

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 14, Section III

The Decision for Guiltlessness Paragraphs 9 to 19

Notice that the emphasis in Section III in the first eight paragraphs is on a specific decision: deciding for guiltlessness rather than guilt. In the last eleven paragraphs, the emphasis shifts to the more general issue of making decisions of any kind, showing how even these ordinary decisions are, in fact, a choice between guilt or guiltlessness.

Along with Section IV, this passage teaches us that we cannot decide anything by ourselves, for all of our decisions literally influence everyone and everything. We cannot decide for ourselves for two main reasons:

1. We would not know how to influence each and every thing with equal love.
2. Since our current fundamental decision is the rejection of what we really want, any decisions we make by ourselves will reflect that decision. They will express our attraction to guilt.

In regard to making decisions, the message of the Course seems to be this: You have developed a strongly ingrained habit of making decisions by yourself and with your own personal interests in mind. That habit is indicative of a mind that believes it is separate and on its own—that is, the ego. To break this habit, you must make a concerted effort at consciously referring every decision to the Holy Spirit, beginning with conscious decisions, proceeding to decisions as yet unconscious, and continuing to do so until you have become so identified with the Voice of the Holy Spirit that His thoughts have become your own. Only then will listening to Him become effortless.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹Whenever you choose [**decide**] to make decisions **for yourself** you are thinking [**self-**]destructively, and the decision **will be wrong**. ²It will hurt you because of the **concept** of decision that led to it. ³It is not true that you can make decisions **by** yourself or **for** yourself alone. ⁴No thought of God's Son **can** be separate or isolated in its effects. ⁵Every decision is made for the **whole Sonship**, directed in and out, and influencing a constellation larger than anything you ever dreamed of.

• **Study Question** •

1. *Choosing to make decisions for ourselves is a sure way to be wrong. What is the general “concept of decision” that this paragraph seeks to correct?*

The nature of every decision is such that its effects are virtually universal. As John Donne, the Seventeenth Century poet, wrote: “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” His words are echoed here by the Course, applied to our thoughts (9:3–4). What each of us does or thinks affects the whole (9:5; and also, “I am not alone in experiencing the effects of my thoughts” (W-pI.19.Title)).¹ Many of us may have realized this to some degree, but Jesus makes it clear that our decisions’ effects extend far more widely than we may have believed.

We may think we are deciding something entirely private, and that no one else is affected. Or perhaps we realize that others are affected, and believe we know who those others are. Both are false concepts of decision, and decisions made on such a basis cannot be made intelligently (9:1); inevitably, such decisions will bring us grief (9:2). Perhaps you have noticed this fact, as I have. I make a “private” decision, and later learn how it affected someone else negatively in a way I could not have imagined, causing them to feel ill will towards me, so that I end up suffering for my “innocent mistake.”

Jesus has in mind a completely different way of making decisions, one that is based on the dual realization, first, that we all are one so that, as Workbook Lesson 19 says, my thoughts affect everyone; and second, that I cannot possibly take into account all the ramifications of my decisions, and must therefore depend upon divine guidance, which is omniscient.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹Those who accept ~~the~~ Atonement *are* invulnerable.²But those who believe they are guilty **will** respond to guilt, because **they think it**

¹ The Bible also speaks of our oneness and interdependence: “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

(1 Corinthians 12:14–27 NRSV)

is salvation, and will **not** refuse to see it and side **with** it. ³They **believe** that **increasing** guilt is self-**protection**. ⁴And they will fail to understand the simple fact that what they do **not** want **must** hurt them. ⁵All this arises because they do **not** believe that **what they want is good**. ⁶Yet will was given them **because** it is holy, and will bring to them **all** that they need, coming as naturally as peace that knows no limits. ⁷There is **nothing** their will fails to provide that offers them **anything** of value. ⁸Yet because they do **not** understand their will, the Holy Spirit quietly understands it **for** them, and gives them what **they** want [**will,**] without effort, strain, or the impossible burden of deciding **what they want and need alone**.

• **Study Question** •

2. *Why do we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit to make decisions for us? (Pick one answer.)*
- A. *Our will is contrary to God's, and we want the wrong things.*
 - B. *Because we do not trust that our own will is good.*
 - C. *Because we do not know what our own will really is.*
 - D. *A and B*
 - E. *B and C*

In addition to misunderstanding the scope of our decisions, we also misunderstand what we want and need. We are subject to the influence of guilt, in particular (10:2), so that our decisions are distorted by it. We do not realize that we are invulnerable (10:1), and believing we can be injured, we make decisions to “protect” ourselves (10:3). We do not want guilt, so we project guilt onto others in the belief that doing so keeps us safe, failing to realize that if guilt is undesirable in us it is undesirable anywhere. Instead of passing guilt on to others we should be defusing it and refusing it entirely. Passing it on to others will, in the end, hurt *us* (10:4).

We don't trust our own will (10:5), which was given us by God (10:6). We are afraid we want bad things, and as a consequence we feel guilty, which leads to the whole process of invalid decision-making trying to handle the guilt. We don't even know what our will truly is! How could our will be something bad, if God created it? How could our God-given will misguide us? How could anything of value to us not be included in our will, and how could our will include anything that isn't of value to us? (10:6–7). Apparently, we are very confused about ourselves, which makes choosing correctly almost impossible in any situation.

This is why we need the Holy Spirit to assist our decision-making. He understands what our will is, even though we do not. Making decisions alone is an “impossible burden,” but with His help it is effortless (10:8).

In my experience, making decisions with the Holy Spirit is not anything spooky. I don't hear voices or see visions. Maybe I'm handicapped in this respect, but I think not; I think voices and visions are rare, and I have little trust in so-called signs (which is one way I differ from my colleague, Robert Perry). When faced with a decision, I pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help me. I trust Him to

guide my thinking, and then I proceed pretty much as usual, considering pros and cons, thinking about the outcome desired, and so on. I try to keep alert for an inner tingle of some kind, either positive or negative. Most commonly it is a negative feeling about something that otherwise seems quite reasonable and desirable. A friend of mine once called it “a dark brown feeling.” I just get the sense, when considering that alternative, that the Holy Spirit is saying, “No.” By and large, I work on what could be called *corrective guidance*. I only occasionally get specific instructions telling me what to do, but I often get a negative sense about something I am doing or plan to do.

Sometimes, when there are several alternatives, I mentally call each one to mind and ask, “How about this?” In deciding whether or not to take a job offer, for instance, I might visualize myself taking the job and try to imagine how I will feel taking it. Is the feeling light and joyful, or dark and mournful? Then, I try to imagine myself turning the job down, and see how that feels.

I attribute the sense that arises about these decisions to the Holy Spirit. Some may prefer to think of it simply as intuition, but the important thing is that it originates somewhere outside the narrow confines of our egos. It's very different than just making decisions by myself. There is a real sense of being helped, and I am much more confident about decisions made in this way. I still make mistakes, which isn't surprising; learning to distinguish between the ego and the Holy Spirit is the whole point of our learning process, and when I have learned to hear only His Voice, I'll be ready, I think, to graduate. Mistakes, however, are fewer as the years go by.

Paragraph 11

11. ¹It will never happen that you must make decisions **for yourself**.
²You are **not** bereft of help, and **Help that knows the answer**. ³Would you be content with little, which is all that **you alone** can offer yourself, when He Who **gives you everything** will simply **offer it to you**? ⁴He will never ask what you have done to make you worthy of the gift of God.
⁵Ask it not therefore of yourself. ⁶Instead, accept His answer, for He **knows** that you are worthy of everything God wills **for you**. ⁷Do not try to escape the gift of God He so freely and so gladly offers you. ⁸He offers you but what God gave Him **for you**. ⁹You need **not** decide whether or not you are **deserving** of it. ¹⁰**God knows you are**.

• Study Question •

3. *What makes us worthy of having everything?*

Do you sometimes feel lost and alone? Do you feel called upon to make decisions you can't handle on your own? Jesus says, “It will never happen.” It reminds me of his promise to his disciples just prior to his crucifixion: “I will not leave you comfortless” (John 14:18, KJV). He was referring to his intention to send the Holy Spirit to be with them. We never have to make decisions by ourselves; we have “Help,” that is, the Holy Spirit, Who always knows the answer (11:1–2).

Think of what it means to have the Holy Spirit in charge of supplying our needs. We have such low opinions of ourselves that we will always short-change ourselves. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, sees us all as God's holy Son, perfect in every way and "worthy of everything God wills for you" (11:6), and gives to us accordingly—if we put ourselves in His hands (11:3).

When you pray to ask for help or blessing, do you ever feel that you are not worthy? Do you ever wonder, "Why would God listen to me, after all I've done?" I know I do, especially after I've had a major ego attack. But the Holy Spirit never questions our worth (11:4). Neither should we!

One of my favorite passages in the Gospels about prayer is in Luke 11:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? (Luke 11:9–13, NASB)

"How much more?" Human fathers, out of ordinary decency, won't give harmful gifts in response to the innocent requests of their children. Would God be likely to do so? Of course not! The Bible urges us to ask with confidence, expecting to be heard, and so we should. The Apostle John wrote, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (I John 5:14, NIV). Jesus, in the Course, is telling us the same thing. We are *not* without informed help in making our decisions (11:2), and we should not question our worthiness to receive God's gifts. God would not give the gifts if we did not deserve them (11:7–10).

The passage speaks of our trying to escape God's gifts (11:7). That is what the ego does, as odd as it sounds. The ego is sure that God is going to give us a snake or a scorpion instead of fish or an egg. It tries to convince us that if we start turning to God with our decisions, we are going to get a nasty surprise. So it counsels us to flee from those gifts. The ego's real reason, of course, is that if we open ourselves to God's gifts, the ego will be undone.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹Would you deny the truth of **God's** decision, and place your pitiful appraisal of yourself in place of His calm and unswerving value of His Son? ²**Nothing** can shake God's conviction of the perfect purity of everything that He created, for it is wholly pure. ³Do not decide **against** it, for being of Him it **must** be true. ⁴Peace abides in every mind that quietly accepts the plan [that] **God** [has] set for its Atonement, **relinquishing its own**. ⁵You know **not** of salvation, for you do **not** understand it. ⁶Make no decisions about what it is or where it lies, but ask the Holy Spirit **everything**, and leave **all** decisions to His gentle counsel.

• **Study Question** •

4. *How has our mistake about what we are and our own worth affected our ability to make accurate decisions about what we really need and where to find it?*

God decided to give us His gifts. We have substituted our “pitiful appraisal” of ourselves in place of the value He placed on us (12:1). When we make decisions by ourselves, we are making our own evaluation of what will save us, based on that low evaluation of ourselves. Small wonder such decisions don’t pan out.

God is supremely confident in His own creations; He has looked on all He created and pronounced it good, as the book of Genesis says. You and I may be concerned that our failures, our misbehavior, our lack of love, and our less-than-loving thoughts have tarnished our halos, but Jesus reassures us that “nothing can shake God’s conviction” of our purity (12:2). If creation issues from God, according to the Course, then its purity is unquestionable and unassailable (12:3). If we attempt to make decisions on our own we are denying that purity, because solitary decisions are based on a self-view that negates that purity.

I remember a poem by Amy Carmichael that ended with the words, “in acceptance lieth peace.” Jesus seems to be saying much the same thing in sentence 4. When we resist God’s plan for us, we strive and struggle and strain; when we “quietly accept” God’s plan, and just as quietly relinquish our own, we are at peace.

This is really the issue we face: who is in charge? It’s hard to take our hands off the steering wheel of our lives. As the Course so often reminds us, we think we know what we need and make plans accordingly, but since those plans are based on a false concept of who we are, they are wrong. Learning what we do not know is a key component of the Course’s curriculum, which it sometimes refers to as “unlearning.” Letting go of our own plans is just as important as listening for God’s plan; in fact, as long as we hold on to our own plans we won’t *hear* God’s plan.

This is why Jesus advises us to make no decisions about salvation, that is, about what is good for us. We don’t know. We are instructed to “leave all decisions to His gentle counsel” (12:6).

Putting this into practice can be challenging. We can tie ourselves in knots trying to give over every tiny decision to the Holy Spirit. The Course warns against being over-zealous in trying to submit every minute detail of our lives to the Holy Spirit (see T-30.I.1:1–5 and M-29.5:4–10). For instance, every physical step we take, putting one foot in front of another, involves a decision: Shall I go left or right or straight ahead, or shall I stop? Shall I walk slower or faster? It would be absurd to stop with each step to ask these questions and wait for some kind of inner answer. Getting directions for the whole intended journey, however, might make sense. And we should remain open for course corrections at any time.

Still, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being asking the Holy Spirit about everything (too much), 1 being never asking at all, and 5 or 6 being asking just enough, I think most of us would rate at about 2 or 3. We ask for guidance now

and then, for things we deem important (by whose standards?), but most of our decisions we make by ourselves. It might be better to go overboard and then cut back, since we are starting from a place of asking seldom or not at all.

Paragraph 13

13. ¹The One Who knows the plan of God that God would have you follow can teach you what it **is**. ²Only His wisdom is capable of guiding you to follow it. ³Every decision you undertake alone but signifies that you would define what salvation *is*, and what you would be saved *from*.² ⁴The Holy Spirit knows that **all** salvation is escape from guilt. ⁵You have no other “enemy,” and against this strange distortion of the purity of the Son of God the Holy Spirit is your **only** Friend. ⁶He is the strong protector of the innocence that sets you free. ⁷And it is **His** decision to undo **everything** that would obscure your innocence from your unclouded mind.

• Study Question •

5. (a) *What are the two questions every decision tries to answer, and how would the Holy Spirit answer them?*
(b) *What are some ways we answer these questions? That is, what are some of the usual criteria we use when making decisions by ourselves?*

The Holy Spirit uses a criterion for making decisions that is very different from ours, apart from Him. We chart our course based on what we think is best for us, from a very limited perspective. The Holy Spirit's perspective does not suffer from our limitations. He knows God's plan and He alone can take us through it (13:1–2).

Why do we make plans at all? If you think about it, plans serve the purpose of getting us what we want and avoiding what we do not want. One way we might summarize those two goals is the word “salvation.” From traditional religion we may be accustomed to thinking of salvation as avoiding hell and finding Heaven, but it can be applied to every lesser positive or negative goal as well. When we plan our grocery list, we are both deciding what food we want to taste and avoiding hunger. That's salvation in food form. Any decision we make by ourselves is an attempt to define for ourselves the answers to two questions: what is salvation? (What do I want?) and what do I want to be saved *from*? (13:3).

We are likely to think that salvation lies in financial security, or good sex, or a steady job, or having lots of powerful friends. By contrast, “The Holy Spirit knows that all salvation is escape from guilt” (13:4). His work is to undo everything that would obscure your innocence from your mind (13:7). Feeling guilty means by definition that you are looking at an illusion of some kind, because you are innocent. God created you innocent and you have not changed. So guilt must

² Make note of this phrase: “what salvation *is*, and what you would be saved *from*.” It is going to crop up over and over in the pages that follow.

result from some sort of illusion, some incorrect thought about you. You are about to act as a separated being.

The end of guilt is the basis of all His guidance. He isn't concerned with guiding us to a cushy job or helping us find Prince Charming or Miss Right. He wants to lead us out of guilt, which is our only "enemy," the only thing that is causing us pain (13:5). Sometimes the road to guiltlessness is not the same as what we pick based on our definition of salvation. That's when we need encouragement to let go of our own plans and follow Him. He will lead us in ways that enable us to uncover our innocence (13:7).

Paragraph 14

14. ¹Let Him, therefore, be the only Guide that you would follow to salvation. ²He knows the way, and leads you gladly on it. ³**With** Him you will not fail to learn that what God wills **for** you is your will. ⁴**Without** His guidance you will think you know alone, and will decide **against** your peace as surely as you ~~decided~~ [made the wrong decision in ever thinking] that salvation lay in you alone. ⁵Salvation is of Him to Whom God **gave** it **for** you. ⁶He has not forgotten it. ⁷Forget **Him** not and He will make **every** decision for you, for **your** salvation and the peace of God in you.

• Study Question •

6. *This paragraph sums up the main point of the five preceding ones. What is that main point?*

As I often say, when you see a "therefore," ask yourself, "What is it *there for*?" Sentence 1 is a conclusion based on what has come before, namely that the Holy Spirit has only our best interest in mind. Our enemy is guilt, and the Holy Spirit is our only Friend (13:5), with no agenda but freeing us from guilt and revealing our innocence. What's to be afraid of? Since He is so favorably inclined toward us, and so well informed, who better to have to guide us? (14:1–2). We can rest assured that He knows just what we need to learn and how we best can learn it.

We've been discussing the need to let go of our own plans, and to accept God's plan for our lives, which *seems* to mean that we will accept God's Will in place of our own. And if that is really what we are doing, it also feels quite humiliating. No matter how you sugarcoat it, if being spiritual means doing God's Will instead of doing what I want to do, I don't see how that can possibly lead to happiness. If I never get to do what I want to, how can I be happy?

But that is *not* what it means to be spiritual. The Holy Spirit proposes to teach us that God's Will is what we *really want* (14:3). The things that, without His guidance, we have convinced ourselves that we want will pale into insignificance when we understand what God's Will for us really is. We are like a child who has dropped his sticky lollipop in the dirt and is crying because we want the lollipop but our mother is taking it away from us—until we realize she is offering us an ice cream cone instead. Dirty lollipop?—scrumptious ice cream cone? Which will we

choose? When we see what salvation really consists of, we will gladly let our dirty lollipops go into the trash.

If we *don't* listen to the Holy Spirit, however, we'll still be crying for our dirty lollipop (14:4). The choice is really up to us, and we must choose to listen, and invite Him in to every decision we are aware of making (14:5–7). When we do so, “He will make every decision for you, for your salvation and the peace of God in you” (14:7).

Paragraph 15

15. ¹Seek not to appraise the worth of God's Son whom He created holy, for to do so is **to evaluate his Father** and judge **against** Him. ²And you *will* feel guilty for this imagined “crime,” which no one in this world or Heaven **could possibly** commit. ³The Holy Spirit [**God's Spirit**] teaches only that the “sin” of **self**-replacement on the throne of God is **not** a source of guilt. ⁴What **cannot** happen can have no effects to fear. ⁵Be quiet in your faith in Him Who loves you, and would lead you out of insanity. ⁶Madness may be your **choice**, but **not** your reality. ⁷Never forget the Love of God, Who **has** remembered you. ⁸For it is quite impossible that He could ever let His Son drop from the [**His**] loving Mind wherein he was created, and where his abode was fixed in perfect peace forever.

• Study Question •

7. *What is the overall reason our wish to separate cannot cause guilt? (Pick one answer as given in this paragraph.)*
- A. *Since it is impossible that God would let His Son separate from Him, the separation never happened and therefore cannot have real effects.*
 - B. *We cannot truly evaluate our own worth; only God can.*
 - C. *God can lead us out of insanity by undoing all the effects of our sin.*

As has already been pointed out (11:4), we often try to “appraise the worthiness” of ourselves and of others to receive God's gifts, and we usually find ourselves wanting. This paragraph makes the startling statement that even seeking to take God's place on His throne is not a real source of guilt (15:3), and therefore does not make us unworthy of His gifts.

I think Jesus uses this example because it is the most extreme one we can imagine: Seeking to dethrone God and steal His Kingdom from Him. Usurping the throne of God is the role traditionally assigned to the devil; he is called Satan, meaning “adversary.” Many conservative Bible scholars believe that a passage in the prophecy of Isaiah refers to the devil's desire to overthrow God's rule: “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne

above the stars of God" (KJV).³ If the supposed sin of the devil "is not a source of guilt" (15:3), then what lesser "sin" could possibly merit guilt? Obviously, none.

This paragraph gives several reasons why this is so, all part of a larger reason. The subordinate reasons are:

- No one is capable of judging God and finding Him wanting, but judging God's creations *is* judging Him.
- In our insanity we may *want* to usurp God, but doing so is impossible.
- God's Love for us guarantees that He will never let us go into madness or hell.

The overall reason that encompasses all of these is simply that "what cannot happen can have no effects" (15:4). The paragraph contains several phrases and words that all mean, in essence, that separation from God, or overthrowing His Kingdom, is simply impossible: "imagined crime," "no one...could possibly commit," "cannot happen," "not...reality," and "quite impossible." If it is impossible to overthrow God how can anyone be guilty of the crime? Perhaps we *wanted to*, but we could not, and God is more than willing to forgive our foolish, idle wish. No harm was done!

Paragraph 16

16. ¹Say to the Holy Spirit only, "Decide for me," and it is done. ²For His decisions are reflections of **what God knows about you**, and in this light, error of **any** kind becomes impossible. ³Why would you struggle so frantically to anticipate all you **cannot** know, when **all** knowledge lies behind **every** decision the Holy Spirit makes **for you**? ⁴Learn of His wisdom and His Love, and teach His answer to everyone who struggles in the dark. ⁵For you decide for **them and** for yourself.

• Study Question •

8. *This paragraph gives us several specific injunctions, or instructions about what we should do, based on what has been said so far. What are they?*

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The main thing we must do is simply to ask the Holy Spirit to decide for us (16:1). This begins with obvious decisions and eventually encompasses the decisions we have hidden from ourselves, the choices of mind that determine our entire perception of the world. "Perception is a choice" (T-21.V.1:7). When we give our decisions to the Holy Spirit, His decisions will reflect the truth God knows about us, rather than the lies about ourselves that we believe (which are what are reflected in decisions we make by ourselves) (16:2). In other words, we will be making decisions based on reality rather than lies; such decisions are certain to be right.

³ *A Course in Miracles*, of course, asserts that the only devil is our belief in separation: "The mind can make the belief in separation very real and very fearful, and this belief is the "devil."" (T-3.VII.5:1).

When I read Jesus' question in sentence 3, about why would I struggle to figure things out on my own when the Holy Spirit has *all knowledge* behind every decision He can make for me, it makes neglecting guidance seem really foolish. Doesn't this describe the way we usually operate? Struggling frantically to anticipate every alternative scenario, trying to provide for every option, developing contingency plans in case things go wrong—what an exhausting process! And all the while there is an omniscient Guide waiting to make the choices for us! (16:3).

Instead of struggling in the dark along with everyone else (16:5), why not start “living the inspired life,” as Robert Perry calls it in his book about guidance, *Guidance: Living the Inspired Life?* Why not discover how profoundly wise the Holy Spirit is, and how deeply He loves us?

As he so often does, Jesus finishes his appeal to us with a reminder that our decisions affect more than us alone; they affect everyone (16:5). That can have disastrous effects when we are at the controls, but on the positive side, when we live by guidance, we serve as examples to other people who are still stumbling along under their own inadequate self-direction, showing them the way to find peace and happiness.

Paragraph 17

17. ¹How gracious ~~it is~~ [is it] to decide all things through Him Whose equal Love is given equally to all alike. ²He leaves you no one outside you [*outside yourself, alone without you*]. ³And so He gives you what is yours, because your Father would have you share it **with** him. ⁴In everything be led by Him, and do not reconsider. ⁵Trust Him to answer quickly, surely, and with Love for everyone who will be touched in any way by the decision. ⁶And **everyone** will be. ⁷Would you take unto yourself the sole responsibility for deciding what can bring **only** good to everyone? ⁸Would you **know** this?

• Study Question •

9. *What is the key characteristic of the decision-making of the Holy Spirit that is discussed in this paragraph?*

The decisions of the Holy Spirit take into consideration literally everyone (17:1–2); they are the diametric opposite of our self-involved choices, that aim primarily at preserving our bodies and our egos. Including everyone is exactly why His decisions are better for *us*, because everyone is a part of us. When we leave others out of our decisions, ultimately *we* suffer, because we are ignoring part of ourselves. Everyone belongs to us, and in considering everyone in making decisions for us, the Holy Spirit is simply giving us what truly is ours (17:3).

Considering the needs of everyone, however, is beyond our capability (17:7–8), but not beyond His. “In everything be led by Him...” (17:4). We need to trust Him to communicate to us all we need to know. When consciously faced with a decision, consciously give it over to Him. Open to His communication. Ask for it.

Then, trust that it will come “quickly, surely, and with Love for everyone who will be touched in any way by the decision” (17:5). Don’t make the mistake of anticipating the form the guidance will come in. It comes in thousands of different ways. If we consciously open to it, we will not miss it.

“... and do not reconsider” (17:4). Having given the decision to the Holy Spirit and having opened yourself, then go ahead and decide. If you can wait until you are certain that you hear His voice, do so. If the decision cannot be delayed, trust that what comes to your attention is His guidance. Just choose, securely, with confidence. You may make a “mistake,” but if you do, He will correct you, if you remain open to correction.

If you watch yourself you will find that the vast majority of your decisions are made with no conscious reference to God at all. You just blithely forge ahead on your own, assuming that you know enough to do this intelligently. You never know enough on your own! The Course says clearly that such decisions will be wrong and will hurt you (9:1–2). You are making the decision on the basis of an assumed separate identity, and that is simply not true! (9:3–5).

Watch for this tendency to decide on your own. If you notice it happening, immediately turn things over to the Holy Spirit. If you become aware after making a decision that you made it without consulting Him, go back in your mind and give it to Him. Reconsider your decision and choose again, with His assistance. But once you have given a decision to Him, and then decided, never reconsider. Trust Him completely. Don’t doubt His guidance, and don’t take back your choice to decide with Him.

I think that Jesus means, “Don’t reconsider your choice to be led by the Holy Spirit; don’t try taking the reins back.” He does not mean that we should never reconsider a decision that we believed to be guided.

I’ve found this to be a safe procedure as long as I stay open to correction. Even when I make the “wrong” decision, it is still right; I needed to make that decision in order to learn it was wrong. Like a child learning to walk, I fall down a lot. That doesn’t mean my guidance was wrong; it just means I haven’t learned everything yet.

To “never reconsider” does not mean that we must never change our minds. Charles Fillmore, founder of Unity, once wrote: “The truth we teach is not new nor do we claim special spiritual revelation... and I reserve the right to change my mind!” Guidance is always *present* guidance. If today I think the Holy Spirit guides me to go north, and tomorrow He says “west,” that does not mean that going north yesterday was “wrong.” It just means that today I am moving in a different direction.

Paragraph 18

18. ¹You taught **yourself** the most unnatural habit of **not** communicating with your Creator. ²Yet you remain in close communication with Him, and with everything that is within Him, as it is within **yourself**. ³Unlearn isolation through His loving guidance, and learn of all the happy communication that you have thrown away but could **not** lose.

• **Study Question** •

10. *What is the real purpose of the Holy Spirit's guidance?*

“You taught yourself the most unnatural habit of not communicating with your Creator” (18:1). I love this line, because it shows how upside down our thinking is. For most of us, communicating with God seems very unnatural, while acting on our own comes naturally; Jesus is telling us that the opposite is true. What we consider natural is actually something that we have painstakingly inculcated in ourselves. We have repeated the lesson to ourselves so often that we have forgotten there was ever a different way of seeing things.

Now we have to go through a long period of *unlearning* that lesson. We have to make a very deliberate effort to put ourselves back in communication with God.

The reluctance to communicate is wholly on your part. The Course says, “The Holy Spirit’s Voice is as loud as your willingness to listen” (T-8.VIII.8:7). The Holy Spirit is God’s communication, and that communication is right in your mind. It is within you, not outside you. In fact, the Holy Spirit speaks *for* your true Mind, the only true part of you there is, which never forgot God, never forgot all the truth, and is in constant communication with the Father and with all of our brothers (18:2). He is the voice of your true Self.⁴ His Voice speaks constantly; you just don’t listen. But the fact of the matter is, you are already in perfect communication with God, whether or not you are hearing Him.

From the vantage point of your apparently separated mind, however, the Holy Spirit seems to be a Voice in your mind, a separate being. You have conceived of yourself as separate, and you have to start from that place because that is where you believe you are.

It is okay, therefore, to think of the Holy Spirit or Jesus as someone you talk to and confer with. More than okay; it is necessary at the beginning. You think of yourself in a very constricted way, as a separate mind. The illusion of yourself as a separate mind comprises the ego thought system. Identified with that illusion of a separated self, you cannot hear the truth. The answer is within you, but not in you as you have defined yourself!

The answer to your problems cannot come from within the ego thought system, so in the beginning it is helpful to think of the answer as coming from somewhere other than your “self,” which is really not your self but just a system of thought you have made up. Your experience at first, and perhaps for a long time, will be that the guidance of the Holy Spirit comes from a separate being. As you experience it more and more, you will gradually realize that His Voice is within you, in the Self you have forgotten; the Holy Spirit is in fact the Voice of your real Self, the Christ.

When you make decisions by yourself, you will always make them for yourself. Your personal interests will predominate. In linking up with the Holy Spirit you will automatically begin to decide in a way that considers the whole

⁴ "You are asked to trust the Holy Spirit only because He speaks for you" (T-11.I.11:1). "Do you not understand that to oppose the Holy Spirit is to fight *yourself*? He tells you but your will; He speaks for you" (T-30.II.1:1-2).

Sonship, not just yourself. “The Holy Spirit [is] the shared Inspiration of all the Sonship” (T-5.I.7:1). He is the Voice for the “you” that includes all your brothers and sisters, the communal “you.”

What you are doing is unlearning isolation through His loving guidance (18:3). You think you are alone, and you need to work at remembering that you are not alone. You need to break that habit of non-communication. The practice of asking the Holy Spirit for guidance is meant to undo your sense of separation, bringing you back into full awareness of the communication with God and with your brothers that has always been yours (18:3).

Paragraph 19

19. *1*Whenever you are in doubt what you should do, think of His Presence in you, and tell yourself this, and **only** this:

*2*He leadeth me and knows the way, which I know not.

*3*Yet He will never **keep** from me what He would have me **learn**.

*4*And so I trust Him to communicate to me all that He knows **for** me.

*5*Then let Him teach you quietly how to perceive your guiltlessness, which is **already** there.

• Study Question •

11. Here we are given a specific affirmation to use whenever we are in doubt about what to do. Clearly this refers to very detailed guidance within the world. What quality in us does this affirmation seem designed to reinforce?

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The section ends with practical instruction in how to apply its teaching. At any time you become conscious of the need for a decision, remember that the Holy Spirit is with you, within you, and remind yourself of His ability and desire to guide you. Lean on Him, and “trust Him to communicate” what you need to know. As with every set of lines set off in indented italics, these words are meant to be memorized and actually used. You might want to write them out on a card and read them over any time you are faced with a decision. He will guide you to your innocence, while the ego will always lead you to guilt (19:1–5).

Living like this will seem unnatural at first. That’s true of any skill you learn. When you are first learning to play the piano, playing scales feels very unnatural. It certainly isn’t the music you want to hear! We need to “practice scales” with listening to the Holy Spirit. It will seem awkward and unsatisfying, just as playing scales on the piano does. But you are learning the basic techniques that will make possible for you to know the “music” of living in constant, spontaneous communication with God.

In order to get to the point where you follow God’s guidance without thinking about it, you have to think about it all the time for a long time!

What seems natural to you now—making decisions *without* God—has to be consciously unlearned. Learning a new habit always seems unnatural at first. Don't expect this to be easy. Don't expect it to come naturally to you. You can't get away with just giving the entire day to God in the morning and then assuming that all your decisions through the day will be guided by the Holy Spirit. Doing that helps, of course, but it is only a start.

Getting to the point where listening naturally and without effort to the Voice for God, only that Voice and no other, is not easy. It begins by referring every conscious decision to Him, but it must grow until every unconscious decision behind your perception of the world has been taken over by Him. Jesus says that is the final lesson he learned (T-5.II.3:11), so don't expect it to come instantly to you! It is indeed possible to get to that point; Jesus is the example of that. But "it takes effort and great willingness to learn" (T-5.II.3:10).

You are asked, not to have arrived at perfectly hearing God's Voice, but to be willing to move in that direction. You can do so every day, simply by consciously and deliberately reminding yourself as often as possible to make no decisions without His help, and acknowledging that you trust Him to give you all the guidance you need.

Answer Key

1. The concept that we can make decisions for ourselves or by ourselves alone. It is not even possible.
2. E
3. We are worthy because God chose to give us these gifts and made us worthy of them.
4. Our egos have deceived us about ourselves, and if we make decisions by ourselves, they will be based on a false foundation. Furthermore, since we don't understand ourselves we do not understand what we really need.
5. (a) What is salvation? And what are we saved *from*? The Holy Spirit would say that "all salvation is escape from guilt," and we are saved, therefore, from guilt. (b) We usually think we need to be saved from some kind of lack: loneliness, poverty, or sickness, and so we see salvation in some form, such as a relationship, or money, or physical health. Or else we think we need to be saved from punishment for our sins, from hell, and salvation is to gain such deliverance.
6. The only rational course of action is to allow the Holy Spirit to make all our decisions for us.
7. A
8. Say to the Holy Spirit, "Decide for me." Stop struggling to anticipate all that might happen, and allow the Holy Spirit to make our choices for us since He knows. Teach the answer of the Holy Spirit to others.
9. His decisions are made with equal love for everyone, and everyone will be touched with love through His decisions.
10. To restore in us the habit of communicating with God.
11. Our trust that He will guide us if we ask, and will guide us wisely.