the name of the Son “and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given [us]” (D&C 20:77). It would also be appropriate to read this covenant as “always remember him *to* keep his commandments.” This is how He always remembered the Father. As He said, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: 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).

Jesus achieved perfect unity with the Father by submitting Himself, both body and spirit, to the will of the Father. Referring to His Father, Jesus said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). Because it was the Father’s will, Jesus submitted even to death, “the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7). His focus on the Father is one of the principal reasons Jesus’ ministry had such clarity and power. There was no distracting double-mindedness in Him.

In the same way, you can put Christ at the center of your life and become one with Him as He is one with the Father (see John 17:20–23). You could begin by stripping everything out of your life and then putting it back together in priority order with the Savior at the center. You would first put in place the things that make it possible always to remember Him—frequent prayer, studying and pondering the scriptures, thoughtful study of apostolic teachings, weekly preparation to partake of the sacrament worthily, Sunday worship, recording and remembering what the Spirit and experience teach you about discipleship. There may be other things that will come to your mind particularly suited to you at this point in your life. Once adequate time and means for centering your life in Christ have been put in place, you can begin to add other responsibilities and things you value insofar as time and resources will permit, such as education and family responsibilities. In this way the essential will not be crowded out by the merely good, and things of lesser value will take a lower priority or fall away altogether.

I recognize that aligning our will to that of Jesus Christ as He aligned His will to the Father’s is something not easily achieved. President Brigham Young spoke understandingly of our challenge when he said:

After all that has been said and done, after he has led this people so long, do you not perceive that there is a lack of confidence in our God? Can you perceive it in

yourselves? You may ask, ‘[Brother] Brigham, do you perceive it in yourself?’ I do, I can see that I yet lack confidence, to some extent, in him whom I trust.—Why? Because I have not the power, in consequence of that which the fall has brought upon me. . . .

Something rises up within me, at times[,] that . . . draws a dividing line between my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven; something that makes my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven not precisely one. . . .

We should feel and understand, as far as possible, as far as fallen nature will let us, as far as we can get faith and knowledge to understand ourselves, that the interest of that God whom we serve is our interest, and that we have no other, neither in time nor in eternity.¹

Though it may not be easy, you can consistently press forward with faith in the Lord. I can attest that over time one’s desire and capacity to always remember and follow the Savior will grow. You should patiently work toward that end and pray always for the discernment and divine help you need. Nephi counseled, “But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (2 Nephi 32:9).

I witnessed a simple example of this kind of prayer a few weeks ago when Elder Dallin H. Oaks and I were assigned to conduct a videoconference interview of a couple in another country. Because we are conducting more and more business via videoconferences, we have a studio for that purpose set up on the fifth floor of the Church Administration Building, where our offices are located. Shortly before going up to the studio, I reviewed once again the information we had collected about the couple and felt I was prepared for the interview. As I came to the small elevator lobby on the fifth floor a few minutes before the appointed time, I saw Elder Oaks sitting alone there with head bowed. In a moment he raised his head and explained, “I was just finishing my prayer in preparation for this interview. We will need the gift of discernment.” He had not neglected the most important preparation, a prayer to “consecrate our performance” for our good and the Lord’s glory.

We Answer to Christ for Every Thought, Word, and Action

A second aspect of always remembering the Redeemer is to live conscious of the responsibility we have to answer to Him for our lives. The scriptures make it clear that there will be a great day of judgment when the Lord shall stand to judge the nations (see 3 Nephi 27:16) and when every knee shall bow and

every tongue confess that He is the Christ (see Romans 14:11; Mosiah 27:31; D&C 76:110). The individual nature and extent of that judgment are best described by Amulek and Alma in the Book of Mormon:

And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works.

Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned.

For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance. (Alma 12:12–15)

When the Savior defined His gospel, this judgment was central to it. He said:

Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:13–15)

Being “lifted up upon the cross” is, of course, a symbolic or shorthand way of referring to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, by which He satisfied the demands that justice may have upon each of us. In other words, all that justice could demand of us for our sins, He has paid by His suffering and death in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. He therefore stands in the place of justice. He is now the personification of justice. Just as God is love, God is also justice. Our debts and obligations now run to Jesus Christ. He, therefore, has the right to judge us.

That judgment, He states, is based on our works. The especially “good news” of His gospel is that He offers the gift of forgiveness conditioned on our repentance. Therefore, if our works include the works of repentance, He forgives our sins and errors. If we reject the gift of pardon, refusing to repent, then the penalties of justice which He now represents are imposed. Remember He said, “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:16–17).

Always remembering Him, therefore, means that we always remember that nothing is hidden from Him. There is no part of our lives, whether act, word, or even thought, that can be kept from the knowledge of the Father and the Son. No cheating on a test, no instance of shoplifting, no lustful fantasy or indulgence, no lie is missed, overlooked, hidden, or forgotten. Whatever one “gets away with” in life or manages to hide from other people must still be faced when the inevitable day comes that he or she is lifted up before Jesus Christ, the God of pure and perfect justice.

Speaking personally, this reality has helped impel me at different times either to repent or to avoid sin altogether. On one occasion in connection with the sale of a home, there was an error in the documentation, and I found myself in a position where I was legally entitled to get more money from the buyer. My real estate agent asked if I wanted to keep the money, a significant amount, since it was my right to do so. I thought about facing the Lord, the personification of justice, and trying to explain that I had a legal right to take advantage of the buyer and his mistake. I couldn’t see myself being very convincing, especially since I would probably be asking for mercy for myself at the same time. And I knew I could not live with myself if I were so dishonorable as to keep the money. I replied to the agent that we would stick with the bargain as we all understood it originally. It is worth a great deal more to me than any sum of money to know that I have nothing to answer for in that transaction when I appear before the Great Judge.

Let me give you another example. In my youth I once was negligent in a way that later caused an injury to one of my brothers. It was not major, but it required some stitches in his hand. I was embarrassed about it and did not own up to my stupidity at the time, and no one ever knew about my role in the matter. Many years later, I was praying that God would reveal to me anything in my life that needed correction so that I might be found more acceptable before Him, and this incident came to my mind. Frankly, I had forgotten all

about it. The Spirit whispered to me that this was an unresolved transgression that I needed to confess. I called my brother and apologized and asked for his forgiveness, which he promptly and generously gave. On reflection I realized that my embarrassment and regret would have been less if I had apologized when the accident happened. Of course, it would have been even better if I had followed the prompting of the Spirit at the time and avoided the injury to my brother altogether.

It was significant to me that the Lord had not forgotten about that event of the distant past even though I had. It was a comparatively small thing, but it still needed to be handled, or I would be answering for it at the judgment bar when the opportunity for repentance had passed. I realized once again that things do not get “swept under the rug” in the eternal economy of things. Sins do not take care of themselves or simply fade away with time. They must be dealt with, and the wonderful thing is that because of His atoning grace they can be dealt with in a much happier and less painful manner than directly satisfying offended justice ourselves.

We should also take heart when thinking of a judgment in which nothing is overlooked, because this also means that no act of obedience, no kindness, no good deed however small is ever forgotten, and no corresponding blessing is ever withheld.

We Need Not Fear Since We Can Look to the Savior for Help We Need

My third and final observation regarding what it means always to remember Him is that we can always look to the Savior for help. In the infant days of the Church, really before the actual reestablishment of the Church as an institution, Jesus counseled and comforted the two young men who were working to translate the Book of Mormon and who would soon have the priesthood conferred upon them, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Joseph was twenty-three years old at the time, and Oliver twenty-two. Persecution and other obstacles were frequent if not constant. In these conditions, in April 1829, the Lord spoke these words to them:

Fear not to do good, my sons, . . . let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail.

Behold, I do not condemn you; go your ways and sin no more; perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you.

Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.

Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Amen. (D&C 6:33–37)

Looking unto the Savior “in every thought” is, of course, another way of saying “always remember him.” As we do, we need not doubt or fear. He reminded Joseph and Oliver, as He reminds us, that through His Atonement He has been given all power in heaven and earth (see Matthew 28:18) and has both the capacity and the will to protect us and minister to our needs—“Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet.” We need only be faithful and we can rely implicitly on Him and His grace.

Isaiah states it this way, “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation” (Isaiah 51:7–8; see also verses 12–16).

Preceding the comforting revelation to Joseph and Oliver that I have cited, the Prophet endured a poignant, painful experience, familiar to all of us, that taught him to look to the Savior and not fear the opinions, pressures, and threats of men. I quote from the account in our priesthood and Relief Society manual, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*:

On June 14, 1828, Martin Harris left Harmony, Pennsylvania, taking the first 116 manuscript pages translated from the gold plates to show to some of his family members in Palmyra, New York. The very next day, Joseph and Emma’s first child was born, a son they named Alvin. The baby died that same day, and Emma’s health declined until she was near death herself. The Prophet’s mother later wrote: “For some time, [Emma] seemed to tremble upon the verge of the silent home of her infant. So uncertain seemed her fate for a season that in the space of two weeks her husband never slept one hour in undisturbed quiet. At the end of this time, his anxiety became so great about the manuscript that he determined, as his wife was now some better, that as soon as she had gained a little more strength he would make a trip to New York and see after the same.”

In July, at Emma’s suggestion, the Prophet left Emma in her mother’s care and traveled by stagecoach to his parents’ home in Manchester Township, New York. The Prophet’s trip covered about 125 miles and took two or three days to complete. Distraught about the loss of his firstborn son, worried about his wife, and gravely concerned about the manuscript, Joseph neither ate nor slept during the entire trip. A fellow traveler, the only other passenger on the stagecoach, observed the Prophet’s weakened state and insisted on accompanying him for the 20-mile walk from the stagecoach station to the Smith home. For the last four miles of the walk, recalled

the Prophet's mother, "the stranger was under the necessity of leading Joseph by his arm, for nature was too much exhausted to support him any longer and he would fall asleep as he stood upon his feet." Immediately upon reaching his parents' home, the Prophet sent for Martin Harris.

Martin arrived at the Smith home in the early afternoon, downcast and forlorn. He did not have the manuscript, he said, and did not know where it was. Hearing this, Joseph exclaimed, "Oh! My God, my God. . . . All is lost, is lost. What shall I do? I have sinned. It is I that tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which I had no right to ask. . . . How shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?"

As the day wore on, the Prophet paced back and forth in his parents' home in great distress, "weeping and grieving." The next day he left to return to Harmony, where, he said, "I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord . . . that if possible I might obtain mercy at his hands and be forgiven of all that I had done which was contrary to his will."

The Lord severely chastised the Prophet for fearing man more than God, but assured him he could be forgiven. "Thou art Joseph," the Lord said, "and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work" (D&C 3:9–10).

For a time, the Lord took the Urim and Thummim and the plates from Joseph. But these things were soon restored to him. "The angel was rejoiced when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim," the Prophet recalled, "and said that God was pleased with my faithfulness and humility, and loved me for my penitence and diligence in prayer, in the which I had performed my duty so well as to . . . be able to enter upon the work of translation again." As Joseph moved forward in the great work before him, he was now fortified by the sweet feelings of receiving the Lord's forgiveness and a renewed determination to do His will.²

As you know, the Prophet's determination to rely upon God and not fear what men could do became fixed after this experience. His life thereafter was a shining example of what it means to remember Christ by relying upon His power and mercy. Joseph expressed this understanding during his very difficult and trying incarceration at Liberty, Missouri, in these words: "You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves. Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (D&C 123:16–17).

In short, to "always remember him" means that we do not live our lives in fear. We know that challenges, disappointments, and sorrows will come to each of us in different ways, but we also know that in the end, because of our divine Advocate, all things can be made to work together for our good

(see D&C 90:24 and 98:3). It is the faith expressed so simply by President Gordon B. Hinckley when he would say, “Things will work out.” Because we always remember the Savior, we can “cheerfully do all things that lie in our power,” confident that His power and love for us will see us through.

Now I bless you that you will be able to always remember our incomparable and divine Redeemer—that you will feel the need and be able to discern and follow His will in all aspects of your life, so that increasingly you will be one with Him as He is one with the Father; that you will always retain an awareness of your accountability to the Lord to sustain you in your fight against temptation or, where needed, in your repentance of any sin or misdeed; and finally, that you will always have with you the quiet assurance of His love and grace that will enable you to withstand the assaults of the adversary and his supporters and to feel the comfort and reality of your Lord’s protecting care. I bless you that the promise to those who always remember Him—“that they may always have his spirit to be with them” (D&C 20:77)—will be fully realized in your life. I bear my witness of the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I bear witness of the reality of the living, resurrected Lord. I bear witness of the infinite and personal love of the Father and the Son for each of you and pray that you will live in constant remembrance of that love in all its expressions. **RE**

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Notes

1. *Deseret News*, September 10, 1856, 212.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 69–71.