

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Section 2.VIII

The Meaning of the Last Judgment

In regard to fear, this is an interesting section. The way we mistakenly understand the Last Judgment, it is the time all our dirty laundry gets aired, all our sins are listed, we stand naked and exposed as the sinners and failures we know we are, and we are sentenced to the just punishment. Therefore, we fear the Last Judgment. (If you have grown up in Western civilization without having absorbed some version of this fantastically false picture of God's great tribunal, you are fortunate indeed.) So it makes sense that a chapter that has dealt extensively with our fear would end with a reinterpretation of what, for many of us, seems like the climax of all our fears: the Last Judgment.

This section and the next (T-3.I) present the Course's corrections for two major Christian doctrines: the Last Judgment and the Crucifixion as a sacrificial atonement. The traditional teachings, according to the Course, lend themselves to fear. The Course's reinterpretations of both doctrines aim at freedom from fear. *A Course in Miracles* is not shy about breaking from traditional Christian teaching when it feels that the teaching has been mistaken. Although the Course shares a wide stretch of common ground with Christianity, these two sections demonstrate unmistakably that its teachings in many areas profoundly differ from traditional Catholic and conservative Protestant theology.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹One of the [Ur: chief] ways in which you can correct the magic-miracle confusion is to remember that you did not create yourself. ²You are apt to forget this when you become egocentric, and this puts you in a position where a belief in magic is virtually inevitable. ³Your will to create was [Ur: instincts for creation were] given you by your Creator, Who was expressing the same Will [Ur: instinct] in His creation. ⁴Since creative ability rests [Ur: solely] in the mind, everything you create is necessarily a matter of will [Ur: necessarily instinctive]. ⁵It also follows that whatever you alone make is real in your own sight, though not in the Mind of God [Ur: It also follows that whatever he creates is real in his own eyes, but not necessarily in the sight of God]. ⁶This basic distinction leads directly into the real meaning of the Last Judgment.

• Study Question •

1. *Try to follow the author's logic. Why does a belief in magic become "virtually inevitable" (1:2) when you forget that you did not create yourself?*

Much of the chapter has been talking in various ways about "the magic-miracle confusion" (1:1). The phrase seems to sum up all the various *confusions* that have been

discussed: confusing the levels (body, mind, spirit); confusing miracle impulses with physical impulses; confusing the body's power with those of the mind; believing one level can affect another; or attempting to correct error on the body level, or in any way other than in the mind. All of these are forms of magic. If you recall, we defined *magic* like this:

Magic is the uncreative use of mind; it is “making” instead of “creating.” Thus, as is explained later in the Course, it can be thought of as any attempt to solve problems or seek satisfaction in separation, by ourselves and apart from God.

In T-2.IV.2:9 we were told magic can take two forms:

- Belief that the body can miscreate (have real effects) in the mind.
- Belief that the mind can miscreate (have real effects) in the body.

The “magic-miracle confusion,” then, would describe any way in which we attribute true healing power to any form of magic. For instance, when we think crystals actually have healing powers, or when we believe that antibiotics actually heal us, we are demonstrating this confusion. Likewise, when we believe that our will, apart from God's, has actually altered God's creation, we are believing in magic.

Jesus suggests that one way to correct our tendency to confuse magic with miracles “is to remember that [we] did not create [ourselves]” (1:1). This is another reference to Section 2.I; it has been a recurring theme in the chapter. Forgetting this fact makes “a belief in magic...virtually inevitable” (1:2). Why will remembering that God created us help correct our confusion of magic and miracles? Because magic depends on the idea that something we do *apart from God* can have real effects. Remember how this chapter opened by saying that the origin of the separation is in the idea that we created ourselves?

If I make the mistake of believing that I can create myself, and that what I do apart from God can actually alter God's creations, including myself, *of course* I am going to believe in magic. That belief *is* a belief in magic. If I recall that only what is created by God, or by us with God, is real, then I will not be able to believe that anything magical has any real effect.

Sentence 3 recalls what was said back in T-2.I.1:2: God created us to be creators like Himself. This even more clearly links this section with Section I, and shows the unity of the chapter in the author's mind. Having begun the chapter with the origins of separation before time began, he ends with a discussion of the Last Judgment and the end of time. In between, we have seen that we are going through a process of corrective learning, of being trained to recognize every dark thought and bring it to the light of God for healing. The correction of our confusion between magic and miracles is one way of describing that training process.

Creative ability rests in the mind; only the mind creates. Therefore, what we create is “a matter of will” (1:4), our choice. However, if we make something “alone” (without a conscious union with God), although it is real *to us* it is not real in the Mind of God. Thus, only what we create *in union with God* is ultimately real. This distinction between what we create and what we make has been identified before as something extremely

important (for instance, T-2.V(A).12). We are about to see just how important it is, because, “This basic distinction leads directly into the real meaning of the Last Judgment” (2:6). This is so because the Last Judgment is all about distinguishing what we make from what we create. In the process of this judgment we will look on everything we have created or made and sort out which is which.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹The Last Judgment is one of the most threatening ideas in your thinking. ²This is [Ur: only] because you do not understand it. ³Judgment is not an attribute of God. ⁴It was brought [Ur: Man brought judgment] into being only after [Ur: because of] the separation, [God Himself is still the God of mercy. After the Separation, however, there was a place for justice in the schema,] when it became [Ur: because it was] one of the many learning devices [Ur: which had] to be built into the overall plan. ⁵Just as the separation occurred over [Ur: many] millions of years, the Last Judgment will extend over a similarly long period, and perhaps an even longer one. ⁶Its length can, however, be greatly shortened by miracles, the device for shortening but not abolishing time. [Its length depends, however, on the effectiveness of the present speed-up. We have frequently noted that the miracle is a device for shortening but not abolishing time.] ⁷If a sufficient number become truly miracle-minded [Ur: quickly], this shortening process can be virtually immeasurable. ⁸It is essential, however, that you free yourself [Ur: that these individuals free themselves] from fear quickly [Ur: sooner than would ordinarily be the case], because you [Ur: they] must emerge from the conflict if you [Ur: they] are to bring peace to other minds.

• Study Question •

2. *2. Traditional theology sees God as a great Judge, and places justice as high as love on the list of His attributes . What different picture of God and judgment does the Course present here?*

When the Course says, “The Last Judgment is one of the most threatening ideas in your thinking” (2:1), it refers to persons whose heritage lies in the Western theological framework. Judaism, Islam and Christianity share a belief in a final Judgment Day. For instance, Matthew 25:31–46 speaks of separating of the sheep (the holy ones) from the goats (the sinners), with sinners departing into everlasting fire. The Bible tells of “the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16, NIV). The Apostle Paul warns:

The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (I Thessalonians 5:2–3, NIV)

To those who as children were taught these things, the Last Judgment is a terrifying thing, even if as adults they have tried not to believe in it. How could “God's determination of which human beings shall be sent to heaven and which condemned to hell” (definition of “Last Judgment” in the *American Heritage Dictionary*) be anything *but* terrifying?

The Last Judgment is terrifying only “because you do not understand it” (2:2). In the first place, “Judgment is not an attribute of God” (2:3). This simple statement is probably one of the most profound differences between the way the Course and traditional Christianity view God. Judgment came into being as a learning device only after the separation (2:4–5). Its true purpose is not to condemn, but to separate or “sort out” what is real from what is unreal.

This sorting out will take a long time. The separation took millions of years (“many millions” in the Urtext); “the Last Judgment will extend over a similarly long period, and perhaps an even longer one” (2:5). This is one of the plainest statements in the Course that this entire process is *not* something that happens overnight. One purpose of the Course, and of miracles, is to shorten the time it takes (2:6). But let's be clear: It could take millions of years, maybe longer! Robert Perry thinks that the period of time mentioned for the separation does not refer to how long separation *lasts*, but how long it took for it to initially *happen*. The separation and the Last Judgment are like bookends, with human history sandwiched in between. So this really says nothing about the length of the period that lies in between the two!

Science tells us that the universe is 14 billion years old. We can speculate on where to pinpoint the start of the separation: Was it at the Big Bang 14 billion years ago? Or was it when humankind first became self-conscious, with individuals aware of themselves as distinct from the rest of creation, which seems to have been about 35,000 years ago? We don't really know. But the large numbers being bandied about here should not surprise us, because we are talking about the whole of human history here.

I recall Ram Dass once sharing a story, I think from Hinduism, of how the wearing down of separated consciousness is like an eagle which, once every hundred years, flies by a mountain and drags a silk scarf over it. How long will it take to wear down the mountain? That's how long it will take to end the separation.

True, it can be a depressing thought. I find it curiously liberating, however. It stops me from thinking that something must be wrong with me because I am not fully enlightened after living for nearly seventy years. It encourages me to be patient with the people I love, recognizing that the process of the last judgment takes considerable time.

The good news is that miracles *can* shorten the time, and a whole bunch of people getting miracle-minded can bring “virtually immeasurable” shortening (2:7). It just depends on how quickly this happens, and how effective “the present speed-up” is. This is a reference to a phrase Helen was given outside the actual dictation of the Course. In her unpublished autobiography (quoted in *Absence From Felicity*, by Kenneth Wapnick), Helen wrote:

However, people had reached a point where they were losing more than they were gaining. Thus, because of the acute emergency, the usual slow, evolutionary

process of spiritual development was being by-passed in what might be called “a celestial speed-up.”

There does seem to be a nod here to the “Hundredth Monkey” theory: that numbers count; time can be shortened if “a sufficient number” become miracle-minded, and do so “sooner than would ordinarily be the case,” whatever that implies. The period of time being referred to seems to be for the Last Judgment of the entire Sonship. The great length of time is required for the Sonship as a whole; individuals can go through their own “last judgment” before the rest of the Sonship (2:8).

Finally, we cannot lay back and do nothing because it will take so long! We are told it is “essential” that we “free [ourselves] from fear quickly” so that we can “emerge from the conflict” and “bring peace to other minds” (2:8). To use the analogy of the Hundredth Monkey, a few “starter monkeys” are necessary to begin the entire process. We certainly should not wait around for the Last Judgment to “do it” for us.

As a whole, the human race still has a very long way to go. I sincerely doubt that the Year 2000 or 2012 is anywhere near the end of the story. The history of enlightenment is extremely brief compared to the age of the universe. We count our profoundly enlightened masters through history in single or at most double digits. You and I are still at the beginning, and it falls to us to free ourselves from fear quickly, so that the process can be hastened and shortened. We are the world’s saviors, miracle workers with the power to bring peace to other minds. May we choose, fully and deeply, to fulfill our function.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹The Last Judgment is generally thought of as a procedure undertaken by God. ²Actually it will be undertaken [Ur: solely] by my brothers with my help. ³It is a final healing rather than a meting out of punishment, however much you may think that punishment is deserved. ⁴Punishment is a concept totally opposed to right-mindedness, and the aim of the Last Judgment is to restore right-mindedness to you. ⁵The Last Judgment might be called a process of right evaluation. ⁶It simply means that everyone will finally come to understand what is worthy and what is not. ⁷After this, the ability to choose can be directed rationally. ⁸Until this distinction is made, however, the vacillations between free and imprisoned will cannot but continue.

• Study Question •

3. *3. This paragraph lists several contrasts between the traditional view of the Last Judgment and the Course's view. More follow in later paragraphs. Glance through the entire section, and make a comparison chart in two columns, showing the differences.*



The Course's Last Judgment is not something carried out by God, as is the traditional view. It is something the Sonship does for itself, with Jesus' help (3:1–2). It isn't

something in which God *judges us*; rather, in it *we* are doing the judging (3:2), and we judge our own creations, evaluating which are worthy of keeping (3:5–6). The purpose is not to punish wrong-doing but to heal wrong-mindedness and to restore right-mindedness (3:3–4). As Robert Perry puts it, it is the separation of worthy *thoughts* from unworthy ones, rather than separation of worthy *souls* from unworthy ones.

