

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 25

The Holy Spirit's Justice

Section V

Christ Stands Before You

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

Overview of Section V

Overview

Paragraph 1

The state of sinlessness is merely this: The whole desire to attack is gone, and so there is no reason to perceive the Son of God as other than he is. ²The need for guilt is gone, because it has no purpose and is meaningless without the goal of sin. ³Attack and sin are bound as one illusion, each the cause and aim and justifier of the other.¹ ⁴Each is meaningless alone, but seems to draw a meaning from the other. ⁵Each depends upon the other for whatever sense it seems to have. ⁶And no one could believe in one unless the other were the truth, for each attests the other *must* be true.

¹. When sin is framed as an *act* in the Course, it is basically synonymous with attack; it is attack seen as having real effects. Here, however, sin is framed as a *state*. In this sense, we could define it as “the state of sinfulness” (in contrast to “the state of sinlessness” from the beginning of the paragraph). So the meaning of this sentence is this: “The act of attack and the state of sinfulness are bound together as one illusion, each the cause and aim and justifier of the other.”

• **Study Question** •

1. *“Attack and sin are bound as one illusion, each the cause and aim and justifier of the other” (1:3). Try to think about how this sentence is true, and explain in your own words how sin and attack each cause and seem to justify the other.*

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What is sinlessness like? Can you imagine it? How would it feel if you absolutely knew you were sinless? The Course here gives at least part of the answer: When you have accepted your own sinlessness, there is absolutely no remaining desire to attack anyone. And therefore you see the perfect Christ in everyone else (1:1).

Why does recognizing my own sinlessness result in the loss of desire to attack, and the recognition of the Son of God in everyone else? Well, if I am sinless, there is no longer any reason for or need for guilt, because I no longer need to project my imagined sin onto others (1:2). The unstated assumption here is that the only reason we ever attack another person is because we are attempting to offload our guilt by making another person guilty. Back in T-12.I.4:1, Jesus told us: “There is nothing to prevent you from recognizing all calls for help as exactly what they are except your own imagined need to attack.”

If I have no sin I have no guilt to dump on anyone else, and therefore no need to attack. Without that “imagined need to attack,” I am free to perceive the Son of God in them. The two — attack and sin — are inextricably connected, almost as one (1:3). