

Jesus Christ Is the Truth—Where Are You?

(The Course)

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“Stand Forever” Episode 20

Where are you? That is the question for this episode. You can’t get to where you want to go without first knowing where you are and then plot the course in between. In past episodes, we explored some of the many dimensions of who you are, including whether you are good enough? I suggested the answer to that question depends in part on where you are. Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge, and this is Episode 20 of the *Stand Forever Series*.

So, where are you? The answer to this question is much easier, than “who are you?” There only two places in the world—the path of the gospel of Jesus Christ and everywhere else. You are either on the path or you’re not. The question should be, “are you on the path?” It doesn’t matter so much where you are on the path, if you are on it and moving forward—that’s the question. If you are, then you are good enough despite your weaknesses, mistakes, and imperfections. It’s that simple.

There Is Only One Course

Having taken your bearings as to where you want to go (Point B) and where you are (Point A), you would think to draw a straight line between the two and that would be your course. That may or may not work here, however, depending on where you are. The problem is, not all courses lead to Point B, any more than all roads lead to heaven.

Life is about getting to the end, getting to the destination, reunion with God, receiving the gift of God’s Son, God’s Spirit, and God’s life and helping others do the same. More concisely, it is to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and help others do the same. That’s the destination. That’s Point B.

There is only one course, one path, that leads to that destination. If you are already on that course, then you can draw a straight line to the destination. But if not, you need to draw a straight line to that course and then turn right toward the destination. You are either on the course, or you’re not; if you’re not, go there.

In Lehi’s description of the vision of the tree of life, he said he saw multitudes “pressing forward” on the path that led to the tree of life (the straight line).¹ But he also said “[I]

¹ 1 Nephi 8:24, 30

saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, *that they might obtain the path* which led unto the tree by which I stood.”² You have to get to the path first, the true course, and then stay on it to get to the tree of life.

This method of navigation is counter to the intuition to draw a straight line to the destination from your location wherever you may be, but it is necessary because not all courses converge on the same destination and the course is also partially the destination.

Convergent Courses

One common belief is that all roads lead to heaven. “Every church is good, and we will all be saved in the end.” You may have even thought, “I really don’t know that much about other faiths. There are many people of other faiths that seem to be sincere and convinced that they have the truth also. All religions teach people to be good, and isn’t that what we are trying to do, become good people? So maybe that is all God asks of us. We are essentially striving towards the same thing.”

The belief that all churches lead to heaven, that all religions teach people to be good and in the end that is all God wants, the belief that one church is not better than another, just different, that all paths will converge, and one is quite as good as another, is a prevalent belief that has done great harm to mankind throughout time. It is as old as the world.

Nehor falsely taught “all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.” The scripture goes on to say, “And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.”³ That’s the feel-good gospel. Korihor and Sherem taught similar nonsense, also deceiving many.⁴

Moroni saw our day and said, “there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.”⁵ Nephi also saw our day and said the same thing:

² 1 Nephi 8:21, *emphasis added*

³ Alma 1:4-5

⁴ Alma 30:17; Jacob 7

⁵ Mormon 8:31

Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and *it shall be well with us*. And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and *at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God*. Yea, and *there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines*, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark. And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them. Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted.”⁶

Again—“The blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.” Imagine the anguish of those saints who sacrificed all they had, some their lives for the truths of the restored gospel, when they see the apathy, mediocrity, confusion, and deceit created by this singular belief. Surely, they would cry out in anguish that their blood was shed for naught because people are blinded by such “false and vain and foolish doctrines.”

How can everyone be right when there are so many divergent teachings? That is what the young Joseph asked himself. He said,

My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*⁷

⁶ 2 Nephi 28:7-11

⁷ Joseph Smith—History 1:9-11

Obviously, all churches cannot be true because, although there is some common ground among them, they differ greatly in fundamental doctrine. The only other conclusion is no church is the true church, which means they are all in error. God created all of this—the cosmos, the universe, our solar system, the earth, and every form of life—just to stick us here and let us muddle through? How much sense does that make? Why would He do that? Why create this world for us and then leave us in confusion to stumble along? Why would He not show us the Way and then allow us to choose?

