

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 9

Section III, “The Correction of Error”

This section, “The Correction of Error,” is one of the most practical and fascinating sections we’ve studied so far. One sentence taken from mid-section summarizes it well: “It is not up to you to change your brother, but merely to accept him as he is.” (6.4)

The previous section, “The Answer to Prayer,” spoke of how we find our answer to prayer in our brothers by perceiving only the truth in them. It told us that we could receive only by recognizing the Holy Spirit in everyone (T-9.II.12:2, 4).

You may be thinking that it is all well and good to “see the Holy Spirit” in our brothers, but what do we do about all the obvious mistakes they make? What do we do when they act from fear, when they act insanely, and when they are clearly identifying with their own ego? Isn’t it our job to correct their errors? Isn’t it good and proper to point out their mistakes so they can correct them?

This section, “The Correction of Error,” deals with the question that inevitably arises for all of us: What do I do about the obvious errors I see in my brothers and sisters? Isn’t it my responsibility to correct them? The basic answer to that question in this section, as we will see, is very simple: *Do not respond to errors. Do not react to them as if they were real.* Our only responsibility is the healing of our own minds. The correction of errors in our brothers and sisters should be left to the Holy Spirit.

Paragraphs 1 & 2

1. ¹The alertness of the ego to the errors of other egos is **not** the kind of vigilance the Holy Spirit would have you maintain. ²Egos are critical in terms of the kind of “sense” they **stand for**. ³**They** understand this kind of sense, because it **is** sensible to them. ⁴To the Holy Spirit it makes no sense at all.

2. ¹To the ego it is kind and right and good to point out errors and “correct” them. ²This makes **perfect** sense to the ego, which is [*totally*] unaware of what errors **are** and what correction **is**. ³Errors **are** of the ego, and **correction** of errors [*of any kind*] lies [*solely*] in the **relinquishment** of the ego. ⁴When you **correct** a brother, you are telling him that he is **wrong**. ⁵He may be making no sense at the time, and it is certain that, if he is speaking from the ego, he **will** not be making sense. ⁶But your task is still to tell him **he is right**. ⁷You do not tell him this verbally, if he is **speaking** foolishly [*because*]. ⁸He needs correction **at another level**, because [*since*] his error **is** at another level. ⁹**He** is still right, because he is a Son of God. ¹⁰His ego is **always** wrong, no matter **what** it says or does.

• Study Question •

1. *The last three sentences of the first paragraph don't quite make sense (no pun intended) without paragraph 2, so read them together.*
 - (a) *The Course is always encouraging us to be vigilant, but what kind of vigilance is not encouraged?*
 - (b) *What kind of involvement with the errors of other people makes sense to the ego (2:1, 2; 1:3)?*
 - (c) *Describe how we are to "tell him he is right" if a brother is speaking foolishly and we cannot tell him so verbally (2:4–10).*

As they begin to learn about all the subtle deceptions of the ego many Course students become very adept at spotting the ego in other people and pointing it out. The Course makes it ultra-clear that this is *not* the correct application of the truth! (1:1). The standards the ego uses in making judgments are the standards that make sense *in the ego framework*, but those standards are meaningless to the Holy Spirit (1:2–4). (Just what criticism our egos consider sensible will be clarified in paragraph 2.)

We excel at noticing the mistakes of others, don't we? Have you ever noticed how someone who studies psychology can seem very good at detecting psychological problems in other people, and yet be nearly blind to the same things in themselves? Or the way some Bible students are expert at condemning other people, and yet apparently overlook entirely the Bible's message of, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12, KJV). As Jesus put it in the Gospel of Luke, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Luke 6:41, NAS).

Why do we do that? Because we are listening to the ego. Correcting the errors of other people is the sort of thing that makes sense to the ego (2:1–2). In fact, if our minds are working in the ego framework, we probably will consider it a loving thing to do! If I see a friend, for instance, making what I consider to be mistakes in the way he is raising his children, I may think that, as a good friend, I need to straighten him out. Or, what is more insidious, as a Course student, if I see a fellow student obviously listening to his or her own ego fears, I think that it would be really kind to point it out to them!

That kind of thinking, says the Course, is ego-directed thinking. It does not work. It's really a kind of attack. Think of some time when someone you know tried to correct *you*. Ask yourself how it felt. Did it feel as though the person was emanating love to you? Or did you feel attacked? Perhaps only subtly attacked; maybe you even figured the attack was unconscious on the part of the other person, but nevertheless you felt attacked. Right? At the very least you can probably recognize that you felt *defensive*, and that your ego felt deflated a bit.

Now, I realize there are times when someone can help us find a better way to do something and it feels like loving assistance. Usually, though, we've asked for help in such instances, or at the least, the other person has asked us if we would like some help and we've said yes. The kind of "attack disguised as loving correction" I am talking about here, and what I think Jesus has in mind as well, is the sort that tries to "set you straight" whether you want it or not. "Look, George," we say, "you're really messing things up here. Let me tell you how you ought to be doing this."

That sort of correction is stating, either directly or by clear implication, that the person is w-r-o-n-g. It is telling them they are making a mistake or committing an error. But telling your brother he is wrong isn't what you really want to do! That just identifies him with the ego (because "Errors are of the ego" (2:3)). The true goal of correcting a person is not to associate them with the ego but to show them they do not *need* to be associated with the ego (2:4). You need to "tell him he is right" (2:6).

In other words, you don't heal by pointing out his errors. You heal by pointing out his *wholeness*. You see *through* the errors to the truth of the Holy Spirit within him. You don't focus on his ego and tell him what is *wrong* with him; you focus on his spirit and tell him what is *right* with him. You see him as God's Son and your brother, rather than as an enemy.

In teaching us to tell our brother that he is right, the Course is not asking us to blind ourselves to the truth or to lie—to agree with whatever our brother might be saying. There are times when your brother will be spouting absolute nonsense, and you will know it; you are not meant to agree with his nonsense (2:5–7). You do not lend support to his ego, because "His ego is always wrong..." (2:10). To "tell him he is right" (2:6) often does not use speech at all! We are talking here about communication on the level of mind rather than verbal communication, because your brother's error is occurring at the level of thought, not at the level of behavior (2:8). In other words, *what are you thinking about him?* That is what you are communicating, whether you put words to it or not. His ego may be wrong, but *he* is not wrong (2:9–10).

Pay particular attention to the distinction being made here between your brother and his ego. When you attempt to correct your brother on the behavioral level, you are mentally identifying him with his ego. You are communicating the message, "You are the ego." When you choose to see past his ego to his reality, you are communicating the message, "You are not your ego." *That* is how you correct his mistake, because his mistake is not his behavior, his mistake lies in thinking that he and the ego are one. Rather than correcting his behavior by your words and actions, you correct his *mistaken thought* by your *correct thought*. You recognize him as a Son of God.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹If you point out the errors of your brother's [*his*] ego you **must** be seeing through yours, because the Holy Spirit **does not perceive his errors**. ²This *must* be true, since [*Ur: if*] there is no communication [*at all*] between the ego and the Holy Spirit. ³The ego makes **no** sense, and the Holy Spirit does not attempt to understand **anything** that arises from it. ⁴Since He does not understand it, He **does not judge it, knowing** that nothing the ego makes [*nothing it engenders*] **means anything**.

• Study Question •

2. *Since the Holy Spirit does not see the ego's errors, what must be true when we point out the errors of a brother's ego?*

It's rather sobering to realize that only the ego sees the ego. "It takes one to know one." When my partner or friend starts acting out of the ego, and I begin to point out how

ego-driven they are, it is *my own ego* speaking (3:1). Try watching your thoughts for a few hours and see how many of them are judgments against someone else's ego. It's a distressing experiment, but fruitful because it can help you to recognize how your own mind is dominated by your ego.

When you respond to your brother you are following one of two voices, that of the ego, or that of the Holy Spirit. When you judge your brother's ego, you *must* be listening to the ego because the Holy Spirit doesn't judge. The Holy Spirit does not judge the ego because He does not understand it (3:4). He does not even *see* your brother's errors! (3:1). This does not indicate any lack or failure on the part of the Holy Spirit. The ego is meaningless, and anything without meaning *cannot* be understood. Nonsense is nonsense!

As the Holy Spirit does not perceive errors, we are asked to do the same thing. This doesn't mean that we literally don't see what our brother or sister is doing. Rather, it means we *overlook* it; we don't imagine that it is real. In *The Song of Prayer*, Jesus says:

“Do not see error. Do not make it real. Select the loving and forgive the sin by choosing in its place the face of Christ” (S-2.I.3:3-5).

Suppose that, when your brother behaves insanely, you reminded yourself, “This does not mean anything.” If it does not mean anything, how can you *judge* it? It does not say anything about your brother. If his ego leads him to verbally attack you, for instance, it does not mean that he is a cruel person any more than the sky is cruel when it drops rain on your picnic. It does not mean *anything*. He is still the Son of God. He still deserves your love.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹When you react **at all** to errors, you are **not listening to the Holy Spirit**.
²He has merely disregarded them, and if you **attend** to them you are **not hearing Him**.
³If you do not hear **Him**, you are listening to **your** ego and making as little sense as the brother whose errors you perceive.
⁴This **cannot** be correction.
⁵Yet it is more than merely a lack of correction for him.
⁶It is the **giving up** of correction in **yourself**.

• Study Question •

3. *List some of the different ways in which we currently react to errors in others, and try to describe what not reacting might look like.*
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The Course answers the question, “How should I react to my brothers mistakes?” very simply: *Don't*. **Any** reaction to error comes from the ego! (4:1). Therefore, when your brother makes a mistake, *don't react at all* to his mistake. This isn't an easy dictum to follow! It does not mean that you do not react at all *to your brother*, but it does mean that you do not react *to his mistake*. You do what the Holy Spirit does; you *disregard* the error (4:2). You actually overlook it. “Overlook” is a very important word in the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit, as we will see when we study Section IV. There is a great line about overlooking in Chapter 10: “To overlook nothingness is merely to judge it correctly, and because of your ability to evaluate it truly, to let it go” (T-10.IV.2:4). That

is how the Course is asking us to see the ego's mistakes in our brother or sister—as *nothing*; without any importance, without any meaning, without any effect on our attitude towards him or her.

Overlooking his errors means you see that his mistakes have not changed the truth of what he is, a holy Son of God ("Look on your brother with this hope in you, and you will understand he could not make an error that could change the truth in him. It is not difficult to overlook mistakes that have been given no effects" (T-30.VI.10:1-2)). When you try to correct your brother's mistakes, you are not overlooking them. You are seeing them as something with real effects, and you are thinking that, for your own salvation, you need to change him. You don't need to change him—he does not need changing. You need to accept the truth about him.

If you let your brother's ego engage your ego, you're going to be as confused as he is (4:3). You will not be of any help at all (4:4), no matter how you sugarcoat your words and call them "helpful criticism." You won't help your brother and you certainly will not help yourself (4:5–6). As we've seen repeatedly, the Course teaches us that the way we come to recognize the Christ in ourselves is through recognizing Him in our brothers and sisters. If we choose to ignore the reality of Christ in our brother and to focus on his ego, we're going to take the same warped view of ourselves.

When the Course says that we attack ourselves and coat ourselves with guilt, many of us probably feel that the Course is overstating its case a bit. If, however, we consider how the Course is asking us to treat others' errors, we will realize that we have a hard time imagining viewing our own errors in the same way.

Can you *disregard* your ego's errors? Do you find it easy to overlook them? Do you recognize that your errors are without meaning? Do you refuse to let them diminish your sense of value and self-worth? Your answer to all those questions is probably, "No," although we generally aren't aware of how strongly we *do* react to our ego's errors. That's one value our brothers have for us. The way we react to their errors reflects exactly the way we react to our own errors; our condemnation of them is a true measure of our self-condemnation. Thus, practicing forgiveness, practicing the overlooking of my brother's mistakes, is a powerful way to increase my own self-forgiveness and self-acceptance. If, instead, we listen to our own egos and react strongly to the egos of others, we are depriving ourselves of the Holy Spirit's correction.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹When a brother behaves insanely, you can heal him **only** by perceiving the **sanity** in him. ²If you perceive his errors and **accept** them, you are accepting **yours**. ³If you want to give **yours** over to the Holy Spirit, you must do this with **his**. ⁴Unless this becomes the **one** way in which you handle **all** errors, you cannot understand **how all errors are undone**. ⁵How is this different from telling you that what you teach you **learn**? ⁶Your brother is as right as you are, and if you think he is **wrong** you are condemning **yourself**.

• Study Question •

4. *List at least two positive instructions given us here about how to “handle all errors” with the Holy Spirit. Give your opinion of what those instructions mean in practical terms.*

You don't heal your brother by pointing out his errors. You heal by pointing out his *wholeness* (5:1). You see *through* the errors to the truth of the Holy Spirit within him. You don't focus on his ego and tell him what is wrong with him; you focus on his spirit and tell him what is right with him. You see him as God's Son and your brother (T-9.II.12:6), rather than an enemy.

Your job is to *not see* the errors in others, but to see instead their perfection, to see the Holy Spirit in them, to see that they are God's Son just as you are, and therefore your brother. You are not here to point out your brother's insanity; you are here to point out his underlying *sanity* (5:1). You are not here to tell him he is wrong; you are here to tell him he is *right*. If you want the Holy Spirit to overlook your mistakes, you must be willing to overlook the mistakes in your brothers (5:3).

You cannot expect God to let you off the hook for your mistakes and yet hold your brothers and sisters accountable for every minor deviation. (Of course, God does not have you on any hook! But if you condemn your brother, you will believe you are condemned as well.) As much as you might think you'd like it, you can't have a double standard where forgiveness is concerned. The reason, as we've seen often, is that you and your brother are not *really* separate beings; you cannot condemn him and forgive yourself at the same time.

In the Gospels, when Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness (“How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?”), Jesus told a fascinating story about an unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21–35). It involves a king and his servant, who apparently handled a lot of money even though he was a slave, because he owed the king ten thousand *talents* of silver. A talent is a unit of weight; one talent of silver was worth something like \$2000 in mid-Twentieth Century terms (according to the Scofield Reference Bible), and more today. Ten thousand talents, then, was worth about \$20,000,000. Twenty million dollars! This guy was in *serious* debt!

The king decided to regain what he could by selling the slave, along with the slave's possessions, wife and children. But the slave begged for forgiveness, and the king gave it to him. He forgave the twenty million dollar debt! Pretty amazing!

The slave, however, was a fool, and despite the demonstration of forgiveness, went out and found a fellow slave who owed him a hundred denarii, or about \$35. He grabbed the guy, choked him and said, “Pay me back!” The fellow slave begged forgiveness, but the first slave refused and threw him in prison instead.

When the king heard about it, he called the fellow back, reprimanded him, and then “turned him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him” (Matthew 18:34). Pretty grim story! The point of the story, I think, is that unless we are willing to give our brothers total forgiveness, we will not be able to accept it for ourselves. We will continue to torture ourselves with guilt until we learn to grant forgiveness to all our brothers. There is only one standard, “one way in which [we are to] handle all errors” (5:4).

So, what is the one way? How are we meant to handle all errors, both in ourselves and in our brothers? We must “give [them] over to the Holy Spirit” (5:3). What does that mean? Well, we’ve already been told (3:1, 3:3–4) that the Holy Spirit does not perceive errors, makes no attempt to understand them, and therefore does not judge them. If you give an error over to Him, it pretty much disappears. It becomes something you no longer see, don’t even try to understand, and certainly do not judge. It becomes, in effect, *nothing*.

Once again, the Bible has some images that, to me, illustrate beautifully what happens when you give an error over to the Holy Spirit. Of course the Bible speaks of “sins” rather than “errors,” but the central idea of giving our mistakes to God and having them removed, erased, or eradicated is there, express in a number of ways:

As far as the east is from the west, [so] far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:12, KJV)

... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18, KJV)

... thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. (Isaiah 38:17, KJV)

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. (Hebrews 8:12, KJV)

I, [even] I, [am] he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. (Isaiah 43:25, KJV)

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins... (Isaiah 44:22, KJ

He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19, KJV)

How far away do your mistakes go when you turn them over to the Holy Spirit? “As far as the east is from the west,” which is *infinitely* far. They are as much “gone” as something you drop into the middle of the deepest ocean. That is a wonderful truth that has been part of the message of Christ from the beginning: “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38, NIV).

What the Course adds to that message is that this is the one way *all* errors are to be handled. We are to turn *all of them*, our own and everyone else’s, over into the forgiving hands of the Holy Spirit, Who will put them behind His back and never remember them again. If we want to be free from the guilt of our mistakes we must be willing for our brothers to enjoy the same freedom. We must offer to them the same forgiveness we want the Holy Spirit to offer to us (5:3–4). We must accept that every brother, even that most difficult one who seems incorrigible or beyond hope, is “as right as you are” (5:6).

“But,” we may object, “if no one points out my sister’s mistakes, how will she ever learn to change them? If I don’t correct her, and no one else does, she’ll just go on doing the same stupid things forever, won’t she?” Let’s see how Jesus addresses that issue.

Paragraph 6

[6. ¹You cannot correct yourself. ²Is it possible, then, for you to correct another?]

³Yet you **can** see him truly, because it **is** possible for you to see **yourself** truly.
⁴It is not up to you to **change** your brother, but merely to accept him **as he is**.
⁵His errors do not come from the truth that is in him, and **only** this truth is yours.
⁶His errors cannot change this, and can have no effect at all on the truth in **you**.
⁷To perceive errors in anyone, and to **react** to them **as if they were real**, is to **make** them real to you. ⁸You will not escape paying the price for this, **not** because you are being **punished** for it, but because you are following the wrong guide and will ~~therefore~~ lose your way.

• Study Questions •

5. *We can't correct ourselves; therefore we cannot expect to be able to correct others.*
 - a. *If we can't correct them or change them, what can we do (6:1–4)?*
 - b. *Making an error real is a concept often repeated in the Course; it is defined here (6:7) as perceiving the errors in someone and reacting as if they were real. (Memorize this; there will be a quiz—just kidding! But it is an important concept.) If you stop to think about your normal behavior you will realize that we react to errors as if they were real all the time, both in ways that are negative (anger, feeling hurt) and pseudo-positive (wanting to help, attempting to correct others). According to 6:5–8, what can enable us to avoid making the errors of others real?*

Face it; we can't even get our own lives in order. What gives us the *chutzpah* to think we can tell anyone else what to do? (6:1). As Marianne Williamson puts it, we should ask ourselves, "Who appointed *you* to police the universe?" The urge to correct people is, nevertheless, virtually universal. In my experience, giving in to that urge is a sure guarantee of trouble. Whenever that urge to correct somebody strikes me, I try to remember, "Changing him is not my job!" (6:4).

What *is* our job, then? Our job is not *to see the errors* in others and then correct them; it is *to not see the errors* in others, but instead to accept them as they are (6:4), which means to see them truly (6:3), to see their perfection. It is to see the Holy Spirit in them, to see that they are God's sons and daughters just as we are (or, more accurately, that each of us is a part of God's one Son). We are here to point out their underlying *sanity* (5:1).

Accepting the person as he is doesn't mean that you accept someone as a drunk, or as a vicious person—because *that's not who he is*. "As he is" means as he is *in truth*: a holy Son of God. You are accepting the truth in him. You are recognizing that he or she is not defined by the mistakes you are seeing. He is not separate from you. He is wholly loving and wholly loveable, equal in holiness. Correcting his mistakes isn't your job; seeing beyond the mistakes to Who he really is, *is* your job. And it is your doing that, your seeing the truth in him, that opens his mind to be able to see the truth about himself, to find the truth within his own mind—and *that* is what does the correction. The truth in him, the Holy Spirit in him, is what does the correction, not you.

If I want to point out something that I have in common with my brother, what do I want to point out? Sins? Flaws? Shortcomings? Or, do I want to point out "the truth that

is in him” which is also in me? (6:5). If I point out my brother’s insanity it just points up my own insanity; I would far rather point out our shared *sanity*. At the core, we both want peace. We both want to be loved and to be loving. We both want to find our home in God. I cannot effectively remind anyone of their inner sanity and their loving nature while I, at the same time, enumerate their faults or make them wrong by pointing out their mistakes!

One of the greatest messages of the Course is contained in this paragraph. To paraphrase it from sentences 5 and 6: *My brother’s errors cannot change the truth that is in him, and can have no effect whatsoever on the truth in me*. This, I think, is one of the toughest lessons we have to learn. It means that no matter what mistakes anyone makes, no matter how grievous the apparent wrong that is done, none of it really matters in the long run. It doesn’t *change* us! My mistakes do not change me; your mistakes do not change you. We are both still exactly as God created us. Nor do your mistakes have any effect on me whatsoever! Oh, what you do may affect my body. It may disturb my emotions. But it cannot have the *least* effect on the reality of what I am in truth, and therefore, being without effect, those mistakes do not exist *in reality*. There is nothing to forgive:

He can do nothing that can hurt you, and by refusing to allow him to think he can, you teach him that the Atonement, which you have accepted for yourself, is also his. There is nothing to forgive. No one can hurt the Son of God. His guilt is wholly without cause, and being without cause, cannot exist. (T-14.III.7:4-7)

It seems so difficult to accord that grace to the people who have wronged us! But if we do not accord this forgiveness to others, what right can we have to expect it for ourselves?

When we fail to overlook the errors of others we do what the Course calls *making the error real to ourselves*. The underlying implication here is that, in and of itself, *none* of our errors are real. They have no effect, and things without any effect simply don’t exist. You might think that a rock doesn’t have any effect just sitting there, but it does; it is keeping the air from that particular area of space. And if someone hits you on the head with the rock, you better believe it will have an effect! Everything that exists has effects on other things by the mere fact of its existence. So if something has no *real* effect, it has no *real* existence. Since errors “have no effect at all *on the truth in you*” (6:6, my italics) they do not exist in truth. However, when we perceive errors in a brother or sister and react *as if they do exist*, as if they have real effects on us, we “make them real” to ourselves (6:7).

This concept of making error real comes up several times in the Course, and this sentence (6:7) is the best definition of what it means, so it will help your understanding to fix it in your mind:

To perceive errors in anyone, and to **react to them as if they were real**, is to **make them real to you**.

One way we *fail* to turn errors over to the Holy Spirit and thus make them real is by attempting to analyze people’s motives. The Course strongly warns against it:

That is why analyzing the motives of others is hazardous to you. If you decide that someone is really trying to attack you or desert you or enslave you, you will

respond as if he had actually done so, having made his error real to you.
(T-12.I.1:6-7)

In other words, *not* overlooking the error means that we analyze it and lay our interpretation on it; we think we understand it and know what it means. Usually, it means that the other person is attacking us or deserting us or enslaving us in some way; we see their mistake and its effects on us, and we believe that both the mistake and the effects are very real. Thus, we respond “as if he had actually done so,” as if our interpretation were fact. Therefore, *overlooking* the error means we *don't do that*. We don't analyze the error, we don't try to interpret it and to understand what it means—because nothing the ego makes means anything anyhow—and we recognize that the error isn't real, and does not affect what we really are, nor what our brother truly is.

I want to point out here that the Course's kind of *overlooking* errors is not what we normally think of as overlooking. The way we normally think of overlooking is actually the *ego's* plan of forgiveness: “The ego's plan is to have you see error clearly first, and then overlook it” (T-9.IV.4:4). The Holy Spirit guides us to not even see the error in the first place! We will discuss the contrast between the ego's kind of overlooking and the overlooking fostered by the Holy Spirit more thoroughly when we study Section IV in the next class.

Let's take an example. Suppose I have a close friend who is not into the Course who is angry about some situation involving another person in his life. Perhaps he is planning vengeance on someone who has wronged him. In his thinking it is fair and just to desire vengeance; the other person deserves what he will get. Observing him, I realize that my friend doesn't know much about forgiveness. He does not understand that attacking another is really attacking himself, so I want to “help” him.

I begin to reason with him, trying to convince him of the error of vengeance. Certainly what I am doing is a good thing, isn't it? When he does not respond, however, I find myself getting upset. Perhaps he (mistakenly from my point of view) sees my attempts at correcting him as an attack. He thinks that if I were a friend I would support him and “take his side” in the dispute. Perhaps he even accuses me of being unloving, and I began to get hot under the collar. It becomes very important to me, and to my happiness, to change his mind. I find myself not wanting to be around him. I start thinking about how stubborn and stupid he is. I'm just trying to help him, after all!

What I'm doing is making his error real. I am reacting to his mistake as if it were real. I am confusing his mistake with who he is. I'm no longer seeing him and responding to him as my loving brother; I'm responding to him as a spiteful, vengeful person, and by *responding* to him that way I am teaching him that *that is* what he is.

By contrast, I remember one time early in my life when I was in fundamentalist Christian circles, I got very depressed and discouraged at what an unholy person I was. I was engaging in the very common “struggle against sin.” I was trying to force myself to be good and holy, and was distressed by all the unholy desires and cravings and failings I had. I was feeling very guilty.

A friend of mine, Paul, was around one night when I was feeling completely down on myself. I unloaded it all on him, telling him all the terrible things I could think of about myself. You know what he did? He just ignored them. He “overlooked” them. He didn't react to them as if they were real things, he didn't respond as though these things made

me a bad person. He continued to treat me exactly the same as he always had. He just said, "Let's go to a movie." I could hardly believe he still wanted to be my friend! But in doing that, in accepting me as still his brother, he helped me to start letting go of my guilt.

When we get all concerned about a brother's mistakes, when we make it our mission to change them, to fix them, or to clean up their act, we are making their errors real to us. By our actions we are telling them, "I can't love you until you change." We are teaching them that they really are guilty, and they really are unlovable.

Overlooking someone's error and not making it real does not mean that you approve of the error or help the person to indulge in it. You can disapprove of a person's actions without disapproving of the person. And to me, that's what not making errors real means: It demonstrates to them that they have done nothing that causes you to put them out of your heart. It shows them, and teaches them, that their errors have not done anything to change the truth in them.

Jesus says that if we make our brothers' errors real we will "[pay] the price for this" (6:8). Ernest Holmes, the founder of Science of Mind, once wrote: "There is no sin but a mistake, and no punishment but an inevitable consequence." The same idea is being expressed here. We will suffer the inevitable consequence of making the errors of others real: Our own errors will *also* be real to us. We are "following the wrong guide" (6:8), i.e., the ego, and we will inevitably apply to ourselves the same ego standards that we use to judge our brothers. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged." (Matthew 7:2, New Living Translation)

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Your brother's errors are not of him, any more than yours are **of you**.
²Accept his errors as real, and you have attacked **yourself**. ³If you would find **your way and keep it**, see only truth beside you[,] for you walk together. ⁴The Holy Spirit in you forgives all things in you **and** in your brother. ⁵His errors are forgiven **with** yours. ⁶Atonement is no more separate than love. ⁷Atonement **cannot** be separate because it **comes** from love. **8**Any attempt you make to correct a brother means that you believe correction by **you** is possible, and this can **only** be the arrogance of the ego. ⁹Correction is of God, Who does not know of arrogance.

• Study Question •

6. *How does correcting another person violate the character of the Atonement?*

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Overlooking your brother's errors is what it means to accept the Atonement for yourself. Atonement for you and atonement for your brother are not separate; they are one and the same (7:6). Your only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for yourself, but the *way* you accept it for yourself is to accept it for your brother, because the only way to include yourself in the Atonement is to include him. If he is excluded, so are you. "Atonement... is the way to undo the belief that anything is for you alone" (T-9.IV.1.1).

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“Your brother’s errors are not of him” (7:1) means that they do not define him, they do not come from his essential nature as a Son of God. The errors are not what he is. As Marianne Williamson puts it, “You are not your résumé.” The same is true for both of you. If you make error real and see the ego (the error) as what your brother *is*, then it must also be true of you, and you are attacking yourself (7:2). Atonement must apply to all, equally, or not at all. An attempt to correct another person implies a separation—one person in error, the other superior and whole. In that sense, correcting another person negates the whole truth that the Atonement is designed to establish.

The path you follow is linked inextricably with the path walked by your brother (7:3). Identify your brother with his errors and you have identified yourself with yours (7:1–2). Forgiveness is for both of you together, or it is for neither of you (7:4–7).

When we try to correct someone it implies that we believe that *we* can actually perform the correction, and that is pure ego arrogance, since no one but God can correct anyone (7:8–9). The Course often reminds us of our ignorance as individual beings. We cannot possibly know what is best for another person! We are not inside of their head; we don’t know what is motivating them or what needs they have, and even if they tell us to the best of their ability we *still* don’t know. I know that when someone else tries to correct *me*, most of the time that is exactly how it feels—like insufferable arrogance! The thought that often arises is, “Who do you think *you* are?” In fact, we have probably all heard people react to correction from another person with words such as, “Who made you God?” Sure, that eruption of anger and resentment is coming from our ego, but what else would you expect? We are already listening to our egos; that is the problem. Pointing out the errors of our ego is just going to aggravate the ego, not make it go away.

I don’t think that the Course means for us to be naïve. When it calls upon us to overlook errors it isn’t asking us to blind ourselves. Overlooking does not mean that we literally don’t see the error or notice it is there. Not even the Holy Spirit does that, and He is our example in overlooking. We are told that He recognizes our mistakes, so overlooking can’t mean not even recognizing their presence:

The Holy Spirit cannot punish sin. Mistakes He recognizes, and would correct them all as God entrusted Him to do. But sin He knows not, nor can He recognize mistakes that cannot be corrected. For a mistake that cannot be corrected is meaningless to Him. Mistakes are *for* correction, and they call for nothing else. What calls for punishment must call for nothing. Every mistake *must* be a call for love. (T-19.III.4:1-7)

The Holy Spirit recognizes mistakes. But He sees them as simply mistakes—not uncorrectable errors, which would be sin. So overlooking errors means not seeing them *as sins*. It means seeing them as *mistakes calling for correction* (by the Holy Spirit), but not as sins needing to be punished. They are just calls for love. In that sense, we *do* see them. But we don’t see them as *meaning* anything about the person. Instead of seeing them as reasons to withhold love, we see them as reasons to give love.

Rather than attempting to correct one another ourselves, we need to do whatever will work best to put them into contact with the Holy Spirit within themselves. *He* can correct the errors in them without arrogance; we cannot (7:9). If we allow the Holy Spirit to heal our perceptions of our brothers, we are opening the way to our brothers to connect with

the Holy Spirit for themselves. We must look past their errors to see the Holy Spirit within them, and point them in His direction.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹The Holy Spirit forgives everything **because God created everything**. ²Do not undertake **His** function, or you will forget **yours**. ³Accept **only** the function of healing in time, because that is what time is **for**. **4**God gave you the function to create in eternity. ⁵You do not need to learn that, but you **do** need to learn to **want** it. ⁶For **that** all learning was made. ⁷This is the Holy Spirit's [**good**] use of an ability [**learning**] that you do not need, but that you [**have**] made. ⁸Give it to Him! ⁹You do **not** understand [**know**] how to use it. ¹⁰He will teach you how to see **yourself** without condemnation, by learning how to look on **everything** without it. ¹¹Condemnation will then not be real to you, and all **your** errors **will** be forgiven.

• Study Question •

7. *Who has the function of correcting error? Who has the function of healing?*

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It is the Holy Spirit Who can correct errors without arrogance. He sees the truth in everything—all of it is God's creation, and therefore He can forgive all of our mistakes (8:1). *His* function is forgiveness or correction; *our* function (in time) is healing (8:3). We might think that healing and correction are the same thing; that is, that it is our job to heal someone *by* correcting their mistakes. I think, however, that what the Course means by healing as our function is defined quite differently later in this paragraph: Healing means learning "...to see yourself without condemnation, by learning to look on everything without it" (8:10).

In other words, to say that healing is our function is no different than saying that it is our function to let our perception of others be healed. To heal is to release from condemnation. Often people read this section and get the message that it is *not* our job to correct one another, but they fail to see all that the section says about what *is* our job:

- Our task is to tell our brother he is right (1:6)
- You "heal him only by perceiving the sanity in him" (5:1)
- You must give your brother's errors over to the Holy Spirit (5:3)
- You "see him truly" and "accept him as he is" (6:3, 6:4)
- "Accept only the function of healing in time" (8:3).

That is what comprises healing, in the sense the Course talks about it. We tend to believe that we can help people by correcting their errors, but that notion stems from the arrogance of the ego that sees my brother's errors as real, sees him as wrong, and sees myself as somehow wiser and superior to him. Only as I meet my brother on equal grounds, releasing him from condemnation, seeing us both as equal inheritors of God's nature and equal beneficiaries of the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit, can I truly bring him healing, and in so doing, heal myself (8:11).

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Answer Key

1. Questions related to paragraphs 1 and 2:
 - a. Being alert to spot the errors of others.
 - b. To the ego, it makes perfect sense to point out their errors to other people, and to attempt to correct them.
 - c. If someone is speaking foolishly in their ego, we should not “correct” them but rather tell them they are right. We do not do so verbally; rather, we need to show them that they are still a Son of God. We cannot do that by telling them they are wrong. The correction must come at a level beyond the external. A true correction of error can occur, not by treating them as if they were identical with the ego they are expressing, but rather by treating them as a Son of God.
2. When we point out the error in a brother's ego, we must be perceiving through our own ego's eyes, because only the ego in us sees the ego in others.
3. When we react to the ego of others, we may get angry, judge, criticize, shun or stay away from them, offer to correct their errors, try to “save” them, sympathize, express horror, agree, pity, or tolerate. Not reacting at all must mean that our response is not based on the error itself but on something else—on the reality of our brother or sister as God's creation, the Son of God, the Christ. We respond, *not to the error*, but to the call for love we perceive coming from the innocent being behind the error. One who does not react to errors in others, then, would consistently love others and behave in a loving manner. She would not do any of the things I've listed above. She would be operating entirely from a different reference point.
4. Two positive instructions: 1) perceive the sanity in him; 2) give his errors over to the Holy Spirit.

#1 means that, behind all the errors, we can and do perceive Who he really is. We do not believe that the person is defined by his errors or defined by his ego; we believe he can and will respond to love, and wants to.

#2 means that we do not attempt to handle the errors ourselves. We turn them over to the Holy Spirit because He knows what to do with them. (If we want to do this with our own errors, we have to be willing to do it with errors of our brother. If he is right, so are we, and vice versa; if he is wrong, so am I. “For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.” (Matthew 7:2 NLT))
5. Paragraph 6 had two questions.
 - a. Instead of correcting a brother or trying to change him, we can see him truly and accept him as he is.

- b. We can avoid making errors real by recognizing that errors do not come from the truth, and we can see the truth in our brother. We can also recognize that his errors cannot change the truth, either in him or in ourselves. If we allow the truth to guide us, and base our responses on this truth instead of on the errors, we can avoid making the error real. In a nutshell: let our responses arise out of truth and not out of error.
- 6. Attempting to correct another puts me in a superior position to them, which separates me from them. This violates the character of Atonement because Atonement is not separate; it comes from love. Therefore one person correcting another cannot be part of the Atonement process, and must be ego arrogance.
- 7. The Holy Spirit has the function of correction. Our function is healing. We learn to look without condemnation on everything, which leads to seeing ourselves without condemnation.

Food For Thought

The following three paragraphs were written by a Course teacher who is a friend of mine. He suggests that the “behavioral injunction against correcting our brothers” is *not* absolute, and that it takes “careful discernment” to know when to correct and when not to. He feels that “there are many ordinary situations where correction is warranted and desired.” Yet he also points out “we could err both by claiming our egoic finger-pointing is ‘guided’ and by being so afraid to correct that we don’t do it when we actually *are* guided.” I am troubled by his idea of throwing it back on seeking internal guidance in each situation.

Read it over. What do you think of his position? Can the section be understood this way?

How do we really live this section?

This section’s teaching sounds very simple and direct, but I think actually living it requires careful discernment. It can easily be abused. Some Course students take the section’s counsel as an absolute behavioral injunction against correcting our brothers. Ironically, this view often leads people to silence anyone who disagrees with them with the statement: “The Course says you shouldn’t correct your brother.” This is ironic because this statement in itself is a correction of a brother, a violation of the injunction.

The section certainly confronts our addiction to fault-finding, but does it really mean that it is *never* appropriate to correct a brother? I don’t think so. Jesus corrected Helen and Bill, and he corrects us on virtually every page of the Course. There are many ordinary situations where correction is warranted and desired, such as when a person is about to step into the path of an oncoming truck. Correction is often appropriate and even vital when one is in a legitimate mentoring role such as parent, therapist, or teacher. Indeed, the Course itself says (in the context of spiritual teaching and psychotherapy) that “It may help someone to point out where he is heading” (T-9.V.7:2), and it speaks approvingly of correcting a child’s misperception of the objects in his room as terrifying monsters (see T-11.VIII.13). And discussing disagreements in a non-attacking spirit rooted in the mutual quest for truth can be totally appropriate. Jesus spoke approvingly of an intellectual debate Helen had with her colleague Jack, saying that “**The virtue lay in the complete respect each of you offered to the other’s intellect.**” I think discussing disagreements in this way is actually far healthier than silencing them with misused teachings from the Course.

How, then, do we really live this section? I think we do two things. First, with the Holy Spirit’s help, we practice to truly attain the mindset the section advocates. We must truly see past our brothers’ errors to their inherent rightness, their sanity, the Son of God in them. Second, we ask the Holy Spirit for specific guidance about how to behaviorally address our brothers’ errors. I’m sure that if we’re really listening to Him we’ll point out errors far less frequently than we do now, yet He will also let us know when it is appropriate. I think there is a real art of discernment to this: we could err both by claiming our egoic finger-pointing is “guided” and by being so afraid to correct that we don’t do it when we actually *are* guided. But if we try our best to see our brothers truly and let the Holy Spirit guide our behavior, we can learn a whole new way to respond to our brothers’ errors.