

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

The Circle of Atonement

This section concerning “The Circle of Atonement” naturally has special meaning for me, since the organization I worked with from 1993 to 2006, which publishes most of my books about the Course, took its name from this section. Although I was not a part of the organization at the time its name was chosen, I thought the choice of the name was particularly appropriate. The imagery of this section depicts a group of people who, as a means to understanding their own guiltlessness, are dedicated to communicating the message of guiltlessness to everyone. That perfectly describes the group I wanted to be a part of when I joined the Circle. (Let me note here that when I capitalize the word “Circle” in that way, I am referring to the organization I belong to; the topic of this section is referred to in the Course as “the circle of Atonement,” with a lowercase “c” on “circle.” The word “Atonement” is capitalized both in the Course and in the name of our organization, so the capitalization of “circle” or the lack of it is the way to tell which I am referring to.)

Paragraph 1

1. ¹The only part of your mind that has reality is the part that links you still with God. ²Would you have **all** of it transformed into a radiant message of God's Love, to share with all the lonely ones who have denied Him [**with you**]? ³*God makes this possible.* ⁴Would you deny His yearning to be known? ⁵You yearn for Him, as He for you. ⁶This is forever changeless. ⁷Accept, then, the immutable. ⁸Leave the world of death behind, and return quietly to Heaven. ⁹There is **nothing** of value here, and **everything** of value there. ¹⁰Listen to the Holy Spirit, and to God through Him. ¹¹He speaks of you to *you*. ¹²There **is** no guilt in you, for God is blessed in His Son as the Son is blessed in Him.

• Study Question •

1. *What, according specifically to this paragraph, is the immutable that we are to accept?*

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The central thought of this paragraph, to me, is found in the question in the second sentence, with the added encouragement of the third sentence, telling us that such an elevated ambition is indeed accessible to us because God has provided the means for it. What does that poignant question really mean?

As the Course often says, our mind has accepted identification with the ego, which is really nothing but an imagined and extremely limited self-concept. When we begin to seek reawakening, it seems to us that our minds are divided in parts, with one part in contact with God and another thoroughly enmeshed with the ego. Here, the Course makes the startling claim that the only *real* part is the part that is in touch with God (1:1). This is consistent with its parallel assertion that the ego is *not* real.¹ We may wonder, what about what seems to be “the other part” of our mind? What happens to it? Is there “another part” of the mind at all? The Course says we must be “willing to return the unhealed part of [our] mind to the higher part” (T-5.IV.2:6). There definitely *seems* to be another part, from our perspective, and given that perspective, we are called upon to yield up that part to the healing power of the Holy Spirit. The appearance of separated parts of the mind is an illusion, but while we are deceived by that illusion, we need healing. What is healed is, in fact, the *illusion* that there is a separate part at all.

So Jesus asks us whether we truly want that healing to occur (1:2). Do we want our entire mind to become a beacon of divine Light to all the world? Perhaps that seems a far-fetched goal to you. I know it sometimes seems so to me. I have looked within my own mind enough to be amazed at the thought that the entire thing could ever be a pure, undiluted expression of God's Love. But “*God makes this possible*” (1:3). Those words are emphasized by Jesus in the Course, not just by me. Think about that! *Your* mind can be transformed like that. Everything in you that seems so unlike God, so unlovely or unloving, can all be washed away, turning your entire mind into “a radiant message of God's Love” (1:2).

That is what this section is all about. It tells you how that can be accomplished—“not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6, NIV). That is, not by lots of sweat and labor, not by great skill, but through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit working within you.

God yearns to be known by all of His creation, including the very “ones who have denied Him” (1:2,4). He wants to make Himself known *through you and through me*. What is more, “you yearn for Him” (1:5). There is within us all, as Saint Augustine wrote, a God-shaped blank space in our hearts. The Course says, “this is forever changeless” and “immutable” (1:6–7), so we may as well stop resisting it. Here you have two irresistible forces, God's longing for us and our own immutable longing for Him; the result is inevitable, so why fight it any longer? Why hold on to the insane illusion of a split mind, part of which wants God and part of which does not? God and we are like two super-powerful magnets, drawn together by an overwhelming mutual attraction. Nothing can stand in its way.

¹ “The ego, which is not real, attempts to persuade the mind, which is real, that the mind is the ego's learning device” (T-6.IV.5:3).

“The distractions of the ego may seem to interfere with your learning, but the ego has no power to distract you unless you give it the power to do so. The ego's voice is an hallucination. You cannot expect it to say ‘I am not real.’” (T-8.I.2:1-3).

“For the ego is itself an illusion” (T-16.V.9:5).

Jesus appeals to us to leave behind the sad illusion we have made, returning to our rightful place as co-creators with God (1:8-9). The Holy Spirit is speaking; *listen!* His message is about *you*. He is telling you “There is no guilt in you” (1:12).

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Everyone [Each one of you] has a special part to play in the Atonement, but the message given to each one [to share] is always the same; *God's Son is guiltless*. ²Each one teaches the message differently, and learns it differently. ³Yet **until** he teaches it and learns it, he will suffer the pain of dim awareness that his true function remains unfulfilled in him. ⁴The burden of guilt is heavy, but God would not have you bound by it. ⁵**His** plan for your awaking is as perfect as yours is fallible. ⁶You know not what you do, but He Who knows is with you. ⁷His gentleness is yours, and all the love you share with God He holds in trust for you. ⁸He would teach you nothing except how to be happy.

• Study Question •

2. *According to this paragraph, where does guilt come from and what is God's plan for freeing us from it? (Only one answer is correct, though all may be true statements.)*
- A. Guilt comes from the separation, and God's plan is for us to accept the Atonement for ourselves.
 - B. Guilt comes from not fulfilling our true function, and God's plan is for us to fulfill our function by teaching that God's Son is guiltless.
 - C. Guilt comes from special relationships, and God's plan is for us to transform them into holy relationships.

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Guiltlessness is the central message of the entire Course, and indeed, according to the Course, it is the central message of every spiritual path worthy of the name (2:1–2; see also M-10.2:9² and paragraph 6 later in this section, especially 6:5). The specific form that the message takes varies widely in one spiritual path to another, and even from one teacher to another (2:2).

I remember clearly learning about guiltlessness in fundamentalist Christianity. I was taught that “the blood of Jesus washes away all your sins.” We sang songs based on Bible verses about “there is therefore now no condemnation down in my heart” (based on Romans 12:2), or “Gone, gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone...buried in the deepest sea, yes, that’s good enough for me” (based on Micah 7:19). The *basis* of forgiveness was quite different from the Course, but the *fact* of it was the same. “God’s Son is guiltless” was the message I heard.

I recently began reading a book by a Zen Buddhist teacher named Cheri Huber. The title of the book is, *There Is Nothing Wrong With You*. It begins with the words: “You have been taught that there is something wrong with you and

² “It is the only judgment there is, and it is only one: ‘God's Son is guiltless, and sin does not exist.’” (M-10.2:9).

that you are imperfect, but there isn't and you're not." In other words, you are not guilty. Same message, different format. Cheri Huber would never dream of talking about the blood of Jesus, and a fundamentalist preacher would be certain that Buddhists could not be teaching the same thing as he is teaching, and yet both, in their way, are teaching guiltlessness.

In the Psychotherapy pamphlet, Jesus tells us that even the sort of psychotherapy that makes *no* reference to God or religion can be a means of teaching guiltlessness and forgiveness.³ It goes on to say:

It is therefore the psychotherapist's function to teach that guilt, being unreal, cannot be justified.... Salvation's single doctrine is the goal of all therapy. Relieve the mind of the insane burden of guilt it carries so wearily, and healing is accomplished. (P-2.IV.10:7-11:2)

The Course asserts that everyone has the function of teaching guiltlessness (2:1). *Everyone*. This is not the province of a class of clergy or specially anointed spiritual teachers. It's your job, too. Ultimately, our own freedom from guilt is tied to our willingness to take on that job, the job of liberating people from their guilt (2:3-4). Failing to perform our function is one of the taproots of our guilt, and taking up our function again is God's plan for freeing us from guilt (2:5). *Our* way (trying to project the guilt and blame elsewhere) will never work; God's way is absolutely sure to work.

We may not know how to carry out our function, but the Holy Spirit knows and can guide us along the way (2:6). The details will differ for each one of us. Some may engage in overt healing professions such as being a healer, a psychotherapist, or a hospice worker. Others may dispense forgiveness in family relationships. Some work with prisoners. Some are barbers or beauticians who gently lift guilt from the shoulders of those they minister to. Every smile, every small act of kindness is a way of communicating to people that "there is nothing wrong with you." The Holy Spirit can show us where to go, what to do, and what to say to bring peace to the minds of those around us.⁴ He wants us to function as saviors of the world, and He assures us that this is not a path of sacrifice; it is the way to true happiness (2:8).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Blessed Son of a wholly blessing Father, joy was created **for** you. ²Who can condemn whom God has blessed? ³There is nothing in the Mind of God that does not share His shining innocence. ⁴Creation is the natural extension of perfect purity. ⁵Your only calling here is to devote

³ "To be a teacher of God, it is not necessary to be religious or even to believe in God to any recognizable extent. It is necessary, however, to teach forgiveness rather than condemnation" (P-2.II.1:1-2).

⁴ "I need be anxious over nothing. For Your Voice will tell me what to do and where to go; to whom to speak and what to say to him, what thoughts to think, what words to give the world" (W-pII.275.2:2-3).

"Ask Him very specifically:

What would You have me do?

Where would You have me go?

What would You have me say, and to whom?" (W-pI.71.9:2-5).

yourself, with active willingness, to the denial of guilt in **all** its forms. ⁶To accuse is *not to understand*. ⁷The happy learners of the Atonement become the teachers of the innocence that is the **right** of all that God created. ⁸Deny them not what is their due, for you will not withhold it from them alone.

• **Study Question** •

3. *Based on the idea that guilt should be denied, what would you do with someone who is feeling really guilty over killing a pet bird by forgetting to feed it?*
- A. Deny their guilt by ignoring the fact that they feel it.
 - B. Tell them that they shouldn't feel guilty because the bird is with God.
 - C. Tell them that guilt is an illusion since the separation never occurred.
 - D. Pick up the bird and make it look like it's flying, while making bird whistles, in order to convince them it isn't dead.
 - E. See them in your mind as innocent and pure, looking past what they have done, and then ask within for how best to help them see their own innocence.

Guilt and joy are obviously mutually exclusive; how could you be guilty and joyful at the same time? Therefore, in setting freedom from guilt as our target, the Course is also instructing us in the pathway to pure joy. As the Son of God, joy is rightfully our inheritance (3:1). We can be joyful because, as God's perfect creation, there is no condemnation that can mar our joy (3:2). We are *already* without guilt because we are in God's Mind, where no guilt is possible (3:3). We are not *becoming* guiltless, we are learning to remember that we *are* guiltless. When God created us He did so by extending His perfect purity; therefore, we must be perfectly pure (3:4). Those are the facts, whatever lies we may have told ourselves.

As the previous section told us, our only function is to use the Atonement to forgive others (T-14.IV.3:6–7). That thought is repeated here in other words: our only purpose is to deny guilt (3:5). Denying guilt does not mean we bury our heads in the sand and pretend that we don't feel guilty. It does not mean that "anything goes" nor does it mean we passively condone evil behavior. It means that nothing is viewed as *sinful*. There are still mistakes; there is still right and wrong behavior. An unloving act is still an unloving act, and to be avoided. But unloving acts do not make us bad people; they do not make us sinners. They do not separate us from God. They do not merit punishment; they merit correction and healing. They do not cause love to be withheld from us, but rather, as calls for love, they draw love's gentle response.

When we accuse someone of sin, or view someone as guilty, we are misunderstanding them (3:6). Everyone is innocent by divine right, and we are meant to make teaching that fact the sole purpose of our lives (3:7). Our job is to help others in every way possible see their own innocence and purity. This is what being a happy learner (Section II) really means. Happy learners teach innocence,

and teaching innocence is what makes them happy. Those who spread guilt to others are spreading it to themselves as well, and robbing themselves of joy (3:8).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The inheritance of the Kingdom is the right of God's Son, given him in his creation. ²Do not try to steal it from him, or you will **ask** for guilt and **will** experience it. ³**Protect** his purity from every thought that would steal it away and keep it from his sight. ⁴**Bring innocence to light**, in answer to the call of the Atonement. ⁵Never allow purity to remain hidden, but shine away the heavy veils of guilt within which the Son of God has hidden himself from his own sight.

• Study Question •

4. *What are we asked to protect, and how?*

Stealing someone's innocence does not mean that we hire a voodoo priestess to put a curse on him. It isn't what happens if you don't tell someone about the Course. You steal someone's innocence whenever you see the person as guilty and unworthy of God's Kingdom. This is what we are told *not* to do (4:2). Everyone has a right to the Kingdom of God (4:1). In seeing them as guilty, we are stealing their inheritance just as much as Jacob stole Esau's birthright (Genesis 25:29–34).

Remember that "God's Son" is you, and everyone, not just Jesus; that is one huge difference between the Course and traditional Christianity. The Son is a corporate being, a shared identity; there is only one Son, and all of us are part of him. Therefore, if we see anyone as unworthy of God's Kingdom we have seen *all* of the Sonship as unworthy. As Jesus said in the Gospels, "To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40, NASB). To steal someone else's innocence is to ask for guilt for yourself (4:2).

Imagine what the world would be like if everyone practiced the principle given in sentence 3! Suppose everyone went around protecting the innocence of others instead of finding fault with them (4:3). Instead of pointing out mistakes, what if we all brought people's fundamental innocence to light? (4:4). If that is too hard to imagine, forget the world—what would *your family* be like if you all practiced this?

Still too hard to imagine? Okay; what would your life be like if *you* did this? That's all that the Course is asking. Sometimes we try to avoid the responsibility of responding to the Course by lamenting that no one else is doing it, or that it's too idealistic to expect enough people to do this. "You don't know my family!" we may cry. But, in one of my favorite lines in the Course, Jesus tells us: "He speaks of you to *you*" (T-14.V.1:11). The Holy Spirit isn't speaking to you about your brother, or to your brother about you; He is speaking *to you*, and *about you*. He is saying, "This is *your* function. You take care of yourself, and practice the Atonement; I'll take care of the rest." If we take care of our own minds, the Kingdom of God will come in its own time. Meanwhile, we will be happy because

we will be fulfilling our God-given function. There is purity in everyone, and our job is to uncover it, lifting “the heavy veils of guilt” to reveal the innocent Son of God within everyone (4:5).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹We are all joined in the Atonement here, and nothing else can unite us in this world. ²So will the world of separation slip away, and full communication be restored between the Father and the Son. ³The miracle acknowledges the guiltlessness that **must** have been denied to produce the **need** of healing. ⁴Do not withhold this glad acknowledgment, for hope of happiness and release from suffering of every kind lie in it. ⁵Who is there but wishes to be free of pain? ⁶He may not yet have learned **how** to exchange guilt for innocence, nor realize that **only** in this exchange can freedom from pain be his. ⁷Yet those who have failed to learn need **teaching**, not **attack**. ⁸To attack those who have need of teaching is to fail to learn **from** them.

• Study Question •

5. *Let's say you encounter someone who thinks that by attacking you she can feel free of pain. How do you respond to her, inwardly and/or outwardly?*

The one thing that will eventually end this world and bring in God's Kingdom is the practice of the Atonement. Forgiveness, and seeing the inherent innocence of every child of God, will finally restore to our awareness our union with God (5:1–2). What we are talking about in this section, and indeed all through the Course, is no small thing!

Where this business of seeing innocence gets tough is when somebody attacks you. When someone attacks, in this separated world many people attack back, on the theory that, “They will think twice before they attack *me* again!” They plot their revenge and when their counter-attack is launched, they are thinking: “It's payback time! I'll show *you!*” But attack always breeds attack, and generally the conflict escalates. The Course's teaching is about breaking this cycle of attack and counter-attack. It is about saying, “The attack stops *here*.”

When someone attacks you (or seems to attack you, since the Course wants us to learn that the Son of God cannot be attacked), somewhere, someone has accepted guilt in place of guiltlessness. It is this denial of guiltlessness that precipitates the whole cycle of attack. Therefore, the way to end the attack cycle is to *reaffirm* the guiltlessness of everyone involved—not only your own guiltlessness, but also that of the apparent “attacker.” That is exactly what a miracle does (5:3). If, when you are attacked, you see the attacker as guilty, you are continuing the cycle and blocking “hope of happiness and release from suffering of every kind” (5:4).

Our egos have carefully camouflaged the central role played by guilt. When we get angry at some “unjust attack,” we do not realize the extent to which we are playing into the ego's hands. Our outrage seems so appropriate, so righteous! The

Course is urging us to acknowledge the innocence of our “attacker.” It wants us to see such people, not as guilty, but as ignorant. They haven’t learned yet to “exchange guilt for innocence” but that is no reason for us to fail to do so! (5:6-7). They “need teaching, not attack” (5:7). We have to be willing to teach them their innocence, because learning innocence is the only way to end attack. As the Course says, the innocent do not perceive attack, and so they do not counter-attack.⁵ If we can communicate their innocence to them they will lose all desire to attack. In teaching them their innocence, we will allow them to teach us of our own innocence (5:8).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹Teachers of innocence, each in his own way, have joined together, taking their part in the unified curriculum of the Atonement. ²There is no unity of learning goals apart from this. ³There is no conflict in this curriculum, which has **one** aim however it is taught. ⁴Each effort made on its behalf is offered for the single purpose of **release** from guilt, to the eternal glory of God and His creation. ⁵And every teaching that points to this points straight to Heaven, and the peace of God. ⁶There is no pain, no trial, no fear that teaching this can fail to overcome. ⁷The power of God Himself supports this teaching, and **guarantees** its limitless results.

• Study Question •

6. *This paragraph gives a litmus test by which to measure the true effectiveness of any teaching. A teaching is effective if, regardless of its words, it teaches what?*

Our calling, then, is to become “teachers of innocence” (6:1). There are many such teachers, not just among Course students, but in many places, including other religious traditions such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Wiccan, or Native American, to name just a few. Teachers of innocence are found among therapists, school teachers, basketball coaches, sales clerks and doctors. They are everywhere. Each one plays a specified “part in the unified curriculum” (6:1). Every thought, word and deed that diminishes guilt, no matter what form it takes, is a part of God’s lesson of innocence. This—the reduction of guilt—is where everyone and everything joins together (6:2–4).

I am very aware that even in my fundamentalist Christian background, where there was much teaching about hellfire, and some teaching that actually increased fear and guilt, there was also a great deal of teaching about forgiveness and innocence. We were told that our sins were forgiven; that we had been washed “whiter than snow,” and that “there is no condemnation.” Many people, whether Sunday School teachers, ministers, or just church members,

⁵ "What danger can assail the wholly innocent? What can attack the guiltless? What fear can enter and disturb the peace of sinlessness" (T-19.IV(C)i.10:1-3).
(T-19.VI(C.i).10:1-3; T-13.In.1:1)

communicated love and forgiveness. Each in their own way was teaching innocence, and in that sense, they were, and are, part of this same “unified curriculum” the Course speaks of.

If the purpose is “release from guilt” then, whatever form the teaching may take, it “points straight to Heaven” (6:5). I love this aspect of the Course! I love its universality and inclusiveness. I can pick up a book by the Buddhist teacher, Cheri Huber, titled “There Is Nothing Wrong With You: Regardless of What You Were Taught to Believe,” and know that in its presentation of freedom from guilt it is part of the same teaching program as the Course. The identifying and unifying characteristic is that its purpose is to release from guilt. This is the core essential, and this is also the complete prescription that meets all of our needs (6:6). This is God’s message, what Christianity calls the Gospel or “good news” (6:7).

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Join your own efforts to the Power that cannot fail and **must** result in peace. ²No one can be untouched by teaching such as this. ³You will not see yourself **beyond** the power of God if you teach only this. ⁴You will **not** be exempt from the effects of this most holy lesson, which seeks but to restore what is the right of God’s creation. ⁵From everyone whom you accord release from guilt you will **inevitably** learn **your** innocence. ⁶The circle of Atonement **has** no end. ⁷And you will find ever-increasing confidence in your safe inclusion in the circle [in what is for all,] with everyone you bring within its safety and its perfect peace.

• Study Question •

7. *Based on your understanding of the Course, how do people that you bring into the circle of Atonement teach you that you are in it?*

Bringing someone into the circle of Atonement does not mean recruiting them into some organization; it does not even mean persuading them to become students of *A Course in Miracles*. It means teaching them of their innocence, and helping them to accept their own guiltlessness before God (or simply to accept their own guiltlessness, if belief in God presents a problem). To teach people that they are innocent is easier if they also accept the thought system of the Course, because that thought system presents a sound rationale for the end of guilt. It explains why nothing we think we have done has had any real consequence, and thus there is really nothing to forgive. Yet it is still possible to release people from guilt, even without that philosophical foundation.

This is our calling: to teach innocence. This “cannot fail and must result in peace” (7:1). Jesus rhapsodizes here about how effective this teaching is, how it touches everyone and ends our tendency to exclude ourselves from the mercy of God (7:2–4). We not only introduce others to their innocence, we substantiate our own innocence. One of my favorite Christian authors, Oswald Chambers, wrote about our temptation to put ourselves down. If a person declared, “Oh, I’m no saint!” he would ask, “And why not?” He said that people who cling to their

own guilt in this way are actually declaring, “Oh, I’m much too weak and helpless! I’m outside the reach of the Atonement.” And that, Chambers said, is an insult to the power of God. If we “teach only this” perfect innocence in others we will learn not to exclude ourselves from God’s power (7:3).

The picture drawn here is simple but beautiful. We confirm and solidify our own acceptance of innocence every time we extend innocence to include someone else (7:7). We grow stronger in faith as we open our arms to forgive another brother or sister, and to see them without guilt. The circle grows continuously, and as it grows so do we.

In my own life, even before I encountered the Course, the image of an expanding circle seemed to illustrate my own spiritual path. I began with a narrow circle, including only people who verbally “accepted Jesus as their Savior.” Almost immediately I expanded that circle to include people of many different Christian denominations; an allegiance to Christ was enough. Over the years the circle grew more and more inclusive, adding in people who “unconsciously” accepted God by allowing His love to flow through them, adding in other religions and people of no religion. Eventually, with the Course, the circle came to include literally everyone.

I have always loved the poem by Edwin Markham:

*He drew a circle that shut me out-
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.*

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Peace, then, be unto everyone who becomes a teacher of peace. ²For peace is the acknowledgment of perfect purity, from which no one is excluded. ³Within its holy circle is everyone whom God created as His Son. ⁴Joy is its unifying attribute, with no one left outside to suffer guilt alone. ⁵The power of God draws everyone to its safe embrace of love and union. ⁶Stand quietly within this circle, and attract all tortured minds to join with you in the safety of its peace and holiness. ⁷Abide with me within it, as a teacher of Atonement, **not** of guilt.

• Study Question •

8. *According to this paragraph, as well as this section, what state or condition does peace come from?*

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Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9, NIV). Many years ago, just after I graduated from college, a Christian adviser told me that he felt this was my calling, based on what I had told him. It rang true deep in my heart. Even my Enneagram category (9) indicates that I am a peacemaker. But we *all* are called to be peacemakers, teachers of peace (8:1). That is what will bring peace to us. “To have peace, teach peace to learn it” is the second lesson of the Holy Spirit (T-6.V(B)). (The first

lesson is a more general form of the same idea, "To have, give all to all" (T-6.V(A).)

Typical of the Course, it says here that peacemakers get peace. What you give, you get. And to teach peace, you need to acknowledge the purity of those you are teaching (8:2). You cannot truly be at peace with someone you are judging in a condemning way. Peace, to be complete, must include "everyone whom God created as His Son" (8:3). If you leave anyone outside the circle of peace and purity, you have an enemy, and you are no longer completely at peace yourself.

The circle of Atonement is also a circle of *joy* (8:4). Joy is the result of release from guilt. I've never known such joy as I experienced when I first truly accepted my guiltlessness (to the degree I was able to do so). I never realized how loud the dirge of guilt was in my mind until it stopped. Of course, guilt creeps back in, and my apprehension of innocence has to be renewed on a daily basis. I still have a long way to go to reach total freedom from guilt. But as guilt decreases, joy increases. And it isn't just my own joy. "No one is left outside" (8:4), and that, too, is a great source of joy.

What a beautiful calling we all have: to "stand quietly within this circle, and attract all tortured minds to joy with [us] in the safety of its peace and holiness" (8:6). God is calling everyone to come. Our job is to radiate such peace and joy that those who think they are outside the peace of God will be attracted to us, and to what we have found.

May all of us, every day, in every situation, stand with Jesus to teach Atonement and not guilt (8:7).

Paragraph 9

9. ¹Blessed are you * who teach with me. ²Our power * comes not of us, but of our Father. ³In guiltlessness we know Him, as He knows us guiltless. ⁴I stand within the circle, calling **you**, *, to peace. ⁵Teach peace with me *, and stand with me on holy ground. ⁶Remember for everyone your Father's power that He has given [them]. ⁷Believe not * that you cannot teach His perfect peace. ⁸Stand not outside *, but join with me within. ⁹Fail not the only purpose to which **my** teaching calls you *. ¹⁰Restore to God His Son as He created him, by teaching him his innocence.

Application (from notes by Robert Perry and Greg Mackie): Please read this again very slowly, inserting your name at the asterisks, and imagining that Jesus is speaking this paragraph personally to you.

Then go within for guidance. Jesus is calling you using poetic imagery, in which you stand inside the circle with him, stand on holy ground with him, and call to those who think they are outside, inviting them in with the message of their guiltlessness. The question you need to ask the Holy Spirit within is, "What would standing with Jesus on holy ground and teaching guiltlessness with him mean for me *in literal terms*?"

• Study Question •

9. *Can you put in your own words one sentence that captures the essence of Jesus' message in the final six sentences of the paragraph?*

“Blessed are the peacemakers” said Jesus in the Bible. “Blessed are you who teach with me,” he says here (9:1). They are the same thing. To teach with Jesus is to be a peacemaker, to teach peace, Atonement, and guiltlessness. There is *power* in such teaching, a power that comes from God and not from any human agency or ability (9:2). If you have experienced such teaching you’ve experienced that power. Even in traditional Christian evangelism, which, to me, seems an imperfect form of the message of forgiveness, there is still a message of release from guilt, and I believe it is that power that draws literally millions to “accept Christ as their Savior” and be “born again.” It was that power that pulled me to my feet in a Billy Graham Crusade in 1957 to give my life to God. I wanted to know that my “sins” were forgiven, and I received that gift that day.

We can give that release! “Release from guilt as you would be released” (T-13.X.10:1). We can give it because we know God in our guiltlessness (9:3). Jesus is calling us to be teachers of peace with him (9:4–5). That is our function in this world: to “remember for everyone” the power of guiltlessness that God the Father has given to them in creation (9:6). As you look on a person whose mind is tortured with guilt, believing herself to be outside the Atonement, condemned in the eyes of God, you can remember her innocence *for her*. And your remembering will help her remember, too.

You may feel incapable of communicating the message of peace and innocence to *everyone* you meet—and there may be certain ones to whom you think you will *never* be able to communicate it. But don’t think that! (9:7). The power to do it does not come from you, it comes from God; trust that. Let It flow through you. Join with Jesus; he will be with you if you let him.

When God called Moses to go to the Israelites in Egypt and deliver them, Moses objected.

"10 But Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' 11 Then the Lord said to him, 'Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.'" (Ex 4:10-12).

So don’t concern yourself about how you can do this, what you will say, or who to say it to (“*I do not have to worry about what to say or what to do, because He Who sent me will direct me*” (T-2.V.18:4).). Don’t fail in this! (9:9). This is your only purpose; this is your calling: to restore God’s own Son to be as God created Him, innocent, and offer that gift back to God (9:10).

Paragraph 10

10. ¹The crucifixion had [has] no part in the Atonement. ²Only the resurrection became my part in it. ³That is the symbol of the **release**

from guilt by guiltlessness. ⁴Whom you perceive as guilty you would crucify. ⁵Yet you **restore** guiltlessness to whomever you **see** as guiltless. ⁶Crucifixion is **always** the ego's aim. ⁷It sees everyone as guilty [*It sees as guilty*], and **by** its condemnation **it would kill**. ⁸The Holy Spirit sees only guiltlessness, and in His gentleness He would **release** from fear and re-establish the reign of love. ⁹The power of love is in His gentleness, which is of God and therefore cannot crucify nor suffer crucifixion. ¹⁰The temple you restore [*in your brother*] becomes **your** altar, for it was rebuilt through **you**. ¹¹And everything you give to God **is** yours. ¹²Thus He creates, and thus must **you** restore.

• **Study Question** •

10. Explain what part, if any, the crucifixion had in the Atonement?

The opening line of this paragraph (10:1) would raise the hackles of any good Christian fundamentalist and even many more moderate Christians. One of the “fundamentals” that is the basis of fundamentalism is the doctrine of *substitutionary atonement*, which states “that Jesus of Nazareth died – intentionally and willingly – on the cross as a propitiation, or substitute, for sinners” (Wikipedia article on substitutionary atonement). It makes the crucifixion the central means of atonement. The Course flies in the face of that doctrine and has understandably earned the label of “heresy” as far as fundamental Christians are concerned.

If you consider what the Course teaches as a whole, its statement about the crucifixion makes perfect sense. The traditional teaching is that Jesus died as a substitute for “sinners” who deserved death and hell, but the Course teaches that we are *not* sinners, but together comprise the one holy Son of God, God's perfect and eternally holy creation. We “remain as God created” us (W-pI.110.Title; W-pI.139.11:3). Since there is no sin, there is no punishment, and no need for any substitute to be punished in our place:

I was not "punished" because *you* were bad. The wholly benign lesson the Atonement teaches is lost if it is tainted with this kind of distortion in any form. (T-3.I.2:10-11)

So, how is the *resurrection* Jesus' part in the Atonement (10:2)? Jesus already discussed this in Chapter 3 Section I, “Atonement without Sacrifice.” He made the same distinction there: “The crucifixion did not establish the Atonement; the resurrection did” (T-3.I.1:2). You may want to read over that section now. After a fairly long discussion of how the idea of substitutionary atonement arises from our projection onto God of the idea that sin requires punishment, and of how “Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God” (T-3.I.4:1), Jesus explains how the resurrection contributed to the Atonement:

The resurrection demonstrated that nothing can destroy truth. Good can withstand any form of evil, as light abolishes forms of darkness. The Atonement is therefore the perfect lesson. It is the final demonstration that all the other lessons I taught are true. (T-3.I.7:6-9)

The crucifixion is the symbol of guilt as real; the resurrection is “the symbol of *release* from guilt” (10:3). Note the emphasis on “release” in the UrText. When we perceive someone as guilty we believe they deserve crucifixion (punishment); when we *see* someone as guiltless we are including them in the resurrection’s gift of guiltlessness (10:4–5). If we see guilt we are perceiving through our ego, which always “sees as guilty.” (Note that the UrText omits the word “everyone”; the ego simply “sees as guilty”; it has no other mode of perception!). However, “The Holy Spirit sees only guiltlessness” (10:8), so if we ask to share His perception that is how we will see things. The ego’s aim is crucifixion and death (10:6–7); the Holy Spirit’s aim is release from fear and the re-establishment of the reign of love (10:8). The aim determines the perception. We may not realize that, in identifying with the ego we are identifying with its intention to crucify, destroy, and kill, but we are. That’s why the Course tells us that, “The ego teaches that your function on earth is destruction” (T-13.IV.1:4). It informs us that we came here to die (T-29.VII.5:2). “For the ego does want to kill you” (T-13.II.5:6). The ego insanely believes that by causing our death it triumphs over God and validates its own independent existence, apart from God. It’s an insane belief, but that *is* what our egos believe. And we project that belief onto God and believe that He requires death to propitiate our sins.

Thus, the whole message of forgiveness that is so central to the Course depends on a reversal of this insanity of the ego. That’s why “any form” of the idea that Atonement is tied to the crucifixion must go: It undercuts the true message of Atonement. God’s power “cannot crucify, nor suffer crucifixion” (10:9), and this power, the power of love, is empowered by the gentleness of God Himself (10:9). As love and gentleness flow through us toward others, we restore the inner temple of those others, and that temple, which was rebuilt *through* us, becomes *our* altar of offering to God (10:10–11). Whatever we give to God is established as our own; what we give *is* ours. That is how God creates, by giving so that His creation becomes part of Himself, and therefore, that is how we must restore God’s Son to Him (10:11–12; compare with 9:10). By giving innocence to a brother or sister (that is, by perceiving him or her as guiltless), we are restoring the Sonship to God.

Paragraph 11

11.¹Each one you see you place within the holy circle of Atonement or leave outside, judging him fit for crucifixion or for redemption. ²If you bring him **into** the circle of purity, you will rest there **with** him. ³If you leave him without, you **join** him there. ⁴Judge not except in quietness which is **not** of you. ⁵Refuse to accept anyone as **without** the blessing of Atonement, and bring him **into** it by blessing him. ⁶Holiness **must** be shared, for therein lies everything that makes it holy. ⁷Come gladly to the holy circle, and look out in peace on all who think they are outside. ⁸Cast no one out, for here [this] is what **he** seeks along with you. ⁹Come, let us join him in the holy place of peace which is for all of us, united as one within the Cause of peace.

• Study Question •

11. *What if you see some people as guilty and some as guiltless, where will you see yourself?*

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When you look at someone do you see them as inside the holy circle of Atonement or outside? You make that judgment about every person you encounter, everyone you meet, everyone you even think of (11:1). Are they *in* or *out*? Are they a part of yourself, or something “other”? See them as inside and you can rest in peace with them, within the circle. See them as outside and you’ve placed yourself outside as well because the quintessential characteristic of the circle of Atonement is that *it includes everyone* (11:6). If you are not including everyone, you are not identifying with that holy circle. You cannot be holy *alone*. You cannot be holy and stand apart from anyone else at all! Sharing is what makes holy *holy*.

So, when you perceive another person, don’t try to judge or categorize them by yourself (11:4). Open yourself to God’s gentleness and quietness, and let the Holy Spirit judge *through* you. He always perceives only guiltlessness, so He will always perceive the innocence in everyone. If you find yourself tempted to see anyone as outside the blessing of the Atonement, *refuse* that thought, and choose instead to bless them (11:5). The other person may *think* that they are outside the circle, but it is your task to refuse to cast them out, to look on them in peace, and to recognize that, in their heart, whatever the appearance, they want the same thing you do (11:8). They want the peace of God. They want to live as one with God, “united as one within the Cause of peace,” that is, within God’s own Being (11:9). Everyone wants that, and you can offer it to them by acknowledging their place there with you.

• Study Question •

12. *According to this section, what is your calling, and what are the benefits of fulfilling that calling?*

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Answer Key

1. God's yearning for you and yours for Him.
2. B
3. E
4. We are asked to protect our brother's purity by carefully watching our own thoughts, and rejecting thoughts that would accuse him of guilt or see him as unworthy of God's Love or of our own love.
5. You realize she does not know how to be free of pain, and so you teach her by seeing her as innocent.
6. Guiltlessness.
7. Because you brought them in, they become symbols to you of the fact that you are already in. Their gratitude to you also will teach you that you are in the circle.
8. Purity, or freedom from guilt.
9. Stand with me and restore God and His power to your brothers by teaching them of their innocence.
10. The physical event of the crucifixion played no part in the Atonement, but Jesus' way of perceiving that event led to the Atonement. The crucifixion was the symbol of guilt, of what the ego wants to do to us.
11. You will see yourself as partly in the circle and partly out.
12. Your calling is to teach your brothers that they are God's guiltless Son.
Benefits: release from guilt, peace, joining with other teachers of peace, standing with Jesus, release from suffering, see yourself as inside the power of God, receive effects of your lesson, be taught your innocence by those you teach, be confident you are in the circle, joy, love and union, build your own altar.