

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 13 Introduction & Section I, Paragraphs 1 to 4

Guiltlessness and Invulnerability

Chapter 13 as a Whole

This chapter places major emphasis on the chief characteristic of the transformed perception to which the Course is leading us: the total absence of guilt. It speaks more strongly against guilt than any part of the Text so far, stressing the absolute necessity of freeing ourselves from it. The word “guilt” in various forms (guiltless, guiltlessness) occurs seventy-one times in the Introduction and first two sections. Sections III through VIII mention it only a few times, but then it returns in the closing three sections for another eighty times. The overall theme of the chapter, therefore, is that guilt is the fundamental problem, and release from guilt is the fundamental answer.

The Introduction to the chapter serves as a more detailed summary or overview of the themes developed by the chapter. If I were to try to summarize the message of the chapter in a single sentence, I would say it is this: We see others as guilty because we see ourselves as guilty; therefore, the way to discover our innocence is by seeing others as innocent.

Introduction

The Introduction is almost a short section in itself. The last chapter contained a great deal of instruction on how we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit to have our perception of things changed, at first with individual persons or things, then more generally with more people and situations, and finally extending to the entire world, at which point we would be seeing the real world. This chapter, “The Guiltless World,” is about that real world. It continues to discuss the many layers of blocks we have to perceiving that world. It takes us on another pass through the entire spiritual journey, starting with abject fear and ending with the real world and the infallible certainty of our arrival in Heaven.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹If you did not feel guilty you could not attack, for condemnation is the root of attack. ²It is the judgment of one mind by another as **unworthy** of love and **deserving** of punishment. ³But herein lies the split. ⁴For the mind that judges perceives itself as **separate** from the mind being judged, believing that by punishing **another**, **it** will escape punishment. ⁵All this is but the delusional

attempt of the mind to deny itself, and **escape the penalty of denial**. ⁶It is **not** an attempt to **relinquish** denial, but to **hold on to it**. ⁷For it is guilt that has obscured the Father to you, and it is guilt that has driven you insane.

• **Study Questions** •

1. *Comparing this paragraph to T-12.V.1 and T- 12.I.4, summarize the reason(s) why our ego has a need to attack.*
2. *When our mind denies itself (that is, denies its Identity with God and seeks separation) it inevitably projects guilt onto other minds. Why?*

Our guilt over separation is the cause of our judgment and attack; we see others as guilty because we see ourselves as guilty (1:1). Many people who study the Course have difficulty relating to this idea. They are not aware of feeling any guilt over having separates from God. They are not even aware that they *have* chosen to be separate, and may have even convinced themselves that they do not want to be separate. The Course is perfectly aware of our innate ignorance of the deeper workings of our minds. It explains our unawareness as deliberate on our part; in fact, it sees our unawareness as evidence of our deep guilt. What we believe we have done is so terrifying to our minds that we have buried it beneath multiple layers of denial. Workbook Lesson 136 explains this quite clearly (see W-pI.136.2–6); it says our dark choices are “doubly shielded by oblivion” (W-pI.136.5:2), and says that our lack of awareness just proves that we still are choosing to forget what we have done. We don’t know about it because we don’t *want* to know about it.

Consider what it means to condemn or to attack another person (1:2). You could not attack anyone if you realized that they were really another part of your own mind—you would not purposely judge *yourself* and condemn *yourself*. In fact, our blame of others is really a result of our efforts to avoid blaming ourselves. By imagining that the minds of others are separate from our own mind, we are able to convince ourselves that we can deflect God’s wrath from us and redirect it towards other people (1:3–4). The mind is trying to maintain its rejection of its nature as God’s creation (in favor of self-creation) while avoiding the guilt and punishment that it deems fitting for such a crime (1:5–6). Of course, since the mind cannot reject its own nature, no crime has been committed and no punishment is forthcoming. The attempt at a separate identity failed; nothing came of it.

The mind, however, wants to believe it really happened; therefore, it believes in its own guilt, which gives rise to its need to project guilt onto others. Because our mind believed the separation was real, the guilt was unbearable. Therefore, the mind attempted to *deny* the guilt by making up a world and projecting the guilt onto it; such projection is the cause of all judgment and attack. This process—belief in separation, guilt, denial, projection, and attack—is the mind’s insanity, and this is why our mind has fearfully blocked God out of its awareness (1:7).

All of this clearly indicates just how important guilt is, and how important it is to rid ourselves of guilt. Pull up the roots and the plant dies. Extinguishing guilt will end our insanity. It will remove the impetus behind our groundless attacks on our brothers and will open our eyes to the eternal Presence of God. The reason this chapter places so much emphasis on guilt is that guilt plays such a central role in the ego’s thought system.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹The acceptance of guilt into the mind of God's Son was the beginning of the separation, as the acceptance of the Atonement is its end. ²The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt. ³Look carefully at this world, and you will realize that this is so. ⁴For this world is the symbol of punishment, and all the laws that seem to govern it are the laws of death. ⁵Children are born into it through pain and in pain. ⁶Their growth is attended by suffering, and they learn of sorrow and separation and death. ⁷Their minds seem to be trapped in their brain, and its powers to decline if their bodies are hurt. ⁸They seem to love, yet they desert and are deserted. ⁹They appear to lose what they love, perhaps the most insane belief of all. ¹⁰And their bodies wither and gasp and are laid in the ground, and are no more. ¹¹Not one of them but has thought that God is cruel.

• Study Question •

3. *Name at least one way in which you have, at times, thought that God is cruel (2:11).*

The undoing process reverses all of this: We give up judgment and attack; we take the guilt back within our mind and recognize it as our own; and then God shows us we made it all up in the first place, and we are still united with Him. We undo the projection, then we undo the denial, then we undo the guilt, and finally we undo the original thought of separation. Guilt is the lynchpin on which it all turns. When we are free from guilt, we have been enlightened. Learning that the Son has no need of salvation is what saves us (2:1).

We view the world through a filter of projected guilt; indeed, the entire system of the world grows out of guilt (2:2). Rather remarkably, Jesus says that if we look carefully at the world, it will be obvious that it is “a delusional system of those made mad by guilt.”

The way the Course pictures the world here (2:3– 11) is vivid and convincing. If we are honest, it seems quite familiar. It calls the world “the symbol of punishment” (2:4) because so many things in this world, from birth to death and all the suffering in between, seem to be the kind of things that would happen to us if we were guilty and condemned to continual punishment in hell. Many people have speculated that this world is actually hell, and they are far from wrong.

What intrigues me and shows me that our “normal” way of thinking is thoroughly off base is that most of what the Course says about the world here are things we accept as fact! Childbirth is painful; growing up is a sometimes-painful process, and learning the sorrow of loss and even the death of pets, family and friends is a universal part of it. Few of us question that our brain houses our mind, and we unthinkingly accept the horrid conclusion that when the brain deteriorates, the mind also disintegrates; in fact (so we believe), the mind can lose itself as the body ages and weakens. We desert other people sometimes, and sometimes other people desert us; that's just part of life, it seems. And, of course, *everyone* dies. Do *any* of us seriously question any part of this dreadful scenario? As someone said on a bumper sticker: “Life sucks, and then you die.”

This is the way the world *seems* to be to us. What the Course is saying is that this perception of the world is the result of guilt. If we did not harbor guilt in our minds, we would not see the world this way. The fact that we do see the world this way proves how much guilt must still be buried in our minds. If we are willing to be freed of our guilt, we will discover how completely our perception can be changed.

The Course ends this ugly portrait of the-world-as-we-see-it by asserting that every single one of us has, at one time or another, thought that God must be cruel (2:11). I know I have had that thought, although I usually tone it down by admitting that, “I have wondered how God could allow such things.”

We all have our examples of things we find unacceptable: the premature death of a loved one; a child suffering from a painful and fatal disease such as leukemia or brain cancer; child abuse; unpunished racism and genocide such as the Nazi holocaust; the daily starvation of thousands of children; the 911 tragedy in the USA. Each of us could add to the list, I'm sure. Each of these things raises the question in our minds, “How could God allow this to happen?” Nearly all the answers seem to beg the question, and it continues to fester in our minds. Consciously or subconsciously, we've all probably harbored the thought: “If there is a God, if He is all-knowing and all-powerful, He must be a sadist, or at best callous and uncaring.”

When we see the world in this way, it *does* seem to be a place that punishes us from the moment we are born until we are finally executed, a punishment that presumes guilt. We presume God designed the world to punish us, when in fact *we* designed it that way.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹If this were the real world, God *would* be cruel. ²For no Father could subject His children to this as the price of salvation and *be* loving. ³*Love does not kill to save.* ⁴If it did, attack **would** be salvation, and this is the ego's interpretation, **not** God's. ⁵Only the world of guilt could demand this, for only the guilty could **conceive** of it. ⁶Adam's 'sin' could have touched no one, had he [Ur: you] not believed it was the **Father** Who drove him out of paradise. ⁷For [it is] in **that** belief the knowledge of the Father was lost, since only those who do not understand Him **could** believe it.

• Study Question •

4. Complete this sentence: “If this world as we see it is real, God _____.”

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This world *does* picture madness, pain, and sorrow. To give us life for just the brief span of years we seem to have, to allow us to work most of our short life towards wisdom and then, once it is gained, to have no more time in which to enjoy life, to allow us to mature in love and then lose our loved ones to death—all of this is cruel, if it is real. If this is the way God intended things to be then He *is* a sadist (3:1).

Some religions teach that we are passing through “this vale of tears” as a kind of purification rite. They say that such suffering is the price we must pay for the bliss of heaven that is to follow. In other words, God planned it this way. We may not understand now, but one day we will see that it was worth it all. But any God who would create a

universe based on a plan like that would not be a God any of us would really want to follow! To all the questions people down through the ages have asked, questions that begin with the words “How could a loving God...” the Course replies: “No loving God *could*; you are right!” (3:2–3).

In the thought system of the Course that line of thinking extends to the idea of salvation that derives from the death of Jesus on the cross. “Love does not kill to save” (2:3). As was said earlier (T_12.III.3:1), it is the ego that teaches that salvation comes from attack, not God (3:4). The entire concept of substitutionary sacrifice is rejected outright by the Course, a fact that makes it quite heterodox as far as orthodox Christianity is concerned. The theory of atoning sacrifice, which is at the core of Pauline theology in the New Testament, would not and could not have been conceived unless the belief in guilt were firmly established (3:5).

I have no doubt that Jesus intended to target the teaching of the Apostle Paul here, because he refers to “Adam’s ‘sin’” (3:6), a concept that was introduced by Paul. Jesus puts the word *sin* in quotes. We need to be reminded that quotes around a word or phrase, when not indicating a direct quotation or identifying a word as the object of discussion, generally have the meaning of “so-called” or “supposed.” In this case, we could read it as “Adam’s so-called sin” or “Adam’s supposed sin.” In the bible, Paul teaches that when Adam and Eve (the original human couple from whom all humanity is said to have descended) disobeyed God, their nature became corrupted by sin, and that corrupt nature was then passed on to all their descendants. This is the theory of “original sin.” The Apostle Paul taught that “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men” (Romans 5:12, NIV); he asserts that “as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (I Cor. 15:22, NIV).

Because in the biblical teaching sin is so very real, punishment by death is inevitable: “All have sinned” (Romans 3:23) and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Thus, so the reasoning goes, every human born into this world since Adam has been born condemned to death due to the sinful nature he or she inherited. In order for God to be just, the sinner must die. Or at least *someone* must die! The teaching of the Bible asserts that, in some way, Jesus was able to take our place in death: “Christ died for *our* sins” (I Cor. 15:3, my emphasis).

The point the Course is making here is that such a fantastic “solution” would be entirely unnecessary and inconceivable if it were not demanded by our belief that our sin was real, and that God has cast us out of the garden and now is intent on carrying out His sentence of death. No one who understands the true nature of God could believe that He would do such things (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹This world *is* a picture of the crucifixion of God’s Son. ²And until you realize that God’s Son **cannot** be crucified, this is the world you will see. ³Yet you will **not** realize until you accept the eternal fact that **God’s Son is not guilty**. ⁴He **deserves** only love because he has **given** only love. ⁵He cannot be condemned because he has never condemned. ⁶The Atonement is the final lesson he need learn, for it teaches him that, never having sinned, **he has no need of salvation**.

• **Study Question** •

5. *What two facts must we accept and realize in order to begin to see the world differently?*

The world as it is normally perceived seems to portray a guilty humanity being punished for its sins. It is what one might expect to see if universal guilt were the truth. However, it only appears that way because we expect it to appear that way. Our belief in the reality of sin is what causes us to see the world as a prison filled with people doing time for their crimes (4:1–2). Jesus is using the symbol of crucifixion to represent all forms of punishment for sin, and in particular, death as punishment for sin.

He points out that we will stop seeing the world as a death camp as soon as we realize God's Son—that is, any creation of God's—cannot die. However, that change isn't possible until we first come to realize that "God's Son is not guilty" (4:3). He keeps coming back to the fact that our belief in guilt is at the root of all our misperceptions. If we believe God's Son is guilty, we will believe that he deserves to die—and therefore must be subject to death. Forgiveness, which is the recognition that guilt is unreal and does not exist, removes all condemnation from our brothers. When condemnation is lifted, we realize that there is no reason for death to be visited on him. He does not deserve to die, and God would not subject him to death if he does not deserve it.

In sentences 4 and 5, we see that God's Son is "wholly lovable and wholly loving" (T-1.III.2:3). The transformation the Course attempts to work in us is such that, when our minds have been healed, we will see people as having never condemned anyone, and as having given nothing but love. No doubt it is difficult to conceive of that description as applying to everyone you know, perhaps even to *anyone* you know. Do you know anyone you would describe in that way: that they have never given anything but love, and have never condemned anyone?

Sentence 6 offers an intriguing definition of what the Atonement teaches us: We don't need to be saved! We aren't damned and never were, never will be. I always liked the line from the little book, *A Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment*, which says the only thing we need to be enlightened *from* is the belief that we need to be enlightened! The Course is saying much the same thing here: The only thing we need atonement for is the belief that we need "atonement." We don't need to be reconciled with God; there was no conflict between us and God. We don't need to be *made* one; we *are* One.

Section I

Guiltlessness and Invulnerability

This section is teaching that we are afraid to believe anyone is guiltless because we are secretly convinced that *we* are the guilty ones; to let go of guilt in others is to condemn ourselves. At the root of all our insanity is a secret belief that we are eternally guilty. We are unaware of this guilt because the ego has constructed an elaborate defense system to deny this guilt and hide its existence from us. We believe we attack others and

they attack us; we do not see we are attacking ourselves. We believe we have killed the Son of God. What we do not see is that we are the Son of God. The ego is very afraid that we will see through its defenses.

The main message of this section, in a single sentence, is: Our safety lies completely in letting go of all guilt, both inner and projected.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Earlier, I [Long ago we] said that the Holy Spirit shares the goal of all good teachers, whose ultimate aim is to make themselves unnecessary by teaching their pupils all they know. ²The Holy Spirit wants **only** [wills *only*] this, for sharing the Father's Love for His Son, He seeks [wills] to remove all guilt from his mind that he may remember his Father in peace. ³[For] Peace and guilt are antithetical, and the Father can **be** remembered **only** in peace. ⁴Love and guilt cannot coexist, and to accept one is to **deny** the other. ⁵Guilt hides Christ from your sight, for it is the denial of the blamelessness of God's Son.

• Study Question •

6. *What is the Holy Spirit seeking to accomplish through His teaching?*

We need to develop and strengthen our trust in the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. We need not fear Him, because His only aim is that we lose our guilt and reunite with God. Sentence 1 refers to previous mentions (T-4.I.5:1; T-6.V.1:1) of the primary characteristic of a good teacher: he or she always tries to impart all of his or her knowledge to the pupil, with a goal of making the pupil the equal of the teacher. In essence, the job of all teachers is to “make themselves unnecessary” (1:1).

There is a sort of paradoxical tension between two strands of teaching about the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, the Course makes it plain that we cannot do without Him and that, left to our own devices, we would be trapped in our oblivion; on the other hand, we have this theme that tells us that, in the end, the Holy Spirit will become completely unnecessary. We should avoid the mistake of prematurely declaring our independence of Him, though; such claims are far more like symptoms of adolescent denial than they are symptoms of maturity. I use the term “adolescent” there because what comes to mind is the familiar pattern in teen-aged children, who often falsely assume they are ready for adult privileges and responsibilities when, in fact, they are not quite finished with growing up. Recently I witnessed a sixteen-year-old girl who, after five or six hours of driving instruction by her father, declared, “I’m a good driver; there’s no reason I can’t help drive on this 150-mile trip with my girlfriend.” Shortly afterward, as she pulled out of a parking lot, she missed the driveway and went over the curb.

As Course students, I think we are far too ready to try winging it on our own. We need more time with and tutelage from the Holy Spirit.

I think the reason Jesus emphasizes Holy Spirit’s goal of working Himself out of a job is to make it clear that there is no reason for us to mistrust Him. He has only our well-being in mind. The only thing He is trying to do is to relieve us of our guilt, thus eliminating the cause of the fear that keeps us from remembering our union with God. Is

that something we need to resist? Of course not! Guilt has to be gone before we can be at peace with God (1:3).

That phrase, “peace with God,” triggered a memory. It was the title of a book by the Christian evangelist, Billy Graham, that was a best seller in the 1950’s, at the time when I heard him preach and had my “born again” experience. Think about what that title implies: If the goal is peace with God, then the current state must be what—war? What does that tell us about how our minds typically see our relationship with God? That’s what guilt does to the mind. If we feel guilty we are going to feel at war with God, or at least in disfavor with Him. Peace of mind simply is not possible under those conditions. In fact, you could say that guilt is what “lack of peace” means (1:3–4). If you have guilt, you don’t have peace; if you want peace, guilt has to go.

How can we possibly remember our relationship with God while we *feel* guilty? (1:3). How can we possibly remember our relationship with each other (one in Christ) while we *see* guilt in anyone? (1:5). Guilt is a separating feeling. If I feel I have wronged you in some way, I will often physically try to distance myself from you and keep away from you. We all know that, when someone suddenly begins trying to avoid us, something is wrong. Either we did something to offend them, or they think they have done something to offend us. That’s how we are with God; that’s how we are with each other. That’s why guilt must go if we are to realize our oneness.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹In the strange world that you have made the Son of God *has* sinned. ²How could you **see** him, then? ³By making **him** invisible, the world of retribution rose in the black cloud of guilt that you accepted, and you hold it dear. ⁴For the blamelessness of Christ is the proof that the ego never was, and can never be. ⁵Without guilt the ego **has** no life, and God’s Son *is* without guilt.

• Study Question •

7. *Why does the ego crave guilt and “hold it dear?”*

As egos, we hold on tenaciously to belief in the world as we see it, a world filled with guilt and punishment. The reason we do is that “without guilt the ego *has* no life” (2:5). What a startling phrase! The ego must have guilt to survive, because lack of guilt means the separation never happened, and therefore there is no ego! (2:4).

As long as we hold on to our belief in the reality of sin and the reality of guilt, we cannot see the Christ. Why? Because God created His Son perfectly innocent. If we are seeing guilt, we are not seeing God’s Son. It’s that simple (2:1–2). The real Son of God has become “invisible” (2:3). In his place, a dark, sooty world has formed out of glutinous gobs of guilt. It’s almost as though the guilt has coagulated and clotted into the forms that make up the world. Ken Wapnick once said that the world is made of crystallized guilt. What is bizarre is that we “hold it dear,” that is, we cherish it, we value it (2:3). We do so because guilt is the life force of the ego, and if we want the ego (which we do, or we would not have it), we will want the guilt that is necessary to its existence. It’s like the way we value horse manure because it can fertilize our flowers, but in the

case of the ego the “flowers” smell worse than the fertilizer.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹As you look upon yourself and judge what you do honestly, [as you have been asked to do,] you may be tempted to wonder how you can be guiltless. ²Yet ~~consider this:~~ You are **not** guiltless in time, but **in eternity**. ³You **have** “sinned” **in the past**, but there **is** no past. ⁴Always has no direction. ⁵Time seems to go in one direction, but when you reach its end it will roll up like a long carpet spread along the past behind you, and will disappear. ⁶As long as you believe the Son of God is guilty you will walk along this carpet, believing that it leads to death. ⁷And the journey will seem long and cruel and senseless, for so it is.

• Study Question •

8. *Explain how guilt is connected to our belief in time, according to this paragraph.*

This paragraph introduces teaching about the connection between guilt and time, and the way that time connects with eternity, a theme that will be expanded upon considerably in Sections IV, V, and VI. The Course's view of time is quite unusual and, for some, hard to grasp, so I advise reading carefully and thinking through what is said.

It's hard to believe that we are not guilty when we look with honesty on what we have done (3:1). Looking from within the perspective of time, guilt always appears to be real. “You are not guiltless in time, but in eternity” (3:2). What's done is done, we can't change the past, and so we think that guiltlessness is now impossible. In order to believe in our own guiltlessness we must step outside of time and see things from that vastly different perspective. A belief in the past is identical to a belief in guilt; really they are the same belief. Give up one and the other goes. We probably believe that our guilt has grown out of our experience of time. Can it be possible that our experience of time has grown out of our guilt? “As long as you believe the Son of God is guilty you will walk along this carpet” [of time] (3:6). The mind that accepts guilt cannot avoid seeing the world as a charnel house, “and the journey” through this world “will seem long and cruel and senseless, for so it is” (3:7). With guilt in place, no other way of seeing is possible.

The statements here are stark, extreme, and counter-intuitive: “There is no past” (3:3). *Oh, really? How odd! I could have sworn I was here yesterday.* “Time seems to go in one direction” (3:5). *So, you can make it go backwards? Come on!*

There is absolutely no question that the Course flies in the face of our common experience here. Everybody knows there is a past because we all have one, although sometimes my past seems to differ in subtle ways from that of other people. But there is enough common agreement that we all know pretty much what the past was. Historians make a living creating what we believe to be accurate documents describing the past.

If we think about it, however, the reality of the past becomes a bit less solid. We can't touch it. We can't go there. Nothing in the past can reach out and touch us, either; only things in the present can touch us. So, where is this thing that cannot be touched, cannot be seen, and cannot be visited, a thing which can only affect us through its emissaries in

the present?

If, as the Course asserts elsewhere, our experience in this world is no more real than our nighttime dreams, then our guilt is truly much ado about nothing. The dire events we anguish over never happened; they were nothing more than malfunctioning mental processes, hiccups in consciousness (3:3).

Eternity sees things in an entirely different way, not as a long carpet with a beginning and end, but as an eternal now with “no direction”¹ (3:4). When we leave time and enter eternity, it will be as though the carpet of time rolls up and disappears (3:5). The thing that keeps us perceiving time is our need for guilt; without time there is no guilt. Therefore, because it needs guilt, the ego produces time. We could say that time came into being to provide the backdrop for guilt.

This is one example of how the Course presents a picture of two levels of seeing. Here the two levels are time versus eternity. “It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity, which means there is no time” (T-27.VIII.6:5). Eternity differs entirely from time. Eternity is not time stretched out forever like a rubber band; eternity is timelessness.

If you look at yourself from within the perspective of time, you will always see guilt, because sometime in the past you “sinned.” You failed; you missed the mark. On the level of time, the Course advises us to learn to live in the present, because the present is the nearest we can come to eternity in this world. Live in the realization that neither the past nor the future is here now; therefore neither can be real, neither can have real effects on us. What you are thinking and doing right now is all that matters.

Don't struggle with trying to see the unreality of time. To me, that's a lot like trying to sit quietly for five minutes trying *not* to think of pink elephants. The more you try not to, the more you are thinking about pink elephants. The more you try to see time as unreal, the more real it becomes. Work with what you can work with: guilt. Only when we reach the end of the “carpet,” the end of time, will we realize that time never existed. That experience is beyond us for now. The way to get there is to let go of guilt, because guilt is what produces the experience of time.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The journey the Son of God has set **himself** is useless [**foolish**] indeed, but the journey on which his Father sets him is one of release and joy. ²The Father is not cruel, and His Son **cannot** hurt himself. ³The retaliation that he fears **and that he sees** will never touch him, for although he **believes** in it the Holy Spirit **knows** it is not true. ⁴The Holy Spirit stands at the end of time, where **you** must be because He is **with** you. ⁵He has already [**has always**] undone everything unworthy of the Son of God, for such was His mission, given Him **by** God. ⁶And what God gives **has** always been.

¹ This is an instance of the Course making a pun, which Bill Thetford loved: “Always” sounds just like “all ways” and, like “all ways” it has no direction.

• Study Question •

9. *Why does the Holy Spirit know that retaliation for sin does not exist?*

The “journey” we seem to be on is really a “useless” or “foolish” journey, says the Course (4:1). The whole trip of separation, sin, guilt, and punishment, is like a drug-induced hallucination. That includes our entire experience in this world, it seems. We set ourselves on this journey, not God. “The Father is not cruel, and His Son *cannot* hurt himself” (4:2). We think God is angry with us, that God will “get us” for what we’ve done. Most religious organizations in the world hold some form of the idea that God is keeping accounts on us, and some day we’re going to have to pay for it all. We human beings believe that, but “the Holy Spirit knows it is not true” (4:3). We think we see retaliation, but it isn’t there.

Notice how Jesus dismisses both the idea of divine retribution and the less common but no less threatening idea that, while there may be no God meting out punishment, we are quite capable of causing ourselves irreparable harm by our blind stupidity. In the Introduction to the chapter, Jesus pointed out that everyone at one time or another has looked on something in the world and thought that if God created this, He must be cruel (T-13.Int.2:11). We, not God, made the world, which lets God off the hook but lays the responsibility right at our feet. We most likely would anticipate that, if we have screwed things up, either God will punish us, or else at best, our sufferings are something we have brought upon ourselves, the just consequences of our sins. Jesus says that God is not in the retribution business, and we are incapable of causing ourselves any real harm (4:2). That’s just not how God wired us.

The Holy Spirit sees this quite clearly. He “stands at the end of time” (4:4); in other words, He exists outside of time and sees how it ends. For Him, the story is already over. He knows how it ends, and it does not end in judgment and death. From His perspective, the journey has already ended. Everything that needs fixing has already been fixed. That’s how he *knows* that God is not going to punish us.

To illustrate: Suppose a little boy was supposed to walk the dog before he left for school, but he forgot. While at school, he spends the entire day worrying about being punished for forgetting. He worries about the dog making a mess in the house, imagines his parents finding it when they come home and what they will say to him. Unknown to him, however, his brother noticed the dog hadn’t been out, so he walked the dog for him. The problem has already been handled. There is really no problem, and the boy’s fear is all for nothing. That’s the situation we are in: imagining terribly consequences where none exist.

The illustration isn’t perfect because, in time, we *are* guilty. A better illustration might be this: The boy was *dreaming* about forgetting to walk the dog. He’s still in bed, feeling guilt for something that never really happened except in his imagination.

The Holy Spirit, like a celestial videotape editor, has taken the “tape” of your life, or of your many lives, and has edited out all your mistakes, removing everything except the expressions of love. That’s the job God gave to Him (4:5). Having been given by God, that job is eternally complete (4:6). This is the message of the Atonement: “All your past except its beauty is gone, and nothing is left but a blessing” (T-5.IV.8:2; see also T-5.IV.8:3-4).

Answer Key

1. Our ego has a need to attack because it sees us as weak and guilty. Our guilt must be projected onto another mind, in the belief that punishing another allows us to escape punishment.
2. We see ourselves as separate from the other mind we judge, and think that punishing the other frees us. We are actually trying to hold on to our denial while escaping its consequences.
3. I have sometimes thought that God was cruel to allow the innocent to suffer, or to allow “evil” men to crush “good” ones. (Your answer may be something else.)
4. “...would be cruel.”
5. 1) “God’s Son is not guilty” (4:3), followed by, 2) the fact that God’s son, being innocent, is invulnerable and not subject to any punishment (4:2).
6. The Holy Spirit seeks to remove all guilt from our minds (1:2).
7. The ego craves guilt because without it the ego has no life (2:4–5). Since guilt’s absence would mean the ego’s end, it must maintain guilt in our minds.
8. We are guiltless in eternity but not in time (3:2). We believe that we are guilty because of what we did in the past, and we anticipate death (as punishment) in the future. Guilt, then, is what keeps time in place and gives it the appearance of reality.
9. The Holy Spirit views things from outside of time. Our mistakes have been entirely corrected from where He stands, so no retribution is called for. This is how He knows that there is no retaliation for sin.

10. 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
- ~~striketrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition