

Jesus Christ Is the Way—Choose Christ

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“Stand Forever” Episode 13

Do you make God in your own image? Who is your God? What is your greatest work in this life? If God is merciful and if you can always repent and be forgiven, then why not do whatever you want now and repent later? Are you living a Church-centered or Christ-centered life? Those are some of the questions we will consider in this episode titled “Jesus Christ is the Way—Choose Christ.”

Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge, and this is Episode 13 of the *Stand Forever Series*. In the last episode we observed the characteristics that distinguish us from all other forms of life are intelligence and potential. We said the hallmark of intelligence is rational behavior, thought and choices. We concluded the supreme expression of intelligence, the crowning achievement of every rational being, is to choose best and the best choices are to receive the gifts of God’s Son, Spirit, and life and help others do the same. Those are, have always been, and will always be the best choices through all three sections of the river of life.

Oversimplifying Christ

There is a tendency today to oversimplify Christ by reducing Him to one or more select attributes of His character and make those attributes the North Star. As I said before, a false god can be a principle, even a true principle, or it can be one aspect of the character of Christ. But if that principle or attribute becomes the North Star rather than Christ as a whole, it becomes a false god.

Consider, for example, order. “God’s house is a house of order.” Chaos is the natural state of things, and divine instincts push against chaos to create order. Order is a godly attribute but is not the whole of godliness and if maintaining order and control becomes one of the highest priorities you will feel life is out of whack whenever things spin out of control as they do and will. More than maintaining control and order, a noble objective, we should strive to know and follow Christ in all His dimensions.

Christ is the Prince of Peace.¹ He said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let

¹ Isaiah 9:6

it be afraid.”² And, “in me ye might have peace.”³ But He also said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”⁴

John said, “God is love”⁵ and love is embedded in the first and second great commandments. Love is at the heart of the gospel and character of Jesus Christ. But He is much more than only love, and His gospel is more than sunshine and roses. John did not say, “God is only love.”

On two occasions, the Lord cleared the temple of moneychangers and merchants by force.⁶ He used a braided whip at least in the first instance. On another occasion, He said to some of the Pharisees, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”⁷ On another occasion He said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”⁸

Not to diminish love in the least, but if order, love, peace or tolerance or whatever single attribute we may choose to define Christ becomes the North Star, it becomes a false god. The Lord Jesus Christ is not one-dimensional. He cannot rightly be reduced to a few qualities that fit our own personal agenda, turning things on their head by making god in our own image. One of the reasons for the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ in our day is precisely because “every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world.”⁹

Choose to Receive the Gift of God’s Son

One of the many things we all have in common is inevitable, inescapable death. Life is a miracle with each beat of your heart, but one day it will stop and when it does what will you have accomplished? When you look back over your life, what will be your greatest work, your most important creation?

² John 14:27

³ John 16:33

⁴ Matthew 10:34

⁵ 1 John 4:8

⁶ John 2:113–17; Matthew 21:12, 13

⁷ John 8:44

⁸ Matthew 23:27

⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 1:16

Your greatest work, your most important creation, is and will ever be YOU. Brigham Young said: “The greatest and most important labour we have to perform is to cultivate ourselves.”¹⁰

You have a choice. You can decide what you will do with your life. You can choose what kind of person you will become. Do you think about that? Do you think about and plan for who you want to become?

Who are you and who will you become? By this I don’t mean are you or will you be a cowboy, lawyer, surfer, homemaker, engineer, computer programmer, accountant, or the like. I don’t refer to what kind of car you drive, what kind of clothes you wear, what kind of house you live in, or what kind of family you will raise. I mean, when all of that is removed and there you stand alone, who will you be? I mean, YOU.

What personality, strengths, knowledge, presence, qualities, virtues, and character will you have? What will you look like? What will you sound like? What will it be like to be around you? Who will you be?

We plan many things in life. Most of us live in a house built from a plan. Someone first envisioned the house in her mind, and a plan was then put to paper.

We plan our time in days, weeks, years and beyond. We have meal plans, meeting plans, financial plans, production plans, marketing plans and travel plans. Every intentional creation of both God and man is the product of the same process—an idea, a vision of what can be, a plan and then the work to bring it about. But have you planned your greatest work? Have you envisioned who you will become? Do you plan for what kind of person you want to become? Can you see in your mind who you want to be? Do you know?

As you consider what kind of person you want to become, what choices do you have? The choices are more limited than what you might think. Here are most of the choices, but overall, they are a choice between the qualities of light or the qualities of darkness:

Do you want to be powerful or weak?

Certain and confident, or afraid and insecure?

Comfortable with yourself or arrogant and abrasive?

Do you want to be filled with light or darkness?

¹⁰ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 10:2; (Hugh J. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, p. 392)

Do you want to have peace or conflict within?
Generous or selfish?
Influential or inconsequential?
Do you want to be free or a slave?
Happy or miserable?
Do you want to be kind and loving, or mean and cruel?
Honest or dishonest?
Do you want to be forgiving or hard and unforgiving?
Knowledgeable or ignorant?
Do you want to be a person of faith or doubt and fear?
Trustworthy or unreliable?
Hardworking or lazy?
Do you want to be cheerful or despondent?

The first of each of these choices is an attribute of light. They are incorporated into your character as you choose to follow Christ.

As you consider the question of what kind of person you will become, you must understand the dynamic process of life. You not only can change but you do change all the time mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Up until recently, science held that brains do not change after childhood. We now know that not to be true. The brain is not hardwired by adulthood and can be rewired by changing habits and thinking differently. The ability of the brain to change is referred to as "neuroplasticity."

To recognize physical changes requires little more attention than occasionally looking in the mirror. You are also constantly evolving emotionally and spiritually. All those changes are either for better or worse depending on what you are doing and how you are thinking.

Sometimes people do not believe they can change. They excuse their failures and weaknesses by saying: "That's just the way I am." "I am just a short-tempered, impatient person." "I can't get up in the morning. That's just the way I am." "That's my nature." Or "I'm just shy. That's all. That's just who I am." "I'm just not very strong." "I am not really a spiritual person."

To believe that weaknesses and deficiencies in your character are unchangeable is to reject the central truth of the Plan of Salvation. You are not etched in stone. You are a

dynamic, changing, evolving being. You are always changing. You never stay the same. You cannot stand still.

You are right now the sum of what you have thought, said, seen, heard, and done. What you think, say, do, hear, and see, causes you to change for good or evil, to become either stronger or weaker, to either internalize the qualities of light or the qualities of darkness. Therefore, you are responsible for who you are and you are responsible for who you will become.

Do you know what kind of person you want to become? Do you see in your mind who you want to be? Do you know? Jesus asked a similar question. He said, **“What manner of men ought ye to be?”** He was speaking to his Nephite disciples and so he asked about men, but the question applies to us all, and so, He asks, “What manner of men and women ought ye to be?” Then answering His own question, he said, **“Even as I am.”**¹¹

President David O. McKay summed it up this way: “The highest of all ideals are the teachings and particularly the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and that man is most truly great who is most Christlike. What you sincerely in your heart think of Christ will determine what you are, will largely determine what your acts will be.... By choosing him as our ideal, we create within ourselves a desire to be like him, to have fellowship with him.”¹²

A woman speaking to youth advised, “Decide who you want to be, and go for it.” That advice is better than being knocked around by the circumstances of life, never going anywhere or never accomplishing much, but the world offers no one equal to your full potential or worthy of your highest emulation. If you look around in the world for a star to emulate you will fall way short of your real potential. One of the reasons for the restoration is to part the night clouds and reveal the North Star. Better than “Choose who you want to be” is “Choose to follow Christ.”

“No Other Gods Before Me”

From the beginning of time, God has repeatedly invited us to put Him first, trust in Him (not instead of everyone and everything else, but above anyone and everything else). Trust in God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost. Therein is strength, wisdom, clarity, confidence, power, knowledge, light, intelligence, sustenance, fulfillment, meaning, faith, love, joy, and peace.

¹¹ 3 Nephi 27:27, *emphasis added*

¹² David O. McKay, General Conference, April 1951

God gave to Moses ten commandments. The first is: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"¹³ which is equivalent to $A + B = C$.

The second commandment ("Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth") reinforces the first commandment to have no other gods before the Lord God of Israel.¹⁴ The Old Testament is especially replete with denunciation of idol worship.

An idol is not only made of stone or wood, and a false god or false Christ can be something other than a person, and if a person it need not be one who claims to be Christ or the object of worship. A false god may be an idea (even a good idea), a principle (even a true principle), or a lifestyle or obsession on anything or anyone above or before God the Father and Jesus Christ. It includes anything or anyone that becomes the basis for making choices above God Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ or distracts from worship of them.

Who is your god? What god do you worship? It is easy to tell. Your god is the standard by which you make choices. It's that simple. It is the standard by which you decide what you see, hear, say, think and do, and the standard for measuring the past.

- If you see what you see, hear what you hear, say what you say, think what you think and do what you do based on what is easiest, you worship the god of comfort and ease. As a result, that god will give you what he has to offer: hollow comfort, empty ease, and no more.
- If you make choices based on recognition, acceptance, and praise of others, you worship the great god of popularity. As a result, that fickle god will jerk your chain one way and then another and give what little he has to offer, fleeting popularity which vanishes like the morning dew, but no more.
- If you do what you do based on "the bottom-line" (what will generate the greatest monetary gain and possessions), you worship the god of wealth. That god will give you all he has to offer, fleeting wealth and possessions, but no more.

¹³ Exodus 20:3

¹⁴ Exodus 20:4

- If you do what you do based on the belief that people prosper only by their own industry and intelligence, that everything came to be haphazardly out of nothing, by nothing for nothing, if you believe in nothing, then nothing is your god, and nothing will give you nothing.
- If you make decisions based on your self-image or what YOU want to do, what best satisfies YOUR opinions and desires, then you worship the god of self and you will make of you whatever you can but far, far less than your full potential.
- If you do what you do to please others (whether a spouse, parent, or someone else), that person is your god and who knows what he or she will give you.
- If you make decisions primarily based on a single virtue or bellwether principle—such as tolerance, love, or joy—then you worship a part but not the Whole. That god, however good it may be, will give what she can, but far less than the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and far less than your full potential.
- If you make decisions based on self-gratification, you worship the god of the flesh who will reward you with the flash of pizzazz followed by an endless void.
- If you make choices based on walking the line between right and wrong, walking up to the line but not crossing over, you will walk in the middle, somewhere in between weak and strong, somewhere in between light and dark. Even if you don't cross the line, you will worship the great god of mediocrity, walking with the crowd.
- **But if you make decisions looking to the Lord as your guide, then and only then, you worship Him. Then and only then, is He your God.** He will give you all He and the Father have, every good thing forever: a character like His that will endure throughout eternity; peace, glory, dominions, power, infinite capacity, knowledge, light and intelligence; a fullness of joy; the continuation of family and posterity throughout eternity, and every other good thing in this life and eternity.

To worship at the altar of any other god is folly, which is not to say you shouldn't be influenced by other good people, principles, and persuasions, which you can't avoid anyway. The Lord said, "Thou shalt have no other gods **before me.**" He didn't say, "Thou shalt have no other god **but me.**"

The commandment is to put God first, not at the exclusion of everything and everyone else, but paramount, above and beyond everything and everyone else. "First, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁵ Choose best. Choose Christ.

Church Centered vs. Christ Centered

As an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ it is easy to live a Church-centered life more than a Christ-centered life and not know it. It is easy for Church to become the one thing. To be clear, this is not to diminish the importance of the Church in the least. One cannot fully live a Christ centered life as He intends without the Church He established for that very purpose. But we may "look beyond the mark," blind to Christ¹⁶ or unawares, making Him a lesser light. Christ and His Church are overlapping circles, but not concentric.

A little girl stands at the podium to bear her testimony. What does she say? "I'd like to bear my testimony; I know the Church is true." That's fine. I hope it isn't rote parroting of what she has heard, but I wonder. I'm just struck by what I have never heard a child say. "I'd like to bear my testimony; I know Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I know if we follow Him, we will be happy and if we forget and make mistakes we can be forgiven because He paid for our sins." I've never heard that testimony from a child. Maybe you have. I hope to hear it someday.

One of the patterns that emerged from serving on the Restorations and Cancellations Committee was the tendency of centering one's life on the Church of Jesus Christ rather than Christ. A man has doubts about the Church. He expresses his doubts to his wife, and she shares her faith. He persists in what gave rise to the doubts in the first place and not surprisingly concludes the Church is not true. He becomes bitter and angry, thinking that friends, family, and teachers throughout his life all duped him.

He next concludes there is no God and then is unfaithful to his wife. He decides he was cheated out of all the pizzazz of a swinging single having married at a young age with beliefs so different than what he has now adopted. He leaves his wife and family, in his mind to be free. A divorce follows. Church membership is withdrawn whether at his request or at the initiative of local leaders.

This example is couched in the context of a man, husband, and father but it is not unique to men. It could just as well be a woman, wife, and mother. The pattern is the

¹⁵ Pearl of Great Price, *Articles of Faith* #4.

¹⁶ Jacob 4:14

same either way. It does not occur in every instance, but it is by far and away prevalent enough to be a pattern, the rule and not the exception. It plays out over and over and over again.

It is stunning how quickly and negatively failure of one's testimony of the Church affects every other important aspect of life. Usually, when one's testimony of the Church is shaken, everything else falls to the ground as well. That should not happen.

The fact that the failure of testimony of the Church often leads so quickly to disbelief in God, the abandonment of family and principles of eternal truth including fidelity in marriage, providing for a family, and raising them in light and truth suggests a Church-centered rather than Christ-centered life and how quickly thinking is muddled when the Spirit withdraws.

If one has a testimony of the Church founded on the rock of revelation, he will not likely fall away. But if one also has a testimony of God the Father and Jesus Christ, he should at least remain true to spouse and family even when belief in the Church is shaken. The mistaken belief the Church is not true does not logically lead to the conclusions that there is no God and right and wrong, truth and error dissolve away all together. But that is what usually happens. People turn away from the Church and all the wheels fall off.

Again, one cannot fully live a Christ-centered life without the Church He established for that very purpose. His Church with the fulness of His gospel, His priesthood and ordinances giving way to the blessings of His Atonement, the Spirit of God, the privilege to engage in His work, and ultimately the gift of God's life are essential elements of living a Christ-centered life. However, one may be more influenced by the next assignment, meeting, lesson, service project, activity, or other Church responsibility than looking unto Christ in every thought, remembering Him always, and doing all things in His name. He is the Lord God. Let us take His name and always remember Him to keep His commandments and build up His kingdom, that we may always have His Spirit to be with us. Jesus Christ is the Savior and the Way.

Worthiness Is Not the Whole of Godliness.

Finally, to become like the Lord is more than worthiness. When we refer to Christ, we most commonly use the title "Savior." There is nothing wrong with that. He is, of course, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. That is at the heart of who He is and what He did for us, but it is not the whole of it. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, and every good thing in between.

Although He refers to Himself as the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and so on, He didn't use the term of Savior or Redeemer to describe Himself as recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament. This is not piling on titles and accolades but remembering He did and does much more for us than atone for our sins. The immeasurable greatness of the Atonement should not obscure all else He did and is.

Salvation is in the name of Jesus Christ, which is Christ as a whole, the sum of His parts. Salvation is not in the Atonement, the Savior, Redeemer, Bread of Life, Light of the World, Prince of Peace, Advocate, or any other name. Rather salvation is in the name of Jesus Christ, all of Him, the sum total, all He did and all He does for us, all He is, every part of Him.¹⁷

President Russell M. Nelson summed up the role of Christ as Savior and the Way when he simply said, "Our Savior is the Divine Exemplar who marked the path that we are to follow."¹⁸ Jesus Christ not only came to atone for our sins; He also came to show us the way. He is not only the Savior, but also the Way.

The consequences of following Christ are more than becoming clean. To become like the Lord is more than worthiness. It is to incorporate into your being His qualities, all the qualities of godliness, not just purity.

When we speak of repentance and forgiveness, we often say the Lord's forgiveness is complete; it washes away or remits our sins. Though our sins be as scarlet they may be as white as snow if we repent.¹⁹ All of that is true. We also say, our sins are washed away, forgiven as though they never occurred. But here we must be careful. That statement, though true in a way, gives rise to a serious misunderstanding.

It is true if we repent, we are washed clean and made worthy again because of Christ's intervention on our behalf, which He can do having atoned for our sins. It is also true we may be worthy again to have God's Spirit. But it is not true that forgiveness makes everything else all better.

Damaged reputation, self-esteem, and consequently one's ability to exercise faith are not necessarily restored, even with forgiveness. Forgiveness is not forgetting, and the

¹⁷ See, for example, Mosiah 3:17

¹⁸ Russell M. Nelson, "The Love and Laws of God," *BYU Devotional*, September 17, 2019

¹⁹ Isaiah 1:18

more there is to forget, the more difficult it is to believe in one's worthiness or recover a good reputation or for others to forgive.

Forgiveness does not restore broken trust and damaged relationships resulting from sin. If a divorce follows and a family is destroyed, or a child is born out of wedlock, God's forgiveness of the sins giving rise to those consequences doesn't change any of that. The collateral damage remains.

Without the Atonement of Jesus Christ, there would be no hope for anyone; chaos, darkness and death would prevail. But it is folly to believe every consequence of sin is absolved because of God's forgiveness. That reality is in part the awfulness of sin.

Elder B.H. Roberts said: "The severity of the Atonement should impress men with the fact that we live in a world of stern realities; that human actions draw with them tremendous consequences that may not be easily set aside if the actions in which they have their origin are wrong."²⁰

We do "live in a world of stern realities" and there can be "tremendous consequences" that flow from sin that "may not be easily set aside," even with repentance and forgiveness. Sin, for example, rarely affects only the sinner; there is almost always collateral damage.

A woman commits adultery and her husband is devastated. He does not forgive her, and a divorce ensues. They both repent, she of her infidelity and he of his refusal to forgive. Let's assume they are both forgiven and made clean before God through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As glorious as redemption is, certain collateral consequences remain: they are apart, both remarried and their children don't have their mother and father in their home.

A man becomes involved with pornography and eventually loses his job, his wife, and family. He commits a felony, serves time in prison, and is registered as a sex-offender. Eventually he changes the direction of his life, he gets on course and repents. He may well have been forgiven of all sins, made clean and worthy through the Atonement of Christ, but he still must deal with a broken family and a criminal record. Nothing in this life will change those facts.

Another man was unfaithful to his wife many years ago. She was unwilling to forgive. He lost his membership in the Church and although he repented and was rebaptized,

²⁰ B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology*, Vol. 4; P. 128.

he remained inactive in the Church for many years because of his guilt and the bitter feelings of his wife. She has since forgiven him and they are both active, worthy members of the Church, but all their children are inactive in the Church.

When we are forgiven, God's forgiveness does not instill automatically within us all the strength and power, all the character and knowledge, all the trust and good name, all the confidence and faith, that could have otherwise been ours had we been obedient in the first place. It also does not resolve all the collateral damage.

The idea of "play now and pay later" or "rebel now and repent later" is a common idea, but a terribly bad one. Another man said, "I convinced myself I would be able to cease sexual sins when I wanted to repent of the transgressions committed." He was wrong. That mentality would have merit if the only issue were worthiness and if you could always repent and be forgiven, but the issue is not simply *are you worthy?* Rather, who are you and who are you becoming? Everything you do and experience plays into that.

Forgiveness stops the backward slide of sin, but it does not propel you forward to where you would have been had you never sinned in the beginning. There is nothing in scripture to suggest forgiveness is a substitute for righteousness so as to instill immediately and magically within you all that you would have become had you chosen more wisely to begin with.

As Jacob said, "O ... remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal."²¹

Remember the awfulness of sin. You may live a life of deceit and later repent, but neither repentance nor forgiveness will make of you an honest person. Redemption will not instill in your soul that godly quality we call integrity. You may repent of a lifetime of impatience and temper and be forgiven, but forgiveness will not make of you a patient and temperate person. Character is forged one choice at a time, choosing to follow Christ and not only because God forgives your sins.

There is nothing of greater importance in all eternity than the Atonement of Jesus Christ, except possibly obedience in the first place. When God declared the purpose for the creation of the earth, He didn't say, "we will prove them herewith to see if they will

²¹ 2 Nephi 9:39

repent," rather He said, "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them."²²

Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. He is the Savior. He is also the Way. He came not only to save us from our sins; He came to show us how to act and what to do in the first place. We all make mistakes in this life. We all sin. There would be no hope for any one of us without Christ the Redeemer, the Savior, without the crowning achievement of His Infinite Atonement, but we can't sit on our hands thinking all will be well in the end when we repent. That is "a false and vain and foolish doctrine."²³ We must do our part now, choose better and better until we learn to choose best before "the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed."²⁴

The supreme expression of intelligence, the crowning achievement of every rational being, is to choose best, to make choices that will produce change and growth within us to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. To choose best is to follow Christ. Choose best. Choose God Our Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

In the next episode (Episode 14), we will consider whether there is something you can do that will make everything else better that can also be done while doing everything else and not at the exclusion of everything else? The answer is yes. I hope you will join me then to discover what is The One Thing.

²² Abraham 3:25

²³ 2 Nephi 28:9

²⁴ Alma 34:33