

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 9

The Acceptance of the Atonement

Section I:8-14

The Acceptance of Reality

We're continuing the discussion of Section I, having covered the first seven paragraphs in the previous commentary.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹No right mind can believe that its will is **stronger** than God's. ²If, then, a mind believes that **its** will is different **from** His, it can only decide either that there **is** no God or that **God's Will is fearful**. ³The former accounts for the atheist and the latter for the martyr, who believes that God demands sacrifices [Martyrdom takes many forms, the category including *all* doctrines which hold that God demands sacrifices of *any* kind]. ⁴Either of these insane decisions [Either basic type of insane decision] will induce panic, because the atheist believes he is alone, and the martyr believes that God is crucifying him. [Both really fear both abandonment *and* retaliation, but the former is more reactive against abandonment and the latter against retaliation. The atheist maintains that God has left him, but he {the atheist} does not care. He will, however, become very fearful, and hence very *angry*, if anyone suggests that God has *not* left him. The martyr, on the other hand, is more aware of guilt, and believing that punishment is inevitable, attempts to teach himself to *like* it.] ⁵Yet no one really wants either abandonment or retaliation [The truth is, very simply, that *no-one* wants either abandonment or retaliation], even though many may seek both [Many people *seek* both, but it is still true that they do *not* want it]. ⁶Can you ask the Holy Spirit for "gifts" such as these, and actually expect to **receive** them? ⁷He cannot give you something you do not want. [The Holy Spirit is totally incapable of giving *you* anything that does *not* come from God. His task is *not* to make anything *for* you. He *cannot* make you want something you *don't* want.] ⁸When you ask the Universal Giver for what you do not want, **you** are asking for what **cannot** be given **because it was never created**. ⁹It was never created, because it was never your will for *you*.

• Study Question •

1. If you were to ask the Holy Spirit for either abandonment (the prayer of the atheist) or punishment (the prayer of the martyr), would He grant you your requests? (In other words, do we ever need to fear being abandoned or punished by God?)

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As the first seven paragraphs have shown us, the separation is nothing more than the belief that my will is different from God's Will. *That is the fundamental illusion*, and it is not true.

If, however, I do believe that God's Will and my will are different, there are only two possible ways my mind can react. I cannot possibly believe that my will is *stronger* than God's (8:1), so if we are in conflict, He will inevitably "win." If I believed that my mind was in conflict with God, since God is all-powerful, I would also believe in my own annihilation. The only two ways my mind can hold a belief in a different will and still continue to function are:

- I will believe there is no God (8:2).
- I will believe that God demands sacrifices (8:3).

I will be either an *atheist* or a *martyr*. If I think my will is different from God's, then to survive and have my own way I have to decide that God does not exist. If I believe He does exist, then I am doomed; I'm going to lose out on what I want; I will have to sacrifice to a God Who constantly crosses my will and denies my having what I want.

If I decide that my will is different from God's, I have to be either an atheist or a martyr. Whichever choice I make, the result is *panic!* Either I am completely alone against the universe (the atheist) or God is crucifying me. Frank Zappa, the rock and roll performer, once said, "In the fight between you and the world, back the world."

The only tenable position is that God is real, and our will is one with His. The only ways to maintain the illusion of a separate will are atheism and martyrdom, and both of those inevitably produce panic. We may *try* to be a good atheist, but no one really wants to be alone in the universe without God. We may *try* to be a good martyr, but nobody really wants divine retaliation for disobedience. The only possible way to peace of mind, therefore, is to accept the unity of our will with God's.

If you decide God does not exist, you are competing with the universe, and the universe will win. If you decide God does exist, you are fighting God, and there is no question of who will win that fight. *Both decisions are clearly the path to insanity*. And yet this is what you are asking for when you ask for a separate, independent will! The point is this: If you look at this rationally, you *don't really want* what you think you want.

We might think that the Course is missing the mark when it says we are seeking abandonment or retaliation. Certainly no one ever *actively* seeks for such things (8:5). The Course is saying that when we ask for (or wish for) a will that is separate and independent from God's Will, we are, without realizing it, asking for either abandonment or retaliation. The good news is that we cannot ever receive abandonment or retaliation from God, *even if we ask for them*, because such things cannot possibly exist (8:6). God never created them (8:7–8). That includes the separate will we think we want. It does not exist, and we do not have it.

In fact, *we never really wanted it!* (8:9). Somewhere in our minds we *knew* that asking for an independent will meant asking God to either abandon us or punish us, and since we could never want either of those things, our minds were incapable of actually

willing to be independent of God. The only possible sane decision, then, is realizing that *we want what God wants*, and that our will and His are identical.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹Ultimately everyone must remember [Ur: learn] the Will of God, because ultimately everyone must recognize **himself**. ²This recognition **is** the recognition that **his will and God's are one**. ³In the presence of truth, there are no unbelievers and no sacrifices. ⁴In the security of reality, fear is totally meaningless. ⁵To deny what **is** can only *seem* to be fearful. ⁶Fear cannot be real without a cause, and **God** is the only Cause. ⁷God is Love and you **do** want Him. ⁸This *is* your will. ⁹Ask for **this** and you **will** be answered, because you will be asking only for what **belongs** to you.

• Study Question •

2. What kind of prayers *will* be answered? What do you really want? Spend a little time in prayer actually asking for these things.

As it so often does, the Course here boldly asserts that everyone will eventually achieve enlightenment. “*Ultimately everyone must remember the will of God, because ultimately everyone must recognize himself*” (9:1). The truth will out. We cannot continue forever to deny the truth about ourselves.

It would be an interesting and effective exercise, I think, to repeat this sentence over and over for five or ten minutes, inserting the names of various people we know, including ourselves: *Ultimately, everyone including me [or other name] must remember the Will of God....*

Accepting reality means accepting that my will is one with God's (9:2). It means abandoning every trace of the unbelief of the atheist or the sacrifice of martyrs, because such beliefs cannot survive in the light of the truth (9:3). God has not abandoned me; God is not punishing me. I want what He wants.

In the security of knowing the unity of my will and God's, I cannot be afraid. An atheist actually fears that God has abandoned him, and if He has not, that He wants to retaliate. The martyr, while maintaining an apparent belief in God, believes that God demands sacrifice from him in payment for his sins; he, too, fears retaliation and eventual abandonment. Both positions are positions of fear. But when the truth dawns upon us, when we recognize that the separation has not happened, that God still loves us as His only Son, fear vanishes.

In wishing for a separate will we are asking for the impossible. We are actually denying what we really do want. While it is possible to deny facts, denying them does not change them! And of course, denying the facts brings *fear* or even *panic*, because to persist in an illusion is to exist in a state that is constantly threatened by everything that is true (9:5). That is a perfect description of the ego: a state of mind that is constantly threatened by everything that is true!

How can fear be real? For anything to be real it must have a cause. “*God*,” however, “*is the only Cause*” (9:6). Would God cause fear? Would God have created such a thing? Of course not! Therefore, “*Fear cannot be real*” (9:6), whether it be the atheist's fear of abandonment or the martyr's fear of punishment.

“*God is Love and you do want Him*” (9:7). To me, that is one of the most inspiring statements of the Course. The ego would tell us the opposite, that God is an angry tyrant who wants to punish us, and that we don’t want to be one with Him, we want to exist separately. Even when our hearts begin to turn to God we have the lingering fear that maybe He doesn’t want us, or that maybe, deep down, we really don’t want Him. When I hear these words my heart sings for joy. *God is Love*, and I *do* want Him! Hallelujah!

My true will has been revealed. I don’t really want independence. I don’t really want abandonment and retaliation. *I want God*. If I ask in line with this will, my true will, I will always be answered (9:9). I will be asking for something already given to me by God, something that is already mine.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹When you ask the Holy Spirit for what would hurt you He **cannot** answer because **nothing** can hurt you, and **so you are asking for nothing**. **2**Any wish [*desire*] that stems from the ego **is** a wish [*desire*] for nothing, and to ask for it **is not a request**. ³It is merely a denial in the **form** of a request. ⁴The Holy Spirit is not concerned with form [*at all*], being aware only of **meaning**. ⁵The ego cannot ask the Holy Spirit for **anything**, because there is **complete communication failure** between them. ⁶Yet *you* can ask for **everything** of the Holy Spirit, because **your** requests to Him are real, being of your right mind [*being of your will*]. ⁷Would the Holy Spirit deny the Will of God? ⁸And could He fail to recognize it in His Son [*God’s Sons*]?

• Study Question •

3. How would you apply the teaching of this paragraph to your own prayers and prayer requests?

The discussion turns more specifically to the realm of prayer once more. When we ask for something that would hurt us, the Holy Spirit cannot give it to us. It isn’t because He does not want to give us such things. Rather, such things do not exist! There is nothing that can hurt us (10:1).

If that is true, we might wonder, why doesn’t He just give us everything we ask for? None of it can hurt us, right? If we are thinking along that line, we are confusing form and content, or form and *meaning*, as this paragraph puts it (10:4). When we ask, for instance, for a new car, what the Holy Spirit hears isn’t a request for a particular form: a car. What he hears is a request for union with God or separation from Him, for healing or for attack. If we ask for the car out of ego motives, as far as He is concerned we are asking for *nothing* (10:2), and so that’s what we get! What seems to us like a request, when it is motivated by the ego, is actually a denial of the truth, and not a request at all (10:3).

When we are listening to the ego, prayer is actually impossible, because the ego cannot communicate with the Holy Spirit (10:5). “*Yet you can ask for everything of the Holy Spirit*” (10:6), that is, when we listen to our true Self, the Voice for God within our right mind, we can ask for anything and everything, and nothing will be denied to us (10:6–8) because those requests will be in accord with God’s Will.

I note here that the Course is reprising the theme of choosing to listen to the Holy Spirit instead of the ego, a theme that sounded often in the preceding chapter.

Paragraph 11

11. [The energy which you withdraw from Creation you expend on fear. This is not because your *energy* is limited, but because *you have limited it.*]
¹You do not recognize the **enormous** waste of energy you expend in denying truth. ²What would **you** say of someone who **persists** in attempting the impossible, believing that to **achieve** it is to **succeed**? ³The belief that you **must have the impossible** in order to be happy is totally at variance with the principle of creation. ⁴God **could** not will that happiness **depended** on what you could never have. ⁵The fact that God is Love does not require belief, but it **does** require **acceptance**. ⁶It is indeed possible for you to **deny** facts, although it is **impossible** for you to **change** them. ⁷If you hold your hands over your eyes, you will **not** see because you are interfering with the laws of seeing. ⁸If you deny love, you will **not know it** because your cooperation is the **law of its being**. ⁹You cannot change laws you did not make, and the laws of happiness were created **for you, not by you**.

• Study Question •

4. According to this paragraph, what is one possible reason that we get tired so often?

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What we are, in truth, is loving beings, created by God to be extensions of His Love. We were created to create. We are here in this world only to extend the Love of God.

I am the light of the world. That is my only function. That is why I am here. (W-pl.61.5:3-5)

Every moment we spend in denial of that truth is spent at the cost of an “*enormous waste of energy*” (11:1). It takes great effort to suppress our awareness of the obvious. Our quest of complete autonomy is like someone who devotes his life to learning to fly (11:2). We can pour our energy into the project day after day after day; we can invent one clever scheme after another, but we will never succeed because we are attempting the impossible. A life devoted to the impossible is bound to be a very unhappy life. The waste of energy poured into our futile search for an independent will can only leave us drained and depleted.

This could not possibly be God’s Will for us (11:4). He would never demand that we perform the impossible in order to be happy. Therefore, accepting that God is Love must be within our easy reach (11:5). When the Course contrasts belief and acceptance here, I think what it means is that there is no positive action required on our part. We don’t have to make ourselves “believe.” Instead, we just need to *stop denying* what we already know! We already know that God is Love. We already know, in our right mind, that we do want Him. But we are denying that knowledge; we are holding our hands over our eyes and blocking the light that, if left unhindered, would shine directly into our eyes and our minds (11:6-7).

How do we figuratively hold our hands over our eyes? We do so by denying the natural outflow of love from our hearts. Blocking the extension of love from within me

toward another person obscures the truth of my being. We hide the light from ourselves when we refuse to be the light of the world. "My grievances hide the light of the world in me" (W-pI.69). In order to *know* what I am I must *cooperate* with what I am (11:8).

Paragraph 12

12. ¹Any attempt to deny what *is* must be fearful, and if the attempt is strong it will induce panic [Attempts of any kind to deny what *is* are fearful, and if they are strong they *will* induce panic]. **2**Willing against reality, though impossible, can be **made** into a very persistent goal **even though you do not want it**. ³But consider the result of this strange decision. ⁴You are **devoting** your mind to what you **do not want**. ⁵How real can this devotion be? ⁶If you do not want it, it was never created. ⁷If it were [was] never created, it is nothing. ⁸Can you **really** devote yourself to nothing?

• Study Question •

5. What are some ways in which you are attempting to deny what *is*?

As we saw in paragraph 8, attempting to deny reality (seen there as how denying the union of our will with God's results in atheism or martyrdom) causes panic (12:1, see 8:4). Yet, as we have seen quite often, the ego can make much ado about nothing. Even though we do not *truly* desire anything except reality, even though it is impossible to alter reality, the ego can make doing so "a very persistent goal" (12:2). The voice of this thing that does not even exist can seem extraordinarily loud. The fruitless goal of ego autonomy lingers on and on, refusing to die despite repeated attempts to educate us as to its futility.

So the Holy Spirit tries yet again, asking us to consider the result of our "strange decision" (12:3). In a nutshell, we end up devoting our lives to nothing—something that simply is not possible (12:4–8). Jesus here repeats the same arguments he used in paragraph 8. There, he was speaking about things we were asking for; here, he applies the argument to what we are devoting ourselves to. He says that since they were never our true will, they were never created, and since they were not created, they are nothing. Therefore they cannot be given to us; therefore, we cannot be devoted to them.

Paragraph 13

13. ¹God in His devotion to **you** created you devoted to **everything**, and gave you what you are devoted *to*. ²Otherwise you would not have been created perfect. ³Reality **is** everything, and you [therefore] have everything **because** you are real. ⁴You cannot make the **unreal** because the **absence** of reality is fearful, and fear cannot **be** created. ⁵As long as you believe that fear is possible, **you will not create**. ⁶Opposing orders of reality **make reality meaningless**, and reality is meaning [reality is *meaning*].

• Study Question •

6. If God created you “devoted to everything” (13:1), how would that fact, if you accepted it, express itself in your daily life? Try to think of some specific examples.

When Jesus says that God created us “devoted to everything” (13:1), to me that implies that we will be filled with love, compassion, and care for everything. We will be filled with love, desiring only to bring blessing to everyone and everything we encounter. If I am devoted to my children, it means that I watch over them, I take care of them; I always put their well being foremost in my mind. I think about it constantly. If I am devoted to everything, it will mean that I constantly give priority to the well being of others. I will be continually extending love and blessing. I will be the light of the world, extending blessing wherever I go.

God not only created me devoted to everything, He gave everything *to me*. Having everything and being devoted to everything is what makes me perfect (13:2). If I lacked anything, or if I excluded something from the circle of my love, I would not be perfect. Being perfect, being real, and having everything are synonymous (13:3). Only that which is perfect is real. Only that which has everything and serves everything is perfect. If God is the being we believe God to be, this must be so.

Accepting this completeness, this perfection and this reality is the only way we can exist in peace; if we resist and deny this reality, we will be filled with fear. Fundamentally, fear cannot exist (13:4). If it *seems* to exist, it is an illusion. When we attempt to “create” anything other than this united reality, we are by definition making something *unreal*, which is patently impossible. “*The absence of reality is fearful*” (13:4). When our minds deny reality, we “make” fear. In order for our illusions to seem real to us, the fear must also seem real to us; they are like two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other.

As long as we adhere to our illusions, and believe in the reality of both the illusions and the fear they produce, it will remain impossible for us to truly create (13:5). Creation is a facet of reality; our devotion to unreality cancels out reality and therefore cancels out our creative function, rendering us meaningless (13:6).

What does all this mean to us practically? How can we put the teachings of this section into practice and have them make any difference in our lives? The next paragraph will address that question, and give us a specific practice exercise we can use.

Paragraph 14

14. ¹Remember, then, that God's Will is **already** possible, and nothing else will **ever** be. ²This is the simple acceptance of Reality, because only that is real. ³You cannot **distort** reality and **know what it is**. ⁴And if you **do** distort reality you will experience anxiety, depression and ultimately panic, because you are trying to **make yourself unreal**. ⁵When you feel these things, do not try to look **beyond** yourself for truth, for truth can only be **within** you. ⁶Say, therefore:

⁷*Christ is in me, and where He is God must be,
for Christ is part of Him.*

• Study Question •

7. Look back over the last day or week, and try to identify at least three times when you experienced some of the negative emotions mentioned in sentence 4. See if you can identify the way, at that time, your mind was distorting reality (by “distorting” we must understand anything except “simply acceptance”).
8. Memorize sentence 7, and use it this week whenever you feel anxious or depressed.

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We are asked to remember two things about God's Will (14:1), which of course includes God's Will *for us*, the function to which He has called each and every one of us.

- a. God's Will is already possible.
- b. Nothing but God's Will will ever be possible.

What do these thoughts about God's Will have to do with the acceptance of reality? Remember that we started this section talking about the strange belief that our will is different than God's Will. The second declaration counteracts that idea, since only God's Will is possible. That means that the seeming will we have that differs from God's isn't real, and cannot have real effects. We never made any choices that overturned God's Will. We cannot possibly ever have an independent will, and therefore it is pointless to seek for one. Furthermore, the function to which God has appointed us, being part of His Will, is *already* possible. If “*there is no will but God's*” (see Workbook Lessons 74 and 331), then nothing exists that can oppose or delay His Will; therefore, His Will is perfectly attainable.

If you think about all this implies, you can begin to understand why the Course lays so much importance on accepting that our will and God's Will are one. For instance:

- Willing contrary to God's will is what we would call “sin.” It is impossible that I could have willed anything contrary to God's Will. Therefore, I have never sinned.
- God gave me a function. If He willed it, it is possible. Therefore, it is foolish to imagine that I am inadequate for the function He gave me.
- Only reality can exist. Only what God wills is real. Therefore, it is pointless to seek for or to desire anything other than God's perfect Will.
- God's Will created us all as one. To hold a grievance is to deny the reality of that union. Denial of reality is futile, and brings fear, anxiety and depression. Accepting my union with all beings is therefore the only way to perfect happiness.

And so on.

What does it mean to simply accept reality? God's Will is the only reality. Therefore, accepting reality means to remember that “God's Will is already possible, and nothing else will ever be” (14:1–2). It's important to realize that when the Course talks about accepting reality, it isn't talking about accepting everything that *seems to be* real. For instance, I may seem to have a disease; accepting reality does not mean accepting that the disease exists. It does not even mean accepting that my body, or this world, exists. On the contrary, if we *perceive* something, we need to ask ourselves, “Is this God's Will?” If it

does not match up to what we know of God's Love, then whatever it seems to be, *it cannot be real*. We can say something like this: "God did not create that war, and so it is not real" (W-14.4:5).

Accepting reality does not mean lying down and letting the truck run over us. It does not mean what many people mean when they ask us to, "Face up to reality," or to "Face the facts." In fact, often what the Course means by accepting reality is the *exact opposite* of what the world means by facing reality, because, to the world, it is the physical, material world that is real. To the world, what can be seen is real, while what is invisible is unreal. To the Course, what is invisible to us is the true reality, while what we see with our body's eyes is a lie.

Chapter 12 of the Text sums it up nicely:

When you made visible what is not true, what is true became invisible to you. Yet it cannot be invisible in itself, for the Holy Spirit sees it with perfect clarity. It is invisible to you because you are looking at something else. Yet it is no more up to you to decide what is visible and what is invisible, than it is up to you to decide what reality is. What can be seen is what the Holy Spirit sees. The definition of reality is God's, not yours. He created it, and He knows what it is. (T-12.VIII.3:1-7)

We cause ourselves anxiety when we deny reality (14:4)—that is, when we think something other than God's Will is even possible. Denying reality is fearful (12:1); of course it makes us anxious. It even bring on "*depression, and ultimately panic*" (14:4). Have you noticed how often Jesus mentions *panic* in this section? (See 2:3, 8:4, and 12:1 as well as 14:4.) We might even think of these final words as instructions about what to do when panic strikes.

We need to recognize just what is going on when we feel fear, anxiety, depression, and even panic. Our "natural" inclination is to attribute these feelings to some physical cause: a threatening enemy, an impending disaster, symptoms of illness, shortage of money or other props to our security, or friction in a relationship. This section has been telling us that anxiety and panic do not derive from these causes. "*I am never upset for the reason I think*" (W-pl.5). Panic comes from our attempts to distort reality, denying that only God's Will exists, and trying to make ourselves into something we are not (beings with independent wills), which amounts to making ourselves unreal. Whenever these feelings arise, somewhere behind them is our rejection of our own reality as part of God's Will. We are caught in the belief that our will differs from God's, and that therefore, we are separate from Him.

Therefore, the Course gives us a specific practice to use when these feelings of anxiety or panic arise. Instead of looking to something outside of us for relief and security, as we so often do, Jesus suggests that we repeat some words. These words will counter the mistaken beliefs we have accepted. They will undo, in our minds, the true cause of the anxiety and panic. I am convinced that he fully intends for us to *really do this practice*. In order to do so, there is really no other way than to memorize the words he asks us to say (sentence 7). These words affirm our union in and with Christ, and through Christ, with God. They counter any feelings of guilt and separation we are having. They undermine our belief that our will differs from God's, because if God and Christ are "*in me*" (14:7), how could my will possibly differ from theirs? If they are in me, I cannot be an unholy sinner. I must be a holy child of God.

I do suggest, therefore, that you memorize this sentence. It is only seventeen short words, with "Christ" being the longest word of the sentence. It cannot be that difficult to memorize. Memorize it in the morning. Write the words on a card to carry with you, and then, when you become aware of anxiety, depression, or panic, stop, get alone and quiet if possible, but even if not, silently *repeat these words to yourself, slowly, several times*. This is how you can teach yourself to accept reality. Try it now, even as you read:

Christ is in me, and where He is God must be, for Christ is part of Him (14:7).

Answer Key

1. He would never grant such requests for two reasons: First, He knows that we do not truly want them; and second, such things were never created by God and therefore do not even exist.
2. If we ask for the things that we truly want, we will receive them. Things such as God, His Will, His Love.
3. The general idea is that if we ask for things in accordance with the Will of God, we will receive them. If we ask for things motivated by the ego, they will be things that hurt us, and therefore the requests will be denied. *The form* of our requests is not as important as their *meaning*.
4. One reason we get so tired is that we are wasting so much energy denying the truth, trying to be something we are not.
5. No written answer is expected.
6. It would manifest itself in acts of love and kindness. (Specific examples will vary from one person to the next.)
7. No written answer is expected.
8. No written answer is expected.