

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM® Text, Chapter 7, Section X

The Confusion of Pain and Joy

Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

bold blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext

light blue text = editorial comments

~~strikethrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Overview of the Section

The overall message of this section, “The Confusion of Pain and Joy,” is this: When we project we perpetuate pain; when we extend we increase joy. Such are the laws of our nature, but we have forgotten them; in fact, we have reversed them. We think we can find joy in separating from God, and in seeing ourselves as something different than love. The ego has deceived us and confused us so that we think following God’s Will means some kind of loss. All we lose is the ego, which is nothing; what we gain is everything.

We think that to love means to sacrifice, but only the ego asks for sacrifice. We don’t trust the Holy Spirit (we think He will take something away from us) because we don’t trust ourselves. Because we’ve followed false guidance to begin with, we mistrust our own ability to choose reliable guidance. Then, we’ve projected our mistrust onto Him, so that we blame the Holy Spirit for our mistrust rather than seeing that it comes from ourselves.

We don’t really have a choice about identifying with God’s Will. That was given to us by God. Thinking that we *don’t* share God’s Will is our big mistake. “*The only way out of the error is to decide that you do not have to decide anything*” (6:8). All our pain and confusion comes from resisting the inevitable. All joy comes from doing the will of God, which is to love.

Paragraph 1

1. [You have said that, when you write of the Kingdom and your own creations which belong to it, you are describing *what you do not know*. This is true in a sense, but no more true than your failure to acknowledge the whole result of the ego’s premises.] ¹The Kingdom is the result of premises, just as this world is. ² You may have [You *have*] carried the ego’s reasoning to its logical conclusion, which is **total confusion about everything**. [But you do not really *believe* this, or you could not possibly maintain it.] ³If you **really** saw this result, you **could** not want it. ⁴The **only** reason you could possibly want **any** part of it is because **you do not see the whole of it**. ⁵You are [therefore *are*] willing to look at the

ego's premises, but **not** at their logical outcome.⁶ Is it not possible that you have done the same thing with the premises of God?⁷ Your creations **are** the logical outcome of His premises.⁸ **His** thinking has established them **for** you.⁹ They are exactly where [*therefore there, exactly where*] they belong.¹⁰ They belong in [to] your mind, as part of your identification with **His**, but your state of mind and your recognition of what is in it [*what is in your mind*] depend [, at any given moment,] on what you believe **about** your mind.¹¹ Whatever these beliefs may be, they are the premises that will determine **what you accept into your mind.**

• Study Question •

1. *Premises, with logic applied to them, lead to conclusions or logical outcomes.*
 - (a) *What is the logical outcome of the ego's premises?*
 - (b) *What is the logical outcome of God's premises?*
 - (c) *Which logical outcomes have you been unwilling to look at?*

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Because everything that happens is the result of thoughts within the mind, both the Kingdom of God and this world derive from certain thoughts or “premises” within the mind (1:1). When you take the ego thought system to its logical conclusion, the result is mental chaos (1:2). The Course even refers to the ego’s laws as “the laws of chaos” (T-23.II.1:1). Jesus has previously identified several of the ego’s premises (see T-6.In.1:3–4, especially). He has shown us how, if you build a thought system and a worldview on those premises, the result is a world of attack and fear. He wants us to actually look at the premises of our ego; indeed, he will return to this subject in even greater detail in subsequent chapters, because, as he explains, looking at illusions is how you see through them (T-11.V.2:2). When we see the logical outcome of the ego’s premises we will very quickly realize that we don’t want that outcome (1:3).

The outcome of the ego’s thought system is repugnant. Who could want total confusion? This is one reason the ego prevents us from looking at its thought system as a whole. If the ego can limit us to seeing only parts of its thought system, it can make those parts seem reasonably attractive (1:4). Probably the best example of this is the special relationship, which Jesus will address in gory detail (quite literally) in Chapter 15 onward through Chapter 22. Special relationships seem *very* attractive—until you look at them carefully. Jesus compares the special relationship to a glittering, spectacular frame around a picture of death. He urges us to look at the picture and not the frame; that is, to follow the premises of the ego to their bitter end, which, in the special relationship especially, is death.

To what extent is it true of you that “You are willing to look at the ego’s premises, but not at their logical outcome”? (1:5). I think all of us do this more than we realize. For instance, we abide by the ego’s premise that we are being attacked without considering all that it implies—about ourselves, about God, about our brothers, about the nature of creation itself. If we can be attacked, then God’s creation is flawed. If we can be attacked, then some other force, a force apparently more powerful than God, can destroy God’s creations. If a brother has become unlovable, then I can also be unlovable. If a brother

deserves death for his misdeeds, then I can be judged by that same standard. And so on. When we accept the ego's premise that we are being attacked, we rarely pause to consider the ramifications of the premise we have accepted. Yet, that is exactly what we must do, if we are to willingly abandon the ego's premises.

Jesus goes on to point out that, as odd as it may seem, we have done exactly the same thing with God's premises: We have failed to consider their logical outcome (1:6). We have not wanted to recognize the implications of how God created us and of the nature of the life He has imparted to us. We have been unwilling to realize that, given the fact that God created us by extending His own Self *as us* (T-7.I.5:2), then we *must* extend, we *must* love, we *must* create (1:7–9). Our creations exist just where they should exist because God willed that they do so; nothing more than that is necessary. Perhaps we are unaware of them, and believe that we have not created anything at all with God, but if we think that, we are wrong. They exist; we just are not aware of them. We *should* be fully cognizant of our creations, but because we have believed lies about our minds, we no longer recognize what is in them (which is where our creations are) (1:10). If we understand the meaning of being created by God, we will know that minds created by Him *must* create, and therefore, our creations do exist in our minds. If we believe that we are no longer what God created us to be, we will block that awareness from our minds (1:11).

Paragraph 2

2. ¹ It is surely clear that you can both accept into your mind what is **not** [really] there, and **deny what is**. [Neither of these possibilities requires further elaboration, although both are clearly indefensible even if *you* elect to defend them.] ² Yet the function God Himself **gave** your mind through His *you may deny*, but you **cannot** prevent. ³ It is the logical outcome of what you **are**. ⁴ The ability to see a logical outcome depends on the **willingness to see it**, but its **truth** has nothing to do with your willingness [at all]. ⁵ Truth is **God's Will**. ⁶ Share His Will and you [Ur: will] share what He **knows**. ⁷ Deny His Will as **yours**, and you are denying His Kingdom *and yours*.

• Study Question •

2. *You cannot prevent your function, even though you can deny its presence in your mind. Please give an example drawn from normal human experience of our ability to deny what is actually in our minds (see 2:1).*

The first sentence of this paragraph would be especially meaningful to Helen Schucman, who, as a student and teacher of psychology, was especially aware of the tricks our minds play on themselves. Our minds are capable of believing in things that are not true (for instance, an irrational fear of water or open spaces, or a belief in guilt). They can also deny the existence of things that are real (such as a refusal to recognize the harmful effects of smoking or to recognize our divine nature). We have all noticed such mental deception, in others if not in ourselves (2:1).

Though we may deny our function of extending God's Love, we cannot alter the fact that it *is* our function. Function is derived from being; the use we assign to anything depends on the nature of the thing. We use a hammer to drive nails because it is hard, heavy, and has a flat head that works well to drive the nail. We make use of horses to pull various conveyances or tools (such as a plow) because the horse is large and strong. What a thing is determines its function. Just so, what *we* are, as God created us, determines our function. We cannot change that no matter how much we deny it (2:2–3). We exist to create as God created.

Truth remains truth whether we believe it or deny it. We fail to see the truth of our nature when we are not *willing* to see it, but our nature still remains the same. The reason we are not willing to see the truth is that we think we want a will that is independent of God's Will. We think that if we share His Will we will disappear; we believe that being different is what defines us. Therefore, we refuse to see that the nature God gave to us defines our function; we want to define our own! In refusing to join with God's Will, we lose touch with God's knowledge as well, and become unaware of the glory that has been given to us (2:4–7). Nevertheless, the glory remains.

The mind's power seems awesome, but it is limited in that it cannot alter reality. It can create utterly amazing illusions; that is true. *Within itself*, the mind can grant seeming reality to phantasms, and can eliminate the most substantial things from its awareness. It can, in effect, create its own *apparent* reality, but what is created seems real only to that mind (a "private world" (T-13.V.1:5–9)), and so is not true creation. *Nothing real is changed* by the mind's shenanigans.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹The Holy Spirit will direct you **only** so as to avoid [all] pain. [The *undoing* of pain must *obviously* avoid this.] ²Surely no one would **object** to this goal **if he recognized it.** ³The problem is **not** whether what the Holy Spirit says is true, but whether you want to **listen** to what He says. ⁴You no more recognize what is painful than you know what is joyful, and are, in fact, very apt to confuse the two. ⁵The Holy Spirit's main function is to teach you to **tell them apart.** [However strange it may seem that this is necessary, it obviously *is*. The reason is *equally obvious*.] ⁶What is joyful to you **is** painful to the ego, and as long as you are in doubt about what **you** are, you **will** be confused about joy and pain. ⁷This confusion is the cause of the whole idea of sacrifice. ⁸Obey the Holy Spirit, and you **will** be giving up the ego. ⁹But you will be **sacrificing** nothing. ¹⁰On the contrary, you will be gaining **everything.** ¹¹[But] If you **believed** this, there would **be** no conflict.

• Study Question •

3. *You are very apt to confuse pain and joy, regarding as joyful what is really painful, and as painful what is really joyful. Why do you confuse the two?*

The opening lines in this paragraph are very closely linked to the preceding paragraph, although the first sentences seem to be starting a new topic. But look at

sentences 3 and 4. They are obviously referring to the same topic that ended the preceding paragraph, i.e., our willingness (or lack of it) to recognize that whatever God wills *is the truth*, and to join our will with God's Will in response to that recognition. The Holy Spirit always speaks in accord with the Will of God, since He is the Voice for God. Therefore, being willing to listen to Him is identical to accepting God's Will as our own will.

Jesus *is* shifting gears, however, even if he is not switching topics entirely. In the first paragraph he pointed out that if we saw the whole of the ego's thought system, we would not want any part of it. Likewise, if we saw the whole of God's thought system we would never *refuse* it. Here, he is pointing out one particular aspect of that thought system: freedom from pain. Once we recognize that the Holy Spirit always leads us away from pain we will be quite happy to follow His lead, and all our resistance will melt away (3:1–2).

Our problem is our lack of willingness to listen, which comes because we are completely confused about the difference between pain and joy (3:4). Confusing such radically different things hardly seems likely, and yet we do confuse them because we are confused about who we are. Union and joining with one another are joy to the Holy Spirit, but to the ego they are painful. Revenge and defeating an "enemy" are sweet to the ego, but painful to the spirit. If we are confused about our identity—and we *are* confused about it—we will also be confused about what is joyful and what is painful (3:6). If we think we are the ego, we will have pathologically inverted perceptions of pain and joy.

The ego is the original sadist/masochist. A sadist takes delight in inflicting pain; a masochist takes delight in receiving pain. From the perspective of the Holy Spirit, that is just what the ego does. When we attack another and take pleasure in it, we are sadists because we are inflicting pain. We are masochists as well because what we do to others we are also doing to ourselves, and the ego secretly *enjoys* suffering because it validates the ego's image of itself.

The Holy Spirit wants to help us distinguish joy from pain (3:5); in fact, you might say that's His primary job! Now, even knowing that the confusion I just mentioned exists, I still tend to react to this help of the Holy Spirit with provisional acceptance. I wonder, "Do I really need this help? Surely I can tell pain and joy apart!" I can see that *some people* need this kind of help. I probably have a few people spring to mind as soon as I think about it: a friend who keeps returning to a destructive relationship; a relative who is slowly drinking himself to death. Sure, *they* need help, but I'm not like *them*, am I?

Yes, indeed; I *do* need help. I am just like those people; my form of self-destruction may be subtler than theirs, but I am trapped in just the same kind of blind alley they are in.

From within the ego illusion we cannot tell how blinded we have become. *We need help* to recognize how thoroughly the ego has duped us. We need the assistance of a consciousness that extends beyond the range of our blindness, a mind that can see things from an entirely different perspective. The reason we can so clearly see the self-destruction in someone who is addicted to a relationship or to alcohol is precisely because we are not *inside the trap* with them. We don't share their particular form of trap. We have our *own* form of trap, however, and we need someone who is outside the trap to help us see it.

That Someone is the Holy Spirit. "For His answer is the reference point beyond illusions, from which you can look back on them and see them as insane" (T-13.III.12:9).

You cannot evaluate an insane belief system from within it. Its range precludes this. You can only go beyond it, look back from a point where sanity exists and *see the contrast*. Only by this contrast can insanity be judged as insane. (T-9.VII.6:1-4)

The Holy Spirit provides us with a new frame of reference, from which we can perceive things differently (T-15.V.9:1–5; W-pI.151.11). When He calls us to follow Him, at first we are likely to hear it as a call to sacrifice because of our confusion (3:7). It appears to us as though obeying God's Voice will result in loss. It *will* result in a kind of loss, but all we will lose is our ego! (3:8). Of course the ego interprets that as pain; that's no surprise. If we are identified with the ego, however, we will interpret it as pain and we will recoil from doing God's Will. This explains why we so often don't do the good we know we should, and do the wrong we know we shouldn't. As the Apostle Paul cried out:

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.... I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me... (Romans 7:19, 21, 24, KJV)

Fortunately the apostle's writing does not end there. He adds: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:25). We *can be* delivered from such confusion, because we have a Holy Presence in our minds that sees things from a different frame of reference. He eliminates our conflict by showing us that all we lose is the ego, while we gain literally everything (3:8–11).

Until we actually *see* things this way, we will go on making the wrong choice. As long as we think God's Will means pain and loss, we will avoid it; we'd be fools not to. That's why it is so important that we begin to listen to the Voice for God within us. Without His wonderfully different way of seeing things, we would be permanently blinded (see W-pI.43.1:1–4).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹That is why you need to **demonstrate the obvious to yourself.** ²It is **not** obvious to you. ³You [*really*] believe that doing the opposite of God's Will **can** be better for you. ⁴You also believe that it is **possible** to *do* [*do*] the opposite of God's Will. ⁵Therefore, you believe that an impossible choice **is** open to you, and one which is both [*very*] fearful and [*very*] desirable. ⁶Yet God **wills.** ⁷He does **not** wish. ⁸**Your** will is as powerful as His because it *is* His. ⁹The ego's wishes do not mean anything, because the ego wishes for the impossible. ¹⁰You **can** wish for the impossible, but you can **will** only with God. ¹¹This is the ego's weakness and **your** strength.

• Study Question •

4. *It is impossible to do the opposite of God's Will. Give as many reasons as you can for this drawn from the paragraph.*



We may think that the difference between pain and joy is obvious. It *should be*, of course, but the whole point here is that it is not obvious to *us*. This is precisely why we need to make a special effort to see the difference (4:1–2).

Think about it. Haven't there been times when you honestly believed that you *preferred* to do something that you knew was unloving or selfish? Times when you deliberately went against your inner guidance? (4:3). I know I've had times like that, more than I care to tell you. How blind we must be to think that we will be happier if we *don't* do God's Will! No wonder we are in need of special education in this regard.

What's especially absurd is that we even believe that we *can* oppose God's Will! (4:4). Say, if we can do that, let's stop the sun from rising! Let's make snowballs in hell! Supposing that we are capable of resisting God's Will is preposterous. God does not merely *wish*, which would imply that what He wants is only possible and not certain; God *wills*. That means that what He wants *must be so*. There is no alternative possible; there is no other will that can intervene or prevent the accomplishment of God's Will.

Yet, we do believe we can choose something different from His Will. We not only think it is possible, we think it is "desirable" and will be better for us than obeying God (4:3, 5). At the same time the idea terrifies us, because we imagine that if we oppose God we will have acquired a fearful enemy (see M-17.5:8). We think it is possible; we think it is desirable; and *we think that we have actually done it*. For that very reason, we believe we are guilty of sin and subject to God's wrath.

If things actually work the way most of us think they do then we are doomed. If we have screwed up God's creation He must be royally pissed off! And, in this false view of things, God is not a good Being to get riled up. He does things such as send earthquakes and floods, or lightning bolts, if not in this life, then in the next. No wonder most of us are afraid of death; we are terrified of what lies beyond it.

And yet...how utterly ridiculous to think that we *could* screw up God's creation. What kind of feeble god do we imagine? Jesus makes this point with equal vigor. He points out that while we "can wish for the impossible" we cannot *will* the impossible (4:10). No matter how strong our will is (and it is "as powerful as His" (4:8)), we cannot make the impossible possible. We cannot make it possible to oppose God; such wishes mean nothing at all (4:9). These wishes are not grave sins; they are laughable; they are without meaning. And certainly, being so impotent, they are no cause for guilt!

The ego may seem like a powerful force, but it is really powerless. It is all bark and no bite. The inability of our will to oppose God's Will may sound like a severe weakness, but it is "the ego's weakness and your strength" (4:11). It means that the ego cannot do any damage that is real. It means that sin is impossible. It means that, "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists" (T-In.2:2–3).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The Holy Spirit **always** sides with **you** and with your **strength**. ²As long as you avoid His guidance in any way, you **want to be weak**. ³Yet weakness **is** frightening. ⁴What else, then, can this decision mean except that you **want to be** fearful? ⁵The Holy Spirit **never** asks for sacrifice, but the ego **always** does. ⁶When you are confused about this [*very clear*] distinction in motivation, it **can** only be due to projection. ⁷Projection [of this kind] **is** a confusion in motivation,

and given **this** confusion, **trust** becomes impossible.⁸ No one gladly obeys a guide he does not trust, but this does not mean that the **guide** is untrustworthy.⁹ In this case, it **always** means that the **follower is**.¹⁰ However, this, too, is merely a matter of his own belief.¹¹ Believing that **he** can betray, he believes that everything can betray **him**.¹² Yet this is **only** because he has **elected to follow false guidance**.¹³ Unable to follow **this** guidance **without** fear, he associates fear **with** guidance, and refuses to follow **any** guidance at all.¹⁴ If the result of this decision is confusion, this is hardly surprising.

• Study Question •

5. *Based on what this paragraph says, when it seems to you as though the Holy Spirit is giving you unreliable guidance, or is guiding you to do something that seems to be against your best interests, what is the most likely explanation?*

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When the Holy Spirit guides us it is *always* for our benefit and never to our detriment (5:1). God *loves* us. Why would His Guide lead us astray in any way? If we refuse His guidance we must be seeing something askew. Why would we turn away from advice that is intended to help us, from a Being Who has perfect knowledge of every situation and therefore is capable of giving perfect guidance? Following Him would make us stronger, rather than weaker. The only conclusion possible is that we want to be weak (5:2), which seems crazy. And, since being weak is frightening, we must also want to be afraid (5:3–4).

What part of our mind wants to be weak and afraid? The ego, of course. We are listening to the wrong voice, and have identified with an illusion about ourselves. It cannot be the Holy Spirit we are following when we choose weakness and fear; it must be the ego, because only the ego asks for sacrifice (5:5). We *think* the Holy Spirit is calling for sacrifice, and for that reason we are afraid of listening to Him, but we are wrong. *Listening* to Him does not bring weakness and fear; they come from *not* listening to Him. Foolishly, we listen to the ego and mistrust the Holy Spirit; we think the ego is looking out for us and that the Holy Spirit is trying to misuse us:

So do they think the loss of sin a curse. And flee the Holy Spirit as if He were a messenger from hell, sent from above, in treachery and guile, to work God's vengeance on them in the guise of a deliverer and friend. What could He be to them except a devil, dressed to deceive within an angel's cloak. And what escape has He for them except a door to hell that seems to look like Heaven's gate (T-25.VIII.7:1-4).

Why is it that we seem to mistrust the guidance of the Holy Spirit? This paragraph makes it clear that the fault does not lie with the Holy Spirit; it lies with us (5:8–9). As with all of our misperceptions, our mistrust of the Holy Spirit comes about because of projection (5:6).

What happens is this: It begins when we follow bad guidance. We listen to our ego, which as we have seen, has a very low view of us (T-7.VII.3:2). The ego believes we have betrayed God. By listening to the ego, therefore, we come to mistrust *ourselves*. We see ourselves as capable of betrayal. As we see ourselves, we see everything, so we

perceive everything as capable of betrayal, including even the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, because following the ego's guidance produces fear, we associate guidance with fear and project that specific fear on *all* guidance. It's classic projection (5:6–13).

If we are refusing *all* guidance it is no wonder we feel confused! (5:14).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The Holy Spirit is perfectly trustworthy, as **you** are. ²God Himself trusts you, and therefore your trustworthiness **is** beyond question. ³It will always remain beyond question, however much you may question it. [I trust *my* choices **only** because they *are* God's Will.] ⁴I said before that **you** are the Will of God. ⁵His Will is not an idle wish, and your identification **with** His Will is not optional, since it **is** what you are. ⁶Sharing His Will **with** me is not really open to choice [*at all*], though it may **seem** to be. ⁷The whole separation lies in this error [fallacy]. ⁸The **only** way out of the error [fallacy] is to decide that **you do not have to decide anything**. ⁹Everything has been given you by God's decision. ¹⁰That [This] **is** His Will, and you cannot [*can not*] undo it.

• Study Question •

6. *How does deciding "that you do not have to decide anything" (6:8) rescue you from the error or fallacy of separation?*

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You and I are just as trustworthy as the Holy Spirit. Even God trusts you! (6:1–2). You may mistakenly believe that you are capable of betrayal, but God knows, beyond question, that you are not (6:2–3). You cannot possibly have a will in opposition to God's because that isn't the way He created you. Jesus, speaking in the first person in the Urtext sentence between 6:3 and 6:4, adds that the only reason he trusts his own choices is because they *are* God's Will. That kind of certainty requires a constant connection with spirit that, I believe, comes only with spiritual maturity. It can be dangerous to become convinced that our choices are identical to God's Will while we still have minds heavily influenced by the ego thought of separateness.

The core fallacy that led to our illusory separation from God (6:7) is the idea that we can decide whether or not to be one with God. We don't really have any choice in the matter (6:5–6). God created our will identical with His own, and it remains that way: "You are the Will of god....your identification with His Will is not optional" (6:4–5).

Therefore, we cannot possibly be separate from God. God ordained that we be one with Him and nothing we do can change that (6:9–10). If we are still suffering from the illusion of being separate from God, "the...way out of the error is to decide that *you do not have to decide anything*" (6:8). In other words, realize that your oneness with God is not a matter of choice—it is guaranteed. The crucial decisions have already been made, and made by God; there is no need for further decision.

This is why learning to listen to the Holy Spirit is the way out of hell for us (M-29.3:11; the entire paragraph in the Manual is worth reading in this context). Bringing our minds under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not just a smarter way of living in the world, with a wiser Leader to show us the way; it literally is "the core of the curriculum"

(M-29.3:5). It was our insane, fallacious belief that we could act independently of God that brought about our nightmare of fear and guilt. Only relinquishing that illusion, and once again accepting our total dependence upon God, will relieve us of that nightmare.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Even the relinquishment of your false decision-making prerogative, which the ego guards so jealously, is not accomplished by your wish. ²It was accomplished **for** you by the Will of God, Who has not left you comfortless. ³His Voice **will** teach you how to distinguish between pain and joy, and will lead you out of the confusion **you** have made. ⁴There **is** no confusion in the mind of a Son of God, whose will **must** be the Will of the Father, because the Father's Will *is* His Son.

• Study Question •

7. *Since we have previously seen many examples of the way the Course deals with both the absolute reality of Heaven and the relative reality of this world (also known as illusion), how would you explain the fact that sentence 3 speaks of our confusion, yet sentence 4 says the mind of a Son of God has no confusion?*

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As is so often the case, the Course assures us that nothing essential is beyond our capabilities because nothing essential rests on our solitary minds. The preceding paragraph indicated that our way out of the separation lay in deciding that oneness with God is not optional. That wonderful news, however, might be diluted by a subtle fear. We might fear that we are incapable of making such a choice. We may think that we are so far gone we cannot go back. We may find it hard to believe that we already are one with God, and always have been. Believing that our will is one with God's Will may be a struggle for us, and therefore, full acceptance of that idea may seem out of our reach.

Well, if we think these things, we are wrong again! The part of our mind that doubts its own abilities is the ego, and it isn't capable of any decision; all it can do is wish (7:1). Therefore, we don't need to be concerned; we do not really need to make even this crucial decision to give up our fancied ability to make decisions (7:1). God has already done that for us (7:2). We can't lose.

And yet, being told that God has already made that decision on our behalf doesn't alleviate the inner angst when we are in a serious depression or state of doubt. I know, I've been there. When your mind has contracted in on itself in a ball of fear, the news that we really don't have to do anything because it has already been done can't seem to get through. From within the ball of terror, it seems no more than empty words. The mind is all too aware of its fatal flaws, and seems too far-gone to accept its freedom. The Course refers to this state of mind in terms of long imprisonment:

Prisoners bound with heavy chains for years, starved and emaciated, weak and exhausted, and with eyes so long cast down in darkness they remember not the light, do not leap up in joy the instant they are made free. It takes a while for them to understand what freedom is. (T-20.III.9:1-2)

So it is with us, when the good news of our freedom from choice arrives. We have a hard time believing it. That's precisely why God provided the Holy Spirit, "His Voice" that is mentioned in sentence 3. We are lost in a confused state of our own making, unable to distinguish between pain and joy, but the Holy Spirit can lead us out of our confusion. The Holy Spirit represents the primordial mind, which remains free of confusion (7:4).

The Course strives for a balance between the relative and the absolute. The absolute truth is that our mind is not confused. It knows the difference between joy and pain. The relative truth is that we experience ourselves as confused, and in that state, we make choices that we believe will bring us joy only to find ourselves in pain once again. That state of confusion may be an illusion, and the pain it brings may also be an illusion, but to us it is real. The Holy Spirit works with us in what I am calling the relative reality of our illusions. The foundation on which all His work stands is the absolute truth of our union with God, and yet He addresses the problems we think, in our relative reality, that we have. He teaches us to tell pain and joy apart because, in our illusion, we cannot tell the difference. He leads us out of the illusion by reminding us of the absolute truth. He assures us that our will must be identical with God's Will because God's Son is His Will (7:4).

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Miracles are **in accord** with the Will of God, Whose Will you do **not** know because you are confused about what *you* will. ²This **means** that you are confused about what you are. ³If you **are** God's Will and **do not accept** His Will, you are denying joy. [If you *are* God's will and *do not accept* His will, you can *only* be not accepting what you are. But if your joy *is* what you are, you *are* denying joy.] ⁴The miracle is therefore a lesson in **what joy is**. ⁵Being a lesson in **sharing** it is a lesson in love, which *is* joy. ⁶Every miracle is thus a lesson in truth, and by **offering** truth **you** are learning the difference between pain and joy.

• Study Question •

8. *A miracle is a reflection of God's Will in this world. List the ways in which a miracle is a lesson that teaches you something about God's Will, according to this paragraph.*

•

The means that the Holy Spirit uses to correct our confusion is the *miracle*.

As he does so often, at the end of this section Jesus takes the more abstract truth he has been talking about, which is our oneness with God's Will, and puts feet on it. He relates it to where we are now. What does it mean to be one with the Will of God? It means that we offer miracles, and that those miracles teach us what God's Will is. Therefore, miracles also teach us what we are, since (as the Course tells us) we are the Will of God. Miracles teach us that sharing is what makes us joyful, and withholding from others is what causes us pain. Miracles put an end to our confusion about what we are because they *demonstrate* to us what we are.

Allen Watson's Commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*

By miracles, we learn to tell pain and joy apart. When we refuse to extend our love to a brother, it hurts us. Sometimes, I think of the picture of putting a crimp in the garden hose to cut off the flow of water. That's what we are doing when we cut off the flow of God's Love by refusing to love our brother or sister. That kind of blockage creates a huge inner pressure, and it is painful. Pain comes not through external loss, but through the denial of love. When we try to bottle up love, it hurts. What we are in truth cannot be altered or escaped from; we are an eternal creation of God.

Answer Key

1. (a) The logical outcome of the ego's premises is universal, total confusion.
(b) The logical outcome of God's premises is the creation, by us, of creations that extend God's Being.
(c) We have been unwilling to look at either logical outcome.
2. Any example of denial or repression will do. For instance, a person may deny and repress a strong feeling of anger towards someone, so that they are unaware of that anger and perhaps believe they have forgiven the other person, even while their repressed anger manifests in passive-aggressive behavior toward the object of the anger. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Passive-aggressive...is the term applied to people who respond aggressively and negatively to demands made upon them by using such passive means as procrastination, dawdling, intentional inefficiency, or deliberate forgetfulness." The amount of stuff we have buried in our unconscious is amazing. In my own experience, I recall uncovering a repressed desire for someone's death!
3. You confuse pain and joy because you have confused your self with the ego (you think you are the ego). What is joyful to your Self is painful to the ego, and what is painful to your Self is joyful to it.
4. It is impossible to do the opposite of God's Will (4:5). Since God wills and does not wish, whatever He wills is an accomplishment without opposite (4:6-7). You cannot will against Him because your will is His (4:8). What would go against His Will—the ego's wishes—are meaningless, powerless, impossible (4:9). You can only *wish* against God and can *will* only with Him (4:10).
5. You are either hearing some voice other than the Holy Spirit or you are interpreting the relinquishment He is asking for, which would bring you joy, as a sacrifice. The following paragraph from the *Manual for Teachers* explains this well:

The third stage through which the teacher of God must go can be called "a period of relinquishment." If this is interpreted as giving up the desirable, it will engender enormous conflict. Few teachers of God escape this distress entirely. There is, however, no point in sorting out the valuable from the valueless unless the next obvious step is taken. Therefore, the period of overlap is apt to be one in which the teacher of God feels called upon to sacrifice his own best interests on behalf of truth. He has not realized as yet how wholly impossible such a demand would be. He can learn this only as he actually does give up the valueless. Through this, he learns that where he anticipated grief, he finds a happy lightheartedness instead; where he thought something was asked of him, he finds a gift bestowed on him (M-4.I.5:1-8).

6. Our apparent separation from God stems from the mistaken idea that we can have a will separate from God's, capable of independent choice. Being one with God is not a matter of choice; it is a matter of fact. Therefore, deciding that I don't have to decide anything removes the notion of an independent will, and undoes the cause of seeming separation.
7. Our true mind in Christ cannot be confused and never has been confused. A tiny part of our mind, the "separated" mind that thinks it is the whole, is confused. The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead that tiny, lost part of the mind out of its confusion, back into union with the whole, where perfect knowledge resides.
8. The miracle is a lesson in
 - joy
 - sharing
 - love
 - truth
 - learning the difference between pain and joy