

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM® Text, Chapter 23

### The Escape from Conflict

#### Section I

## *Walk You in Glory*

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary.

### Notes on Chapter 23

This is a somewhat unusual chapter. It has only four sections, and is only 17 pages long. (The average length of chapters in the Text, in the Complete and Annotated Edition, is about 30 pages.) The length of the sections in paragraphs is very uneven: 6, 12, 23, and 15. Section III, “The Laws of Chaos,” comprises 40% of the chapter, clearly the core of it. Yet, despite its short length, this is one of the most challenging chapters in the Text. It picks up on the task of exposing the ego’s thought system that was begun in a previous long and difficult section, “The Obstacles to Peace,” back in Chapter 19. We’ve enjoyed a kind of up-beat interlude since then, but now, in “The Laws of Chaos,” Jesus returns with a vengeance to the effort to get us to recognize with stark clarity what our egos really represent and what they are based upon, and to begin to grasp the extent (only seemingly terrifying) to which our entire lives have been governed by the ego’s insanity. So, get ready for a dark journey. You may want to supplement your study with reading some of the more encouraging and uplifting passages in the Course, such as Workbook lessons 101 to 103, and 109. You may have your own favorite passages.

My first dive into this chapter was in a 5-day-long workshop with Ken Wapnick in 1991, titled, “Undoing the Laws of Chaos.” There were perhaps 25 of us there, in class for five to six hours every day. At the end, a group of us seriously considered making up T-shirts with the saying, “I survived ‘The Laws of Chaos,’” because it was such an intense experience. We won’t try to cram it all into five days, but I anticipate that it will probably take us eight weeks to get through the chapter, with five of them spent on the five laws. So, get ready for a dark journey. You may want to supplement your study with reading some of the more encouraging and uplifting passages in the Course, such as Workbook lessons 101 to 103, and 109. You may have your own favorite passages. Use them.

The chapter begins, in Section I, talking about a “war against yourself” that we are all engaged in due to our belief in enemies: a war that amounts to an attack on our true Self.

The second section expands on that theme, being titled, “The War Against Yourself,” pointing out that, being a conflict between two illusions, the conflict itself is an illusion. The third section, the longest in the chapter, then expounds upon five “preposterous” beliefs that it ironically terms “the laws of chaos.” (Chaos, of course, is really the *absence* of law.) These beliefs are “the laws that rule the world you made,” in which we perceive enemies, value attack, and are at war with our true Self. The chapter ends with a section titled, “Above the Battleground.” It calls us to abandon the belief in attack and to “see no one from the battleground,” thus bringing an end to all the conflict.

You might want to read through the whole chapter in one or two sittings, and as you do, try to follow this theme of our value of enemies and attack, and the war upon ourselves, and how we can rise above it. At least keep this in mind as you study the chapter in ensuing weeks.

## Paragraph 1

Do you not see the opposite of frailty and weakness is sinlessness? <sup>2</sup>Innocence is *strength*, and nothing else is strong. <sup>3</sup>The sinless cannot fear, and fear of any kind is weakness. <sup>4</sup>The show of strength attack would use to cover frailty conceals it not, for how can the unreal be hidden? <sup>5</sup>No one is strong who has an enemy, and no one can attack unless he thinks he has. <sup>6</sup>Belief in enemies is therefore the belief in *weakness*, and what is weak is not the will of God. <sup>7</sup>Being opposed to it, it is its “enemy.”<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>And God is feared as an opposing will.

### • Study Question •

1. Which of the following best summarizes what seems to be the main thought of this paragraph?
  - A. *Innocence and strength are identical; we believe we are weak because we believe we are sinful.*
  - B. *The only reason we attack is that we think we have enemies.*
  - C. *Attack on another is just a false show of strength in an attempt to hide weakness.*

The opening question seems to express surprise that we don’t understand that “the opposite of frailty and weakness is sinlessness” (1:1). Yet, I’m sure if I had asked you what the opposite of weakness is, you would never have responded, “sinlessness.” You (and probably everyone) would have responded, “strength.” Indeed, many thesauri list “strength” as the antonym of “weakness.”

How is sinlessness the *opposite* of weakness? Sinlessness is innocence, and more often than not, we believe that innocence *is weakness*, not its opposite. But Jesus flatly declares, “*Innocence is strength*, and nothing else is strong” (1:2). This flies in the face of

<sup>1</sup>. Pronoun clarification: “Being opposed to it [God’s will], it [what is weak] is its [God’s will’s] ‘enemy.’”

our every instinct, doesn't it? And yet, Jesus seems surprised at our thick-headedness: "Don't you see *yet*?" So—how can sinlessness be the opposite of weakness? It seems hard to believe.

So Jesus proceeds to give a reasoned proof of his assertion, although not strictly in logical order. A sinless person does not attack, nor do they believe they have enemies. They "cannot fear" (1:3), so they do not attack. He points out that no one attacks unless they believe they have an enemy (1:5 latter part). If you fear an enemy, you must be vulnerable, that is, *weak* (1:5 first part). Therefore, your attack on your enemy is really posturing, a show of strength in an attempt to cover up your weakness or frailty (1:4)<sup>2</sup>. In conclusion, therefore, "Belief in enemies is therefore the belief in *weakness*" (1:6). And innocence, and nothing else, is strong.

In other words: If you value attack to protect yourself from enemies, you must believe that you are weak, and anyone who values attack is not sinless. Innocence is thus the *refusal to see enemies*. Seeing another as an enemy is to see myself as weak, vulnerable to attack because I am separate from God (that is, sinful). It is a case of projection: As I see another, I see myself. My judgment on the world is my judgment on myself. To see enemies thus becomes a war against myself (2:1). If I know my Self, I see innocence everywhere.

Furthermore, when I see enemies and thus see myself as weak, I end up seeing *God* as an enemy. This occurs because I know instinctively that weakness, which is what I am, isn't His will. If what I am is *not* His will, I must be something *opposed* to His will. Therefore, I must be His enemy, and He mine, so I end up fearing God (1:6–8).

Of course—and this is really the point, I think—none of this is real. It's all something made up in our confused minds.

## Paragraph 2

2 How strange indeed becomes this war against yourself! <sup>2</sup>You will believe that everything you use for sin can hurt you and become your enemy. <sup>3</sup>And you will fight against it and try to weaken it because of this. <sup>4</sup>And you will think that you succeeded and attack again. <sup>5</sup>It is as certain you will fear what you attack as it is sure that you will love what you perceive as sinless. <sup>6</sup>He walks in peace who travels sinlessly along the way love shows him. <sup>7</sup>For love walks with him there, protecting him from fear. <sup>8</sup>And he will see only the sinless, who cannot attack.

<sup>2</sup> There is a kind of ironic aside tacked on to 1:4: "...for how can the unreal be hidden?" He is saying our show of strength is an attempt to cover up our weakness, but it cannot possibly work because you cannot *hide* something that isn't real—meaning the weakness!

• **Study Question** •

2. *How is it that what seems to be a war against external enemies, including even God, is in reality a war against ourselves?*
  - A. *All of our attacks boomerang against ourselves because “what goes around comes around.”*
  - B. *The enemies we think we see are nothing more than projections of our own belief in sin.*
  - C. *Since love walks with us protecting us, the only thing that can possibly be attacking me is myself.*

We've conjured up a war against ourselves. Isn't it strange? And it gets even more bizarre (2:1) Everything we use to prop up our imaginary war will inevitably (in our minds) turn against us. Every weapon we use to attack will, because we believe it capable of inflicting injury, appear to have the same power toward *us*, and will therefore become our enemy (2:2). I believe this applies even to *persons* we pull into our war, thinking of them as allies, only to end up fearing them, attacking them, and trying to tear them down (2:3). You will imagine your attack has worked, so you'll do it again, but you are only falling deeper and deeper into your pit of fear (2:4).

One simple example, on a more global scale: nuclear weapons. We believe we have enemies. We make nuclear bombs to protect ourselves and threaten the enemy. But we end up fearing the very weapon we have created.

Or consider a “friend” who helps you cheat on your spouse. That friend then becomes a threat because they know something that can be used against you. You end up attacking them.

Jesus says this is true of *everything* we “use for sin.” Once we start down this road of perceiving enemies and attacking them (in “self-defense,” of course), everything becomes an enemy. Even God. It's a law: “Everything you attack you will fear” (2:5).

But there is another way! This too is a law: “You will love what you perceive as sinless” (2:5). If we perceive our own sinlessness (freedom from guilt) and that of everyone around us, we will love ourselves and love those around us. We will walk in peace, instead of attacking and fearing everything around us (2:5–6). When Jesus explains our peace will be because “love walks with him there, protecting him from fear” (2:7), I suspect that “love” walking with us really means *God* walking with us. (Also, see footnote 2.) If we see “*only* the sinless, who *cannot* attack,” there will never be any cause for fear (2:8).

It comes back to the very challenging notion of perceiving *everyone* as sinless. This means re-evaluating everything that I now think of as attack, and truly seeing it, not as attack, but as a call for help. The intriguing thing here (in 2:8) is the sequence of our perception of sinlessness and attack. We—or at least I—tend to think that my perception of *attack* has to change in order for me to perceive someone as sinless. But the implication here is that what has to change first is my perception of the person as sinless. Once I see him or her as sinless—once I recognize that the only reality of this person is

the Self that God created sinless—then, I will realize that nothing they do or say *can* be attack. If it isn't love, it must be a confused *call for* love. And that recognition of their true, sinless nature will come *only* as I allow myself to know that same truth about *myself*. As long as I believe there is sin *in me*, any imperfection, any element of attack, I will project that and it will color my perception of everyone and everything in the world.

### Paragraph 3

**3** Walk you in glory with your head held high, and fear no evil.<sup>3</sup> <sup>2</sup>The innocent are safe, because they *share* their innocence. <sup>3</sup>Nothing they see is harmful, for their awareness of the truth releases everything from the illusion of harmfulness. <sup>4</sup>And what seemed harmful now stands shining in their innocence, released from sin and fear, and happily returned to love. <sup>5</sup>They share the strength of love because they looked on innocence. <sup>6</sup>And every error disappeared because they saw it not. <sup>7</sup>Who looks for glory finds it where it is. <sup>8</sup>Where *could* it be but in the innocent?

#### • Study Question •

3. *When we have accepted our own innocence, we are strong. We can walk in the world without fear. Why? What happens to our perception of those around us?*
  - A. *We see them without fear because we know God protects the innocent against all their enemies.*
  - B. *We are fearless because we share our innocence with those around us and realize that all appearance of harmfulness is an illusion.*
  - C. *Those around us recognize our innocence and no longer seek to harm us.*

•

If we are walking with Love, or God (2:7), we are walking with glory (3:1). We are free of guilt, our heads are held high, and we fear no evil. We are safe because we *share* our innocence (3:2). That is, instead of projecting sin and guilt onto others, we see in them the same love and innocence we have discovered within ourselves. We cannot perceive harmfulness because there is none within us (3:3). Those who were perceived before as harmful can now be seen shining in innocence, free of sin, no longer fearful. In our awakening, we have returned *them* to love (3:4).

<sup>3</sup>. Psalm 23:4 (KJV): “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” In the above allusion, fearing no evil is made possible by sharing our innocence with all we see, so that what looked harmful now shines with innocence. Then, no matter where we walk, we will walk in glory—surrounded by divine radiance rather than “the shadow of death”—with love walking beside us, protecting us.

Like the love of God, we have looked upon only innocence, and so, like love, we share its strength (3:5). All errors have disappeared because we simply *do not see error*, we overlook it (3:6). (We've talked about seeing error instead of sin, but when we realize something is only an error and not a sin, we at that point can overlook it or look past it, realizing it is an insubstantial veil attempting to hide the truth.)

When we walk in glory (shining with the radiance of God's love), we *look for* glory in everyone, and therefore, we find it there (3:7), where it must be, because everyone shares our innocence (3:8).

What a contrast this is to the picture at the beginning of paragraph 2, where we walk surrounded by enemies, inconstant fear of attack. It's a high picture; few of us live in that frame of mind, free of all perception of enemies and all sense of fear. But this is the promise of the Course. This is the state of mind to which it is leading us.

## Paragraph 4

**4** Let not the little nuisances and interferers pull you toward littleness. <sup>2</sup>There can be no attraction of guilt in innocence. <sup>3</sup>Think what a happy world you walk, with truth beside you! <sup>4</sup>Do not give up this world of freedom for a little sigh of seeming sin, nor for a tiny stirring of guilt's attraction. <sup>5</sup>Would you, for all these little and meaningless distractions, lay Heaven aside? <sup>6</sup>Your destiny and purpose are far beyond them, in the clean peace where littleness does not exist. <sup>7</sup>Your purpose is at variance with littleness of any kind. <sup>8</sup>And so it is at variance with sin.

### • Study Question •

4. *What are the "little interferers" Jesus asks us to avoid? What temptation is he asking us to resist?*
- A. *The little interferers are the people who conflict with our spiritual intentions and draw us into conflict.*
  - B. *The little interferers are the temptations of the world's pleasures and attractions.*
  - C. *The little interferers are our desires to belittle our brothers by finding sin and guilt in them.*

Life is full of "little nuisances and interferes," isn't it? Often, it is these "little" things that pull us back into littleness, back into victimhood (4:1). Jesus simply tells us, "Don't let them do that." We can lift our head high and walk in glory any time we choose to do so. Grasp your innocence, and guilt will have no attraction (4:2). We can remind ourselves constantly that truth walks beside us, love walks beside us, and God goes with us wherever we go (4:3). We can look out with Him on a sinless world! Let us remind ourselves over and over of what is always possible, and refuse to give up the happiness and peace "for a little sigh of seeming sin...a tiny stirring of guilt's attraction" (4:4).

Are we really going to let the little nuisances of life rob us of Heaven? We are not so foolish! (4:5) We have a high calling, a “destiny and purpose far beyond” the distractions of the world, in which we dwell in “the clean peace where littleness does not exist” (4:6). As the Workbook calls us to remember: “Let me remember what my purpose is” (W-257).

## Paragraph 5

5 Let us not let littleness lead God’s Son into temptation.<sup>4</sup> <sup>2</sup>His glory is beyond it, measureless and timeless as is eternity. <sup>3</sup>Do not let time intrude upon your sight of him. <sup>4</sup>Leave him not frightened and alone in his temptation, but help him rise above it and perceive the light of which he is a part. <sup>5</sup>Your innocence will light the way to his, and so is yours protected and kept in your awareness. <sup>6</sup>For who can know his glory and perceive the little and the weak about him? <sup>7</sup>Who can walk trembling in a fearful world and realize that Heaven’s glory shines in him?

### • Study Question •

5. *When a brother or sister is in their ego, seeing themselves as little, frightened and alone, they will see attack as a way out, as we all do. How are we asked to respond when this occurs?*
  - A. *To see ourselves as innocent and therefore strong; and by this perception of innocence to see the light of which he is a part, and thereby help his rise above littleness.*
  - B. *To explain to him or her what they are doing, and thereby remind them of who they really are.*
  - C. *To take advantage of their weakness by making them guilty for their failure, thereby enabling ourselves to see ourselves as stronger and more holy.*

The first line might be understood to apply to ourselves, since we are all the Son of God, but I believe that, based on the remainder of the paragraph, it is intended to apply to our relationship partner, and to anyone with whom we are in relationship. We are being asked not to project littleness onto him, or her, which can lead *them* into temptation to see themselves that way (5:1). When we project guilt onto another person, it evokes feelings of guilt in them, or anger and defensiveness. Some form of littleness. Their glory is far beyond such littleness; they deserve better (5:2).

<sup>4</sup>. Matthew 6:13 (KJV): “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” In the above passage, it is not God but our own littleness that leads our brother into temptation, because it sees him as time-bound, little, and alone. Later in the paragraph we are asked to “Leave him not frightened and alone in his temptation.”

When we are advised to “not let time intrude upon your sight of him” (5:3), we should ask ourselves what that means. It means refusing to allow anyone’s past or imagined future to color our perception of them in the present. We are admonished to forget our brother’s or sister’s past, and to meet him or her as if freshly born this day, with no past at all. This is the only way we will be able to see another person as the perfect creation of God they are. Instead, we need to turn within, to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We should not what we believe we have learned from the past to guide us in the present:

<sup>5</sup>When your peace is threatened or disturbed in any way, say to yourself:

*<sup>6</sup>I do not know what anything, including this, means.*

*<sup>7</sup>And so I do not know how to respond to it.*

*<sup>8</sup>And I will not use my own past learning as the light to guide me now.  
(T-14.XII.8:5–8 (CE)).<sup>5</sup>*

When we allow past “learning” to guide our present reactions, we are liable to leave our brother “frightened and alone in his temptation” (5:4). He, or she, is being “tempted by the wrong voice” ((T-2.III.11:2 (CE))), that is, by the ego. If *we* listen to our egos, we leave our brother or sister without our help. Instead, we are called upon by the Holy Spirit to “help him rise above it and perceive the light of which he is a part” (5:4). We can’t do that while we allow our perception of him to be distorted by memories of his past “sins.” If *I* don’t see “the light of which he is a part,” how can I possibly help *him* see it?

When we turn away from our egos it helps those around us to turn away from theirs, and their perception of the truth in turn helps *us* keep our own light and glory in our awareness (5:5). When we are filled with awareness of the glory of God within us, it’s impossible to “perceive the little and the weak” in those around us (5:6). We can’t help seeing others as guiltless when we see ourselves that way (5:7).

## Paragraph 6

**6** Nothing around you but is part of you. <sup>2</sup>Look on it lovingly, and see the light of Heaven in it. <sup>3</sup>So will you come to understand all that is given you. <sup>4</sup>In kind forgiveness will the world sparkle and shine, and everything you once thought sinful now be reinterpreted as part of Heaven. <sup>5</sup>How beautiful it is to walk, clean and redeemed and happy, through a world in bitter need of the redemption that your innocence bestows upon it! <sup>6</sup>What can you value more than this? <sup>7</sup>For here is *your* salvation and *your* freedom. <sup>8</sup>And it must be complete if you would recognize it.

<sup>5</sup> This concept is so important to the Course’s understanding of how we look upon each other that I have written a short article expounding a number of the passages in the Course that deal with time and perception. See the Appendix to this section’s commentary.

• **Study Question** •

6. *Everything we see is nothing more than a part of us. How we see it, then, becomes all-important to our own salvation and freedom. How are we asked to see the world, and why? (Essay answer, in no more than three or four sentences, please.)*

Everything you see is part of you. How amazing is that?! (6:1) Even some scientists are now saying, “Everything I see is ‘me’” (*Beyond Biocentrism*, Robert Lanza, p. 121). “Everything we see *is* the mind” (ibid, p. 123). We can tie ourselves into mental knots trying to figure out how everything can be me, and also is you and billions of other selves, although it may be helpful to realize that separate “me’s” is also something that does not really exist! But for the moment, whether or not that seems helpful, just sit with the idea that everything you see is part of you. That All is One, whether or not you understand it yet. This includes *everything* we see: other people; animals and plants; rocks; oceans; the sun, moon, stars, and distant galaxies! It’s all part of you. It’s all in Mind.

This should affect how we interact with all these things that *seem* to be separate from us. Whatever it is, it’s *not* separate. When I attack it, misuse it, abuse it, disrespect it, or ignore how it (or they) are being treated, I am doing it *to myself*. It’s *part of me* that is being mistreated, *part of me* that is being murdered, *part of me* that is starving to death or being sickened by pollution. And, specific to the context in which this occurs, this is particularly true of your partner in every relationship you have.

So, we are enjoined to look on everyone and everything “lovingly, and see the light of Heaven in it” (6:2). Imagine being able to see the light of Heaven in absolutely everything! When that happens, we will be blown away by everything that has been given to us (6:3) — *everything* is ours! It’s all a part of my being, my essence. The whole world will “sparkle and shine,” and where we once saw something “sinful,” we will now understand it all as “part of Heaven” (6:4).

You and I are meant to accept Atonement for ourselves, to completely recognize our own innocence, and walk through the world “clean and redeemed and happy,” offering redemption to a world “in bitter need” of it, a redemption that we are offering simply by perceiving our own innocence and theirs (6:5).

Your forgiveness of the world “must be complete if you would recognize” “*your* salvation and *your* freedom” (6:6–8). Here, we return to the message of total forgiveness with nothing excluded that was previously stated in T-22.VIII.7:1 (CE) and T-22.III.4:7 (CE):

And faith in innocence is faith in sin if the belief excludes one living thing and holds it out apart from its forgiveness.

When you have looked upon each other with complete forgiveness, from which no error is excluded and nothing kept hidden, what mistakes can there be anywhere you cannot overlook? <sup>2</sup>What form of suffering could block your sight, preventing you from seeing past it?

Forgiveness must be complete. We are here to forgive the world. And when we do, the sight of it will be amazing!

Can you imagine how beautiful those you forgive will look to you? <sup>2</sup>In no fantasy have you ever seen anything so lovely. <sup>3</sup>Nothing you see here, sleeping or waking, comes near such loveliness, and nothing will you value like unto this, nor hold so dear. <sup>4</sup>Nothing that you remember that made your heart seem to sing with joy has ever brought you even a little part of the happiness this sight will bring you. <sup>5</sup>*For you will see the Son of God.* (T-17.II.1:1–5 (CE))

**Legend:**

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is exactly the same as the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often quite different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the FIP edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. Passages that lie outside the current section will continue to have footnoted references. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

# Answer Key

1. A

2. B

3. B

4. C

5. A

6. We are asked to look on everything lovingly and see the light of Heaven in it. We look with kind forgiveness, and allow everything we thought was sinful to be reinterpreted as part of Heaven. We see the world in bitter need, and we bestow the redemption of innocence upon it all.