

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 13, Section II

Section overview: This section, “The Guiltless Son of God,” continues the previous section’s discussion of the main theme of this chapter: *guilt and guiltlessness*. We have seen that guilt is essential to the ego’s survival. Our current section reveals the ultimate source of all our guilt, discusses the ego’s main device for compounding our guilt while *appearing* to free us from it, and offers us the only solution that will *truly* free us from it.

The ultimate source of all our guilt—the foundation of the ego’s thought system—is the belief that we have committed an unspeakable crime: We have crucified God’s Son (5:1). This is a metaphorical way of saying that we believe we have truly attacked and destroyed our holy, innocent true Self and irrevocably turned ourselves into murderous, egotistic monsters. In so doing, we think we have forever removed ourselves from our Father’s Love, and condemned ourselves to the terror of everlasting punishment.

The ego’s main device for compounding our guilt is *projection*. Identifying with the ego, we project our guilt onto the Son of God in our brothers—even onto Jesus—in a desperate attempt to free ourselves from guilt and its painful consequences. But since this ego-identification and projection is nothing less than a re-enactment of the original “crime” of attacking and destroying the Son of God, the actual result of projection is that our guilt and fear of punishment is greater than ever. Only the ego really benefits from projection, because it lives and grows by feeding on the increased guilt that our projection produces.

The only solution that will truly free us from guilt is to withdraw our projection and calmly look at our “guilty secret”—our belief that we attacked and destroyed our true Self—from the perspective of truth (5:1, 9:2). If we do so, we will realize that no crime was truly committed because our attempt to kill the Son of God in us did not succeed, and could never succeed. He “did not die” (9:3), and we are still God’s Son. In spite of what we think we’ve done, we are not murderous monsters. We are still that holy, innocent Self that God created, and in this recognition of our guiltlessness, the ego is undone and the memory of our loving Father is restored to us.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹The ultimate purpose of projection [, as the ego uses it,] is **always** to get rid of guilt. ²Yet, characteristically, the ego attempts to get rid of guilt **from its viewpoint only**, for much as the ego wants to **retain** guilt *you* find it intolerable, since guilt stands in the way of your remembering God, Whose pull is so strong that **you** cannot resist it. ³On this issue, then, the deepest split of all occurs, for if you are to **retain** guilt, as the ego insists, *you cannot be you*. ⁴Only by persuading you that **it** is you could the ego possibly induce you to **project** guilt, and thereby keep it in your mind.

• Study Question •

1. In 1:3, what does the strange phrase “you cannot be you” mean?

This paragraph describes the ego’s bogus method of freeing our minds from the horrible burden of our guilt: *projection* (1:1). Projection is the act of blaming others (or anything external to ourselves) for the problems that we have caused ourselves, making *them* guilty instead of us. At first glance, projection seems to be a great way to meet our needs. But on closer inspection, we find that projection is actually a great way for the ego to meet *its* needs, while only *appearing* to meet ours.

One of our greatest needs is to be free of guilt. Who among us does not pine for lost innocence? We all want the crushing burden of guilt lifted from our backs. Whether we consciously believe in God or not, all of us have a deep yearning to rest peacefully in our Father’s loving Arms once again (1:2). As we saw in “The Attraction of Love for Love,” that attraction to our Source is so strong as to be irresistible. But the ego has an entirely different set of needs: As much as we want to reclaim our lost innocence and rest in our Father’s Arms, “the ego wants to retain guilt” (1:2) and keep us in constant fear of the fires of hell. This is the only way the ego can meet its greatest need of all: to survive.

The fact that our needs and the ego’s needs are so diametrically opposed presents the ego with a real problem: It needs our support to survive, but how can it get that support when its agenda is so radically different from ours? The ego’s ingenious solution is to persuade us that *it* is us (1:4), that “my ego” and “me” are the same thing. If we are thus persuaded, we will be duped into thinking that meeting the ego’s needs *is* meeting our needs. We will still have the desire to free ourselves from guilt—we will still pine for our lost innocence—but we will unwittingly look at the situation “from [the ego’s] viewpoint” (1:2), and thus falsely conclude that projection is the way to *reclaim* that innocence.

All of us have fallen for this ruse, and so we project our guilt onto everyone and everything, thinking that we’re freeing ourselves from it but actually gathering more and more guilt into the ego’s storehouse (1:4). We’re meeting the ego’s need for guilt while *appearing* to meet our need for guiltlessness.

Why doesn’t projection succeed in freeing us from guilt? This paragraph doesn’t discuss this issue, but the quick answer is the well-known Course statement that “ideas leave not their source” (T-26.VII.4:7). Our guilt is in our own minds, and while we *appear* to push it out when we project it, it remains in our minds as long as we believe in it. Moreover, since projecting guilt is an attack on those whom we blame for our problems, our guilt is actually *increased*, “for guilt is the result of attack” (T-13.I.11:1). Thus projection, rather than freeing us from guilt, is really the ultimate guilt magnet.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Yet consider how strange a solution the ego’s arrangement is. ²You **project** guilt to get rid of it, but you are actually merely concealing it. ³You **do** experience the guilt [*experience guilt feelings*], but you have **no idea why**. ⁴On the contrary, you associate it with a weird assortment of “**ego** ideals,” which the ego claims you have failed. ⁵Yet you have no idea that you are failing the Son of God by seeing **him** as guilty. ⁶Believing you are no longer **you**, you do not realize that you are failing **yourself**.

• Study Question •

2. *Bring to mind something in your life that you feel, guilty, ashamed, or embarrassed about—any situation, past or present, in which you feel you haven't measured up, and feel bad about it as a result. This paragraph tells us that the situation you just brought to mind is not the real source of your guilt, but simply a façade that covers the real source. According to this paragraph, what is the real source?*

Psychologists speak of a phenomenon called “free-floating anxiety,” which a psychology textbook of mine defines as follows:

A chronic state of fear or foreboding which is unrelated to any specific situation but which can be activated by a wide variety of situations and activities.

This paragraph describes what could be called our “free-floating guilt”: the constant, vague sense of guilt that all of us carry around even though we “have no idea why” (2:3). We may deny that we feel guilty, but I really do believe that if we look at our feelings honestly, we will discover within ourselves an uneasy, ill-defined sense that we simply aren't good enough, that we haven't made the grade—which is a form taken by our sense of guilt.

I think the editors made a mistake when they changed “you *do* experience guilt feelings” to “you *do* experience the guilt.” The change seems to imply that the guilt is real; the original Urtext version makes it clear that we are merely *feeling* guilty.

And just as with free-floating anxiety, these vague *feelings* of guilt “can be activated by a wide variety of situations and activities.” So, when we become aware of our guilt, we may attribute it to any variety of sources: “I stole a piece of candy in the fourth grade; I didn't tell my father before he died that I loved him; I got pregnant as a teenager and had an abortion; I'm not very nice to people; my spouse told me to take the garbage out and I forgot; I don't do my spiritual practice as much as I should.” In other words, we associate our guilt with various “ego ideals” (2:4). “Ego ideal” is a technical term in psychology, which another psychology textbook of mine defines as “idealized self; concept of one's best performance.” Ego ideals, then, are basically the various standards—such as personal, social, and religious standards—by which we measure our performance, standards we often fall short of.

But according to this paragraph, the things we normally see as the sources of our guilt aren't the *real* source at all. These surface manifestations of guilt actually serve to *hide* the real source (2:2). What is the real source? The rest of this section will discuss that source at length; here, we are told that the real source is that “you are failing the Son of God by seeing him as guilty” (2:5). In other words, we feel guilty because we are constantly playing the role of judge, jury, and executioner of the Son of God. Ironically, it is our very belief in the reality of guilt that makes us feel guilty! We feel guilty because we are attacking our true Self by denying the inherent innocence of that Self.

In everyday terms, we do this whenever we blame, judge, and condemn our brothers for all the problems we have caused ourselves—when we engage in the process of projection described in the previous paragraph. We also do it whenever we condemn *ourselves* for failing to measure up to our ego ideals. Seeing guilt *anywhere* is an attack on the Son of God, and this attack is the real source of all our guilt. *We* are the Son of God, and ultimately we feel guilty because by choosing to attack our true Self, we are

failing ourselves (2:6).

The next paragraph will express the core source of our guilt in different words, words that emphasize the “executioner” aspect of our attack on the Son of God.

Paragraph 3

3. 1The darkest of your hidden cornerstones holds your belief in guilt from your [own] awareness. 2For in that dark and secret place is the realization that you have betrayed God's Son by condemning him to death. 3You do not even **suspect** this murderous but insane idea lies hidden there, for the ego's destructive urge is so intense that nothing short of the crucifixion of God's Son can ultimately satisfy it. 4It does not know who the Son of God **is** because it is blind. 5Yet let it perceive guiltlessness **anywhere**, and it will try to destroy it because it is afraid.

• Study Question •

3. *This section makes several references to a “cornerstone.” a) what do you think the metaphorical term “cornerstone” means? b) What, specifically, is the cornerstone referred to in 3:1?*

“You have betrayed God's Son by condemning him to death” (3:2). The ego has cast us in the role of Judas in its passion play, telling us that we sold out the Christ in us to the ego for “thirty pieces of silver.” This false belief—the belief that, in choosing to separate from God, we “killed” our true Self and irrevocably turned ourselves into murderous egos—is the fountainhead of all our guilt (3:1-2). We believe we have committed an unforgivable crime of cosmic proportions, a crime that forever ripped asunder the fabric of reality itself. This is the central idea at the heart of the ego's thought system, “the darkest and deepest cornerstone in the ego's foundation” (4:4). This is the glue that holds the ego together, the epoxy that keeps our entire sense of separation from God and from one another cemented into place.

Now most of us, upon hearing this, will probably react with disbelief. It sounds so fantastic and macabre, like a dark and twisted story by Edgar Allen Poe. It just seems so remote from our everyday experience. But the fact that we're *unaware* of all this should come as no surprise because, according to the Course, the ego's foundation is *very* well hidden. Indeed, Jesus emphasizes this fact throughout this section (see 2:2-6, 3:1-3, 4:4, 5:2, 6:4, 8:5, 9:2). All of the projection and false attribution of guilt described in the previous paragraphs serves the ego's purpose of keeping this “guilty secret” (9:2) hidden.

Why does the ego want to keep this hidden? Because, as I mentioned above, the ego needs our support to survive, and we won't continue to support it if we clearly saw that identifying with it gives us nothing but a bottomless ocean of guilt. We *really* want innocence, not guilt. So, the ego keeps the depths of our primordial guilt hidden from us by getting us to project it outward onto our brothers, and thus purchase a false sense of “innocence” for ourselves.

Yet ironically, this very purchase of false innocence causes us to lose sight of our *true* innocence: the innocent Son of God in us and in everyone. Projection of guilt gives us nothing but more guilt, because it is a re-enactment of the original crime for which we

feel so guilty in the first place: the “crucifixion of God’s Son” (3:3) in us. This, of course, is the ego’s whole intent. We yearn to resurrect the innocent Son of God, but the ego is bent on keeping him dead. (Of course, the Son of God hasn’t ever died.) The ego doesn’t really know what true innocence is (3:4), but it *does* dimly sense that there is something antithetical to it within us, something to which we are deeply attracted. The ego is deathly afraid of the innocence that would undo it, and so it works ceaselessly to stamp that innocence out at all costs (3:5).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Much of the ego’s strange behavior is directly attributable to its definition of guilt. ²To the ego, *the guiltless are guilty*. ³Those who do **not** attack are its “enemies” because, by **not valuing** its interpretation of salvation [see 12.III.3:1], they are in an excellent position to **let it go**. ⁴They have approached the darkest and deepest cornerstone in the ego’s foundation, and while the ego can withstand your raising all else to question, it guards this one secret with its life, for its existence depends on [*does depend on*] keeping this secret. ⁵So it is this secret that we must look upon, for the ego cannot protect you **against** truth, and in its presence the ego is dispelled.

• Study Question •

4. *What is meant by the ego’s assertion that “the guiltless are guilty” (4:2)?*

The whole idea of stamping out innocence is a very strange one, is it not? Normally, we reserve the death penalty for the horrendously guilty, not the innocent. One of the strongest recent arguments against the death penalty in America is that too many innocent people are executed by mistake. No one, not even the death penalty’s staunchest advocates, believes that the innocent deserve to die.

So the ego, in order to get us to identify with it and its quest to stamp out innocence, must somehow get us to believe that innocence is really *guilt*, and therefore deserving of death. And this is exactly what it does in its radical redefinition of guilt described in this paragraph: “*the guiltless are guilty*” (4:2). In the ego’s estimation, the holiest saints of the world are really the greatest sinners of all! Notice how this is simply another example of the ego’s favorite guilt shedding/accumulating device: *projection*. The ego projects its guilt onto the guiltless, so that now *they* are guilty, while *it* is “innocent.” Therefore, if we follow the ego’s lead here and see the innocent as guilty, we will once again re-enact the original crime of “killing” the innocent Son of God, and thus accumulate yet more guilt.

Why are the innocent guilty in the ego’s eyes? 6:3 will shed more light on this, but in this paragraph, the answer is simply that those who recognize their innocence are guilty because they don’t play the ego’s game. They don’t agree with the ego “interpretation of salvation” (4:3), namely, that “attack is salvation” (T-13.I.10:3), and so they are coming closer and closer to recognizing the flimsiness and insanity of the subterranean foundation upon which the ego rests. Their presence is thus a constant threat to the ego’s survival (4:3-4). In the face of this threat, the ego will do everything it can to drag the innocent down to its guilty level; the Course, in fact, tells us that the ego will fight back with a vengeance whenever we get too close to the truth (see, for instance, T-9.VII.4:5 and T-9.VIII.4:4-6).

If we want to recognize our own innocence, we too must stop playing the ego's game. We must stop projecting guilt onto others and falsely defining innocence *as* guilt (which is what we do when we project guilt onto others). We must look directly at our insane belief that we have crucified God's Son, and recognize both that it is *our* belief (no one else is to blame for it) and that it is a *false* belief (it only happened in illusion—we didn't *really* destroy our innocence). This is the truth, "and in its presence the ego is dispelled" (4:5).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹In the calm light of truth, let us recognize that **you believe you have crucified God's Son**. ²You have not admitted to this "terrible" secret because you would still wish to crucify him **if you could find him**. ³Yet the wish has hidden him from you because it is very fearful, and **so you are afraid to find him**. ⁴You have handled this wish **to kill yourself by not knowing who you are**, and identifying with something else. ⁵You have projected guilt blindly and indiscriminately, but you have **not** uncovered its source. ⁶For the ego **does** want to kill you, and if you identify **with** it you must believe **its goal is yours**.

• Study Question •

5. *Take a moment to actually carry out the injunction in 5:1. With Jesus or the Holy Spirit, look within and see if you can get in touch with the place in you that believes that you are guilty of irrevocably "killing" your true innocence. If you cannot find that place in you (which may well happen, since it is buried so deeply), at least reflect upon and consider the possibility that such a belief may exist in you. Gently remind yourself that you cannot really destroy your innocence, and so you are still a wholly innocent Son of God.*

This is a fascinating paragraph with a lot of thought-provoking material. It begins by giving us a simple injunction to actually *do* the ego-dispelling activity suggested in the previous paragraph: "In the calm light of truth, let us recognize that you believe you have crucified God's Son" (5:1). The words "calm light of truth" here are significant. We aren't supposed to confess our horrible crime and wallow in guilt over it; instead, we are to look at it honestly from the perspective of God's eternal truth—a truth that assures us that it *didn't really happen*. We only *believe* it happened, but it didn't; it is this fact that enables us to be "calm" instead of terrified as we look upon it.

This theme of looking *calmly* at our darkest ego beliefs is an important one in the Course. Interestingly, the word "calmly" occurs only five times in the Course, but every single time it refers to the idea of calmly looking at some expression of the ego's thought system without fear, as a prelude to letting it go (see T-10.III.5:1, T-17.VII.5:4, T-23.II.1:4, T-30.IV.5:9, and W-pI.31.3:4).

However, we *are* terrified to look upon our "'terrible' secret" (5:2) and thus allow the innocent Son of God in us to be revealed once again. Why? The reason given in 5:2 is rather surprising. The gist of it is this: Our self-made transformation of our basic nature from innocent Son of God to demonic ego is so permanent in our eyes that we think even if by some miracle the Son of God in us were resurrected, we would just kill him all over

again. The thought of becoming a serial killer of the Son of God is so repugnant to us that we have decided to keep him safely out of sight (5:3).

After all the material we've read about the ego being a thought of pure attack that wants nothing except our death, it may come as a surprise to read here that there's a part of our mind that both wants to kill us *and* wants to prevent that from happening. How can we explain this? My explanation is that the level of our mind spoken of here is not, strictly speaking, the ego, but instead a kind of repercussion of the ego that lies directly below the ego. In his booklet *Shrouded Vaults of the Mind*, Robert Perry calls this level of mind "the call for love: the crucified Christ." He refers to this level as "the collision between the ego and the Son of God," because it is a kind of borderland between them, a place that contains elements of both.

At this level of mind, we are still heavily identified with the ego, and so we share the ego's relentless drive to kill the Son of God (5:6). But enough of our identification with the Son of God remains that we *also* feel that killing him is a tragic loss for which we feel great remorse, a killing of *ourselves*—a kind of spiritual suicide. The result of this combination is an incredibly painful and terrified state of mind: It contains both a seemingly unstoppable urge to kill, *and* a genuine sense of remorse and sadness about the killing it does. It desperately wants to be rescued from its horrible dilemma, which is why Robert calls it the "call for love."

The image that comes to my mind here is of a murderer who is convinced he has an insatiable, unstoppable desire to kill, but *also* has enough of a conscience that he feels tremendous remorse about it and doesn't want to do it again. So, he pleads with the authorities to give him the death penalty, saying, "Stop me before I kill again." Or perhaps, since the "killing" spoken of here is ultimately a suicide, a better image would be that of a suicidal person who *knows* she is suicidal yet deep down wants to live, a person who is desperately seeking help so that she doesn't succumb to her urge to do herself in.

Unfortunately, at this level of mind we are still heavily influenced by the ego, and so the "solution" we choose to protect ourselves from our suicidal tendencies is keep our true Self out of sight by identifying with the ego (5:4, 5:6). This is a truly insane solution, because all it does is exacerbate the problem, which *is* ego identification.

This identification, as we've seen all through this section, prompts us to adopt the ego's favorite guilt shedding/accumulating device of projection. We project guilt "blindly and indiscriminately" (5:5) onto our brothers, blaming them for the pain and suffering which in truth is caused only by our own guilt. Since our brothers are really the Son of God along with us, this act of projection is ultimately an attempt to attack and kill the Son of God, which is exactly what the ego wants (5:6). Thus our "solution" is—there's that theme again!—nothing but a re-enactment of the original crime, and so rather than finding the innocence and release from pain that we seek, our guilt is simply increased all the more. You have to admit that the ego's system has a kind of twisted brilliance to it.

Paragraph 6

6. ¹I have said that the crucifixion is the symbol of the ego. ²When it was confronted with the **real** guiltlessness of God's Son it **did** attempt to kill him, and the reason it gave was that guiltlessness is blasphemous to God. ³To the ego, **the ego is God**, and guiltlessness **must** be interpreted as **the final guilt that**

fully justifies murder. ⁴You do not yet understand that any fear you may experience in connection with [that *all your fear of*] this course stems ultimately from this interpretation, but if you will consider your reactions **to** it you will become increasingly convinced that this is so.

• **Study Question** •

6. *Why does our fear surrounding the Course stem from the ego's interpretation of guiltlessness as "the final guilt that fully justifies murder"?*



The first three sentences of this paragraph take this section's teaching about the ego crucifying the innocent Son of God in us, and apply it to the event that is the very source of the section's imagery: the crucifixion of the historical Jesus. The first sentence's reference to an earlier statement is not clear to me, but I see two possibilities, both in T-6.I, a section that was specifically about Jesus' crucifixion. The first is T-6.I.12:1, which calls the crucifixion "the symbol of projection"; the second is T-6.I.16:7, which calls it "the perfect symbol of the 'conflict' between the ego and the Son of God." I'm not sure which of these Jesus had in mind. Perhaps he had both in mind, since it seems that both are relevant to what we are discussing here.

The next sentence (6:2) is a direct reference to the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the council of Judean elders that was convened to decide Jesus' fate (Matthew 26:63-66/Mark 14:61-64). Here is the account from the Gospel of Mark:

Again the high priest asked him [Jesus], "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of Heaven."

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. (Mk 14:61-64, NIV)

In 6:2, Jesus gives his interpretation of this exchange: Jesus claimed to be the guiltless Son of God (or better, *a* guiltless Son of God, since he makes it clear in the Course that we are *all* Sons of God). The members of the Sanhedrin, who were clearly coming from their egos at the time, saw this claim as blasphemy, an insult to God. Why? 6:3 gives us the Course's answer: "To the ego, the *ego* is God, and guiltlessness must be interpreted as the final guilt that fully justifies murder." The ego's First Commandment is "Thou shalt be guilty," and as we learned in 4:2, the guiltless are guilty of breaking this most holy commandment. Thus Jesus, who was such a powerful representative of the innocent Son of God in all of us, was the ultimate criminal in the eyes of the ego-bound Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin projected their own guilt onto Jesus and, finding him guilty for claiming to be innocent, sent him to the Romans to be crucified.

In the rest of this paragraph, Jesus shifts gears in a very interesting and thought-provoking way: He goes on to apply the ego principle that led to his crucifixion to the topic of our fear surrounding the Course. His message, in short, is that since the ego

claims guiltlessness merits the death penalty, and the Course *teaches* guiltlessness (this is not said here, but is assumed), it must follow that as long as we keep listening to the ego, we will be terrified of learning the Course. We fear the Course because deep down, we believe that if we become like Jesus, we're going to be crucified just like him! (We think we will crucify ourselves. This is clearly stated in 8:6.) This topic will be explored further in the next two paragraphs.

Paragraphs 7 and 8

7. ¹This course has explicitly stated that its goal **for you** is happiness and peace. ²Yet you are **afraid** of it. ³You have been told again and again that it will set you free, yet you sometimes react [**yet you react**] as if it is trying to **imprison** you. ⁴You often dismiss it more readily than you dismiss the ego's thought system. [Most of the time you *dismiss* it, but you do not dismiss the ego's thought system. You have seen its results and you *still* lack faith in it.] ⁵To some extent, then, you must believe [**You must believe, then,**] that by **not** learning the course **you are protecting yourself**. ⁶And you do **not** realize that it is only your guiltlessness that *can* protect you.

8. ¹The Atonement has always been interpreted as the release from guilt, and this is correct if it is understood. ²Yet even when I interpret [**have interpreted**] it **for you**, you may reject [**have rejected**] it and do not accept [**have not accepted**] it **for yourself**. ³You have ~~perhaps~~ recognized the futility of the ego and its offerings, but though you do not want them, you may not yet [**you will not**] look upon the alternative with gladness. ⁴~~In the extreme you are afraid of~~ **redemption and you believe it will kill you**. ⁵Make no mistake about the depth of this [**your**] fear. ⁶For you believe that, in the presence of truth, you might [**Ur: will**] turn on yourself and **destroy** yourself.

• Study Question •

7. *Reflect upon your relationship with the Course, and with the idea of being liberated from the ego through the Atonement. Can you detect any fear in you concerning the Course and the prospect of redemption? If so, what are some ways that fear manifests in your life?*



These paragraphs continue the discussion of our resistance to the Course, and I personally can identify with everything Jesus says here about this resistance. As much as I have come to believe in the Course's ideas—to the degree that I've dedicated my life to them—when the chips are down, I *do* find myself siding with my ego all too often (7:4). Though I've discovered time and time again that the ego gives me nothing but pain, I still seem to take a “better the devil I know” attitude toward it (8:3). Strangest of all, I have found that even though studying and practicing the Course *always* makes me feel more peaceful and joyful whenever I do it, I still seem to find excuses *not* to do it.

I have heard similar stories from other Course students. Why do we have this strange love-hate relationship with the Course and the redemption it promises us? According to these paragraphs, the reason is that even when we recognize the benefits the Course offers us, we are afraid of it (7:2). Why? As I said above, the reason is precisely because

the Course teaches guiltlessness, and we have accepted the ego's dictum that guiltlessness merits the death penalty. Since we believe this, it logically follows that when we are confronted with Jesus' message that Atonement is release from guilt (8:1), a part of our minds reads into that the message "Atonement is death." And so, our conclusion is that by *not* learning this course in Atonement, we are protecting ourselves (7:5). We *do* believe that guiltlessness is guilty. Why else do we hesitate to claim our freedom from guilt? Because we believe (mistakenly) that saying we are without guilt is presumptuous and arrogant.

The last three sentences of paragraph 8 point out just how powerful and pervasive our fear of redemption is, even though consciously we may dearly *want* redemption. The next section will explore this fear in depth, and give us the ultimate, core-level reason for it: our fear of God's Love. Here in these sentences, the reason given is the same one discussed in paragraph 5: We are so convinced that we have irrevocably become murderous egos, that we are afraid that we would again destroy the Son of God in ourselves if he ever returned to our awareness (8:6).

"Make no mistake about the depth of your fear" (8:5). I think that as Course students, we would do well to keep this in mind as we follow the path of the Course, recognizing that because of this fear, we will be dealing with resistance to what the Course is teaching us every step of the way. If we recognize this, we will perhaps not be so surprised and dismayed when our inevitable resistance pops up. Rather than seeing our resistance as an indicator that we are bad Course students—as evidence that we have failed yet another "ego ideal," giving us one more reason to feel guilty—we should regard it as simply a normal part of walking the path. And as we acknowledge honestly our misguided attempts to protect ourselves from our guiltlessness, we will be one step closer to recognizing the truth: "It is only your guiltlessness that *can* protect you" (7:6).

Paragraph 9

9. ¹Little child, this is not so. ²Your "guilty secret" is nothing, and if you will but bring it to the light, the Light **will** dispel it. ³And then no dark cloud will remain between you and the remembrance of your Father, for you will remember His guiltless Son, who did not die because he is immortal. ⁴And you will see that you were redeemed **with** him, and have never been separated **from** him. ⁵In **this** understanding lies your remembering, for it is the recognition of love **without** fear. ⁶There will be great joy in Heaven on your homecoming, and the joy will be **yours**. ⁷For the redeemed son of man **is** the guiltless Son of God, and to recognize **him** *is* your redemption.

• Study Question •

8. *Why, ultimately, is our "guilty secret" really nothing?*

The previous paragraph described what we *think* would happen if we rediscovered the Son of God in us: Ego beasts that we are, we would just kill him all over again. But this final paragraph reassures us, "Little child, this is not so" (9:1). Why is it not so? Because we are *not* the ego beasts we think we are. Our "guilty secret"—our belief that we destroyed our true Self and became the destroyer, the ego—is not a terrible crime warranting guilt and meriting punishment, but is in fact *nothing* (9:2). The innocent Son

of God “did not die, because he is immortal” (9:3; see also T-12.VII.15:1). Our hands are not stained with the Son’s blood; our horrible crime was never committed. We *dreamed* we committed it, but that is all.

What joyous news this is! Imagine how you would feel if you had a vividly realistic nightmare in which you killed the person you loved most in all the world, but then woke up and discovered that the person was in fact alive and well. You would breathe a huge sigh of relief and say, “Thank God it was only a dream!”

How do we discover the joyous truth that we are wholly innocent? Essentially, by giving up the ego’s false “solution” to the problem of guilt: projection. First, we stop projecting guilt onto our brothers and recognize that the guilt is our own. Then, with the Holy Spirit’s help, we come to recognize that the cause of our guilt is not our failure to live up to our various “ego ideals” (2:4) but our belief that we have destroyed our true Self (2:5, 5:1). Finally, again with the Holy Spirit’s help, we see that our guilt is causeless, because we have *not* destroyed our true Self. In this recognition, our guilt is undone. “If you will but bring it to the light, the Light *will* dispel it” (9:2). This is the Holy Spirit’s *real* solution to the problem of guilt.

All of this may sound very abstruse and remote from our daily lives, but it needn’t be. In practical terms, I think it comes down to the Course’s practice of mental vigilance, the practice of watching our minds for unloving thoughts—our attack thoughts, our tendency to blame others, our resentments and grievances, our self-condemnation, our ways of denying guilt feelings, etc.—and releasing them to the Holy Spirit. When we discover these thoughts, we have an opportunity to look at them honestly, gently loosen our grip on them, and allow the Holy Spirit to undo them. The Course, especially the Workbook, provides a number of specific practices to help us do this. (Lesson 22 is a good example.) I think we would do well to take full advantage of all the specific help the Course offers; it is, after all, “an organized, well-structured and carefully planned program aimed at learning how to offer to the Holy Spirit everything you do not want” (T-12.II.10:1).

The effort is worth it, for the rewards are immense. Our practice dismantles the ego’s foundation stone by stone, and as that foundation of guilt is dismantled, we will see the innocence it concealed: the guiltless Son of God, our true Identity, the Identity we share with everyone. This vision is our redemption (9:4, 9:7), and the redemption of the world. Our fear of punishment and death will be replaced by the awareness of perfect love (9:5) and the joy of Heaven (9:6). As we rediscover our eternal innocence, the memory of our loving Father, obscured by the “dark cloud” of guilt for so long, will at last be restored to us (9:3).

Answer Key

1. It means that in order for the ego to accomplish its goals, *you* cannot be aware of *your true Self*, because your true Self is part of God and totally antithetical to the ego. So, the ego must split your awareness off from your true Self, and get you to identify with *it* instead (1:4).
2. According to this paragraph, the real source of your guilt is “that you are failing the Son of God by seeing him as guilty” (2:5).
3. a) In a nutshell, it means a *foundation*—here, the foundation of the ego’s thought system (4:4). The second and third definitions of “cornerstone” in my *Random House College Dictionary* are relevant here:
 2. a stone representing the starting place in the construction of a building, usually carved with the date
 3. something that is essential, indispensable, or basic.

Thus, when the Course speaks of the ego’s “cornerstone,” it means something that is the starting place in the construction of the ego, something essential, indispensable, and basic to the ego—in short, the ego’s foundation.

The Course uses this cornerstone imagery in a number of places (see T-3.VII.1; T-11.In.2; T-11.In.3; T-11.In.4; T-13.III.1; T-13.VII.10; T-14.VII.2; M-9.1). Sometimes the imagery depicts the cornerstone itself as hidden; other times, it depicts something hidden *within* the cornerstone (an allusion, I believe, to the practice of placing things like time capsules within the cornerstones of buildings). In either case, Jesus’ injunction to us is always to reveal what is hidden and calmly look upon it. Most Course references are to the *ego’s* cornerstone, but there is also a reference to the cornerstone of God’s creation: *you* (T-11.In.3:2).

- b) The ego’s cornerstone in 3:1 is our belief that we have killed God’s Son (3:2, 5:1).
4. Basically, it means that the guiltless, *because* they are guiltless, are “guilty” of violating the ego’s fundamental tenet that we are forever guilty (see also 6:3).
5. No written answer is expected.
6. Because the ego’s interpretation makes us afraid of guiltlessness, and guiltlessness is exactly what the Course teaches.
7. Individual answers will vary. Personally, I am definitely aware of fear in me surrounding the Course and the idea of liberation. Ways that fear manifests in my life include: “forgetting” to do my Course practice; distracting myself with trivial pursuits like food and entertainment; fear that committing to the spiritual life will be a real sacrifice; fear that transcending the body will be the death of *me*, etc.
8. Because God’s “guiltless Son...did not die” (9:3). Therefore, the crime that is our “guilty secret”—the killing of God’s Son, the destruction of our true Self—happened only in our imagination. We are still the holy Son of God Himself, and we are wholly innocent.