If God wants us to return to His presence, if He loves us and wants us to succeed in this life, then would He not make the way clear from the beginning? Yes, He would, and He has. Since the beginning, He has revealed through prophets the way to return to Him. It is simple. Everyone is capable of understanding, choosing, and following. Even the least and weakest can understand the truth and follow Him.

The gospel is clear and available to everyone. In fact, everyone who has not had an opportunity to know and accept will have that opportunity. “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, [literally] all mankind [every last one] may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.*”⁸ We are the only ones that believe that.

No one is excluded. As Nephi said, “He inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female ... all are alike unto God.”⁹

That is one of the reasons for temples, and it is why so many people work so hard at genealogical research. They are not just interested in who their ancestors are, they are working for the salvation of “all mankind” on both sides of the veil. There is no religion that includes everyone, except His Church by which the Lord does and has provided a way for all. But we must choose. It won’t work otherwise. We must get up, walk through the gate, get on the path, and then stay the course.

Life and judgment will not be a process of God only weighing all the good that someone does against all the bad and, if the balances tip in one’s favor, grant him entrance. No unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God. Can’t happen. Can’t be done. It is not just a matter of living a good life, whatever belief system one may have.

There is a glorious kingdom for those who think and live that way. There are decent, respectable, humble, honorable people in many churches, Christian and otherwise.

⁸ The Articles of Faith, 3.

⁹ 2 Nephi 26:33

There are Latter-day Saints who do not keep their covenants, but essentially live a good life.

There is a place for those who live a good life but are “not valiant in the testimony of Jesus.”¹⁰ It is not so much a kingdom of punishment for their shortfall. Rather, it is a kingdom of glory commensurate to their faithfulness, equal to their state of preparation and being.

They will receive the light and glory to which they are entitled in a terrestrial existence, which will be glorious, but not a fullness of joy and glory. They will not realize the full measure of their potential, not because they can’t, but because they choose not to. They will not return to the presence of God the Father, which is the essential problem in life.

Elder Boyd K. Packer said:

Good conduct without the ordinances of the gospel will neither redeem nor exalt mankind; covenants and the ordinances are essential. We are required to teach the doctrines, even the unpopular ones.

Yield on this doctrine, and you cannot justify the Restoration. The doctrine is true; it is logical. The opposite is not.

A few weeks ago I was returning from the East with President Hinckley. We conversed with a passenger who said something to the effect that all churches lead to heaven. How often have you heard that—the parallel path to heaven philosophy?

They claim one church is not really better than another, just different. Eventually the paths will converge. One is, therefore, quite as safe in any church as in any other.

While this seems to be very generous, it just cannot be true.

I find it so interesting that those who condemn us reject the parallel path philosophy themselves when it comes to non-Christian religions.

For if they do not, they have no reason to accept the Lord as our Redeemer or regard the Atonement as essential. And what could they do with his statement

¹⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 76:79

that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”? (Mark 16:16)

While the converging path idea is very appealing, it really is not reasonable.

Suppose schools were operated on that philosophy, with each discipline a separate path leading to the same diploma. No matter whether you study or not, pass the tests or not, all would be given the same diploma—the one of their choice.

Without qualifying, one could choose the diploma of an attorney, an engineer, a medical doctor.

Surely you would not submit yourself to surgery under the hands of a graduate of that kind of school!

But it does not work that way. It cannot work that way—not in education, not in spiritual matters. There are essential ordinances just as there are required courses. There are prescribed standards of worthiness. If we resist them, avoid them, or fail them, we will not enter in with those who complete the course.

Do you realize that the notion that all churches are equal presupposes that the *true* church of Jesus Christ actually does not exist anywhere?

Now, others may insist that *this* is not the true church. That is their privilege. But to claim that it does not exist anywhere, that it does not even *need* to exist, is to deny the scriptures.

The New Testament teaches of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” and speaks of “[all coming] in the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:5,13) and of a “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21).

We did not invent the doctrine of the only true church. It came from the Lord. Whatever perception others have of us, however presumptuous we appear to be, whatever criticism is directed to us, we must teach it to all who will listen

We do not claim that others have no truth. The Lord described them as having “a form of godliness.” Converts to the Church may bring with them all the truth they possess, and have it added upon.”¹¹

The Course Is Partially the Destination.

In addition to the fact that not all courses converge on the same destination, the other reason to chart a course directly to the true course is because that course is also in part the destination.

God’s greatest gifts are His Son, His Spirit, and His life. The purpose or destination of life is to receive those gifts, return home to God and help others do the same. That’s Point B. Except for the gift of God’s life, eternal life, everything else is to be realized along the course. To that extent, the course is also partially the destination. Get on course, stay there and you will make it.

A common view of our journey is bite-the-bullet now for a greater reward later; resist temptation of an immediate reward in preference for a far better one later. This view is particularly driven by our understanding of heaven or eternal life, which is the ultimate goal and the epitome of delayed reward. In the grand scheme of things, eternal life is God’s greatest gift,¹² but while the hope of eternal life holds sway with our choices today, generally people are more heavily influenced by how life can be better here and now.

In their book *The One Thing*, the authors observed that “Economists have long known that even though people prefer big rewards over small ones, they have an even stronger preference for present rewards over future ones—even when the future rewards are MUCH BIGGER. It’s an ordinary occurrence, oddly named hyperbolic discounting—the further away a reward is in the future, the smaller the immediate motivation to achieve it.”¹³

God’s plan for His children, however, is not entirely delayed gratification, suffer now in hope for glory and happiness later—not hardly. The supreme blessings in this life, the best we can experience, the best of human conditions in this life are God’s Son, His Spirit and all the blessings that flow from it, the hope of eternal life and helping other people receive those same gifts. All of that is part of the course, and all of it is available

¹¹ Boyd K. Packer, “The Only True Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 80

¹² Doctrine and Covenants 14:7

¹³ Gary Keller & Jay Papasan, *The ONE Thing* (Bard Press, 2013), 265

now.

What Is the Course?

Speaking of the house of Israel in the “latter days” among others, Nephi said, “They shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, *that they may know how* to come unto him and be saved.”¹⁴ The course is “how” to get to the destination, Point B.

What is the how? What is the course? We might quickly say, “keep the commandments,” and in saying so, we would be correct. The Lord said as much: “And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God.”¹⁵ But the Lord also has repeatedly defined the course more specifically, detailing the waypoints along the way that collectively comprise the course to eternal life.

The greatest mystery in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is odd because the Lord has defined it clearly and repeatedly. He also said we should take it to all the world—that is, “the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved.”¹⁶

As is the case with other gospel terms, “the gospel of Jesus Christ” and “the doctrine of Jesus Christ” are terms that on occasion are used more broadly, but by and large those terms are not only interchangeable,¹⁷ but are clearly and repeatedly defined.

Here are a few examples:

- Doctrine and Covenants 33: “Yea, **repent** and be **baptized**, every one of you, for a remission of your sins; yea, be baptized even by water, and then cometh the **baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost**. Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, **this is my gospel**; and remember that they shall have **faith in me or they can in nowise be saved**; And upon this rock I will build my church; yea, upon this rock ye are built, and if ye continue, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.”¹⁸

¹⁴ 1 Nephi 15:14, 18

¹⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 14:7

¹⁶ 1 Nephi 15:14

¹⁷ Jacob 7:6

¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 33:11-13, *emphasis added*

- Doctrine and Covenants 39: “And verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me. **And this is my gospel—repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter**, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom.”¹⁹
- Nephi says he must speak about the **doctrine of Christ**. He then teaches faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost and enduring to the end. He concludes by saying: “And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, **this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**, which is one God, without end. Amen.”²⁰
- For emphasis, the Lord on one occasion characterized the same principles under four different banners as “my gospel,” “the gospel,” “the word,” and “the commandment.”
 - As for “**my gospel**” and “**the gospel**” he says all men will be judged before Him by their works “(a)nd it shall come to pass, that whoso **repenteth** and is **baptized** in my name shall be filled; and if he **endureth to the end**, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.”²¹
 - “And this is **the word** which he hath given unto the children of men. ... And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their **faith**, and the **repentance** of all their sins, and their **faithfulness unto the end**.”²²
 - “Now this is the commandment: **Repent**, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be **baptized** in my name, that ye may be **sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost**, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, **this is my gospel**; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do;”²³

¹⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 39:5-6, *emphasis added*

²⁰ 2 Nephi 31:21, *emphasis added*

²¹ 3 Nephi 27:16, *emphasis added*

²² 3 Nephi 27:18-19, *emphasis added*

²³ 3 Nephi 27:20-21, *emphasis added*

- The Lord said, “Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you **my doctrine**. And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to **repent and believe in me**. And whoso **believeth in me, and is baptized**, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that **this is my doctrine**, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with **fire and with the Holy Ghost**. And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one. **And again** I say unto you, ye must **repent**, and **become as a little child**, and be **baptized in my name**, or ye can in nowise receive these things. And **again I say** unto you, ye must **repent**, and be **baptized in my name**, and **become as a little child**, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that **this is my doctrine**, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. And *whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil*, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them. Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth.”²⁴

When we use the phrases “the gospel of Jesus Christ” or “the doctrine of Christ,” what do people understand those phrases mean? Many think of all the principles and teachings of Christ as a whole rather than the narrow definition the Lord has repeatedly given. While the broader definition may be correct in some instances, it is less meaningful because it is so broad. If everything is swept into one bucket, most of the individual contents are buried one on top of another, which is why the Lord has repeatedly, carefully, and simply pulled them out of the bucket and laid out the course, the waypoints along our journey, His gospel, His doctrine.

These truths are so important the Lord has said if parents in Zion don’t teach them to their children by age eight, the sin will be on the heads of the parents. “And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized,

²⁴ 3 Nephi 11:31-41, *emphasis added*

that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.”²⁵

Why age eight? Is it because younger children are more teachable? While younger children are more impressionable, what happens at age eight? They become accountable. And what happens then? Eventually they die spiritually. Having become accountable, they make mistakes, and the Spirit withdraws and if they don’t understand the gospel or doctrine of Christ, they won’t know what’s happened when it does, much less how to fix it.

And so as Nephi said, “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, *that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.*”²⁶

One of the best expressions of the standard by which we will be judged is given by Nephi who said:

... if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be *baptized by water*, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water! ... [I]t sheweth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them. And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. ... And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son. And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do.... He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.²⁷

And then Nephi gives a marvelous summary statement of hope: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”²⁸

²⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 68:25

²⁶ 2 Nephi 25:26

²⁷ 2 Nephi 31:5, 9-12, 15-16

²⁸ 2 Nephi 31:20

What then is the standard by which one will be judged? Did you have faith in Christ by repenting of your sins to bring your life into harmony with His teachings and by entering the covenant of baptism to keep His commandments? Did you receive and keep the power of God in your life, the gift of the Holy Ghost? Did you make and keep additional covenants associated with the ordinances of the temple, particularly temple marriage? Did you press forward incorporating into your life the word of Christ, and did you stay the course engaged in His work, building the kingdom of God as an active, contributing member of His Church?

The Lord warned saying, “And of tenets thou shalt not talk, but thou shalt declare repentance and faith on the Savior, and remission of sins by baptism, and by fire, yea, even the Holy Ghost. Behold, this is a great and the last commandment which I shall give unto you concerning this matter; *for this shall suffice for thy daily walk*, even unto the end of thy life.”²⁹

The waypoints along the course that leads to God’s Son, His Spirit and His life, are faith in Christ, repentance, ordinances beginning with baptism for the remission of sins, receive the Holy Ghost and endure to the end building up the kingdom of God. That is the course overcoming the natural state of things, of order out of chaos, light over darkness and life over death.

In coming episodes, we will explore each of those waypoints in greater depth. I hope you will join me for that. *You’re either on it, or not. If not, get on it. If you’re on it, stay on it and you will make it.*

²⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 19:31–32