When I think of the Last Judgment like this, I realize that it is something I actually want, rather than being something I fear. I want the unworthy thoughts purged from my mind. I want the miscreations of fear and attack to depart from me. I find myself with a new appreciation of the prayer of the psalmist in the Bible:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24, NIV)

This is the kind of judgment we need. The Last Judgment is really nothing more than the culmination of the process of mind-watching already encouraged throughout this chapter. It is the mature, final understanding of what is and is not worthy, so that we no longer make irrational choices to imprison our own will. Remember, our true will is to create with God, to extend God's love through our minds with complete freedom. Whenever we make an unloving choice, we imprison our will. So the Last Judgment can be equated to full enlightenment, when our mind makes the clear-cut final distinction between worthy and unworthy. Then, at last, our minds “can be directed rationally” and will no longer make unloving choices. Until then, our vacillation between imprisonment and freedom is inevitable (3:7–8).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The first step toward freedom involves [Ur: *must entail*] a sorting out of the false from the true. ²This is a process of separation [Ur: *division only*] in the constructive sense, and reflects the true meaning of the Apocalypse [the book of Revelation]. ³Everyone will ultimately look upon his own creations and choose to preserve only what is good, just as God Himself looked upon what He had created and knew that it was good. ⁴At this point, the mind can begin to look with love on its own creations because of their worthiness. ⁵At the same time the mind will inevitably disown its miscreations which, without belief, will no longer exist.

• Study Question •

4. *The “real meaning of the Last Judgment” (1:6) is based on what we make apart from God and what we create with God. Refer to the whole section, but notice especially 3:5–6, 4:1–3, and 5:5–6. In your own words, define “Last Judgment” as the Course sees it. For more information see the Workbook section on this topic (W-pII.10), found between Lessons 310 and 311.*



The “first step toward freedom” refers to the process through which the Course is now leading us: “sorting out...the false from the true” (4:1). We may have turned our minds towards God and the light, like a flower turning to the sun, but our turning is half-hearted and incomplete. As the Apostle Paul urges us in the Bible, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2, NIV). Our minds have trained themselves for years to think in ego patterns; they do not rearrange themselves into right-mindedness overnight. The Course describes the process in more detail in a later chapter:

We said before that the Holy Spirit is evaluative, and must be. He sorts out the true from the false in your mind, and teaches you to judge every thought you allow to enter it in the light of what God put there. Whatever is in accord with this light He retains, to strengthen the Kingdom in you. What is partly in accord with it He accepts and purifies. But what is out of accord entirely He rejects by judging against. This is how He keeps the Kingdom perfectly consistent and perfectly unified. (T-6.V(C).1:1-6)

We are being asked to judge every thought we allow to enter our minds, and to *separate* the false from the true. This process we are going through right now, in this present moment, is a reflection of that final Last Judgment (4:2). The word “Apocalypse” is a synonym for “Last Judgment” in this instance, I believe. It literally means *unveiling* in Greek, and possibly here it is a reference to the Book of Revelation, which many believe depicts the Last Judgment in vivid, and often confusing, symbols. When Jesus speaks of “the true meaning of the Apocalypse,” it is a virtual repetition of the phrase, “the real meaning of the Last Judgment,” in 1:6. What he is telling us, then, is that the “first step” we go through now—the step we take each time we judge our thoughts and reject the false, keeping the true,— that step mirrors what will happen in that last day, when we look on *all* of what we have made, and once and for all choose to retain *only* what is good (4:3), only what is created by God and with God.

When our mind has reached “this point” (4:4, the point of choosing “to preserve only what is good”), it will “begin” to view its own creations with love, recognizing their worthiness (4:4). That implies quite clearly that we do not now view our creations with love. We may not even know what our creations are! Robert Perry’s *Glossary of Terms* says, “They, like everything in Heaven, are pure spirit, formless, timeless and perfect” (for the one direct description in the Course of what our creations are, see T-24.VII.7:1-3). The mind will jell, and become settled and unambiguous in its choice. It will love its creations; it will disown its miscreations. And since our miscreations only have temporary existence, fueled by the continued belief of our minds, as soon as our belief in them ends, they will “no longer exist” (4:5). Each time we make that mental separation and choice between what is made and what is created, we bring that last day one step nearer.

This is the point at which our minds can get stuck, however. Clearly, what this is saying is that the undesirable “forms” we experience in daily life—lack, pain, sickness, attack—are nothing but manifestations of our thoughts. Correct the thoughts and the

related forms will cease to exist. We find ourselves asking, “Okay, I recognize that this headache is a projection of my belief in punishment” (or whatever it might represent for you). “I choose to change that belief. Why is the headache still here?”

The Course would answer with the only possible answer, if what it is telling us is true. If the headache is the effect of misthought, then if the headache is there the misthought must still be there. It tells us so in no uncertain terms: “A broken body shows the mind has not been healed” (T27.II.5:1). We may not like the answer. We almost certainly will resist the notion that we are still harboring belief in our miscreations. But if the effect is there, the cause must be there also. And that is the reason for the training program of this Course. Speaking in the image of idolatry, it tells us:

You do not realize how much you listen to your gods, and how vigilant you are on their behalf. Yet they exist only because you honor them. (T-10.III.10:4–5)

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The term “Last Judgment” is frightening not only because it has been [Ur: falsely] projected onto God, but also because of the association of “last” with death. ²This is an outstanding example of upside-down perception. ³If the meaning of the Last Judgment [Ur; Actually, if it] is objectively examined, it is quite apparent that it is really the doorway to life. ⁴No one who lives in fear is really alive. ⁵Your own last judgment cannot be directed toward yourself, because you are not your own creation. ⁶You can, however, apply it meaningfully and at any time to everything you have made, and retain in your memory only what is creative and good. ⁷This is what your right-mindedness cannot but dictate. ⁸The purpose of time is solely to “give you time” to achieve this judgment. ⁹It is your own perfect judgment of your own perfect creations. ¹⁰When everything you retain is lovable, there is no reason for [any] fear to remain with you. ¹¹This is [is] your part in the Atonement.

• Study Question •

5. *“The purpose of time is solely to ‘give you time’ to achieve this judgment” (5:8). Take a little time to reflect on how you use your time. (That is its only purpose, after all!) How much of your time are you actively watching your mind and judging your thoughts, separating the false from the true, retaining only what is creative, what is good, and what is lovable?*



The fear we associate with the term “Last Judgment” stems entirely from our own minds. First, we have “projected onto God” the idea of judgment. We have imagined God as a great Judge, like a celestial Santa who keeps his list, checks it twice, and is “gonna find out who’s naughty or nice” in the end but, unlike Santa, a Judge who not only rewards the righteous but punishes the wicked. But, “Judgment is not an attribute of God” (2:3). If we are seeing judgment in God, *we are putting it there*. Because it isn’t there, not at all. “God is not angry” (T16.V.12:7).

And if we are imagining this Last Judgment to be something that happens after *death*, we are the ones who thought up that idea as well. It is our minds that have associated the word “last” with death (5:1). Jesus calls this “an outstanding example of upside-down perception” (5:2), which we might freely paraphrase as, “Boy! Have you got *this* one wrong! Death? You associate the Last Judgment with death? *It is really the doorway to life*” (5:3, my italics).

If we see the Last Judgment as Jesus has presented it here, without the obscuring layer of our projections—which is what I think he means by “objectively examined”—it *really is* “quite apparent” that the Last Judgment is the entry into life. Once my mind has achieved that decisive final judgment, so that it no longer vacillates between freedom and imprisonment (3:8), the door will open into the fullness of life. “No one who lives in fear is really alive” (5:4), and when my mind has chosen only love, I will be free from fear; I will be “really alive.”

Fear, as we have seen over and over in this chapter, comes only from the insane belief in the reality of my miscreations. Freeing myself from fear is what the Last Judgment is all about. The Last Judgment ends my belief in my miscreations, and therefore, it ends fear. And that is the doorway to life.

The message bears repeating. As usual, Robert Perry has come up with a crystal-clear summary:

The Last Judgment is a process by which you retain only the lovable creations your mind has produced. Retaining only love frees you from fear. If you live in fear you are not really alive. Thus, freedom from fear is the doorway to life. The Last Judgment is the doorway to life.

We cannot judge ourselves because we didn't create ourselves (5:5). We can only judge our own creations or miscreations. This is another reason why remembering we did not create ourselves helps cure the confusion between magic and miracles (1:1), the theme that opened this section. When we imagine we can judge ourselves, we are really presupposing that we have created ourselves, and that *is* magic—something operating out of its true level.

Although we can't judge ourselves, we *can* judge everything we have made “meaningfully and at any time” (5:6). That phrase seems highly significant to me. It tells me that I can practice the principle of the Last Judgment here and now—“at any time.” I can free myself from fear here and now, by judging, or sorting out, my thoughts and retaining only the loving creations of my mind. And I can do this “at any time.” I don't have to wait for some future event at the end of time. I don't have to live in fear until God comes down from Heaven to deliver me; I can free myself “at any time”! Hallelujah!

My “right-mindedness” can't help dictating that choice; it is predisposed to retain only love. And all of time exists for no other reason than “giving me time” to complete this self-sorting process (5:7–8). That keeps on hitting me in the face as I study these early chapters again. There is no other reason for being here except learning what the Course is trying to teach me. In any given minute, there is no real purpose beyond learning to choose life rather than death, love rather than fear. That *is* the purpose of time

and the purpose of life. How seldom I let the full reality of this sink in to my mind! How often I get up and plan my day and divvy up my time, a little for this, a little for that—work, exercise, meals, personal hygiene, relationships, entertainment and relaxation—and I forget that *all* of it is for learning to choose love instead of fear, for learning to love my creations and to disown my miscreations. As Ram Dass and Stephen Levine wrote in their book of the same title, it is all *Grist for the Mill*.

The last judgment for me, and for you, is “your own perfect judgment of your own perfect creations” (5:9). That is my part in the whole process of the Atonement: coming to that perfect judgment, perfecting that judgment (5:11). I am here to accomplish this: to free myself from fear by disowning everything fearful and retaining only the lovable.

Summary

The Last Judgment, then, is not for judging *us*; it is for judging our creations, and since what we made alone is not even in God’s Mind, it is up to *us* to judge it.

Rather than God separating between good and bad *souls* (sending the outcasts to hell), in the Last Judgment *we* separate between loving and unloving *thoughts*, with the rejected thoughts simply ceasing to exist.

The Last Judgment is a process in which we sort out the false from the true (4:1); we sort out our illusions of fear from our creations of love. We look at what we have made and “come to understand what is worthy and what is not” (3:6); we “look upon [our] own creations and choose to preserve only what is good” (4:3). We disown our miscreations of fear (4:5) and without our active support, they will no longer exist. We “retain in [our] memory only what is creative and good” (5:6).

The Last Judgment is going on *now*; we can apply our judgment to our creations at any time (5:6). “The purpose of time is solely to ‘give you time’ to achieve this judgment” (5:8). “This is your part in the Atonement” (5:10). When we reject our miscreations, and retain only what is lovable, there is no reason for fear to remain with us (5:9).

Answer Key

1. If we believe we created ourselves, we will think we can perform acts that actually change reality. A belief that some action on the external level can alter reality is one definition of “magic.” When the true creative Source is forgotten, we tend to believe in the ability of lesser powers to change things.
2. “Judgment is not an attribute of God” (2:3). Judgment did not exist before the separation, so it cannot be part of God, Who is eternal.

3. Chart of Two Views of the Last Judgment

TRADITIONAL	THE COURSE
Threatening idea; fear-inducing	Healing idea; banishes fear
Occurs at end of time	Occurs over millions of years
Procedure undertaken by God	Undertaken by Sonship with Jesus' help
Meting out of punishment	Final healing
Process of separating souls for hell	Process of right evaluation
Judges souls, separates bad from good	Judges thoughts (creations), separates false from true
Associated with death	The doorway to life
Applies to myself	Applies not to myself but what I have made
Purpose: destruction of the sinful	Purpose: retention of the lovable

4. The Last Judgment is the process in which we sort out our thoughts and creations: the false from the true; what we made from our true creations; what is unworthy from what is worthy. It is our own perfect judgment of our own perfect creations (5:9). It discards everything that is not creative and good. It is applied, not to our *souls*, but to everything we have made or created. The term also applies to the culmination of this process, which in an individual marks his graduation from the curriculum, and for the Sonship marks the end of time (see, for instance, T-17.II.5:2–3, W-pII.9.3:1, and W-pII.10.2).
5. No written answer is expected. Your answer depends on your own experience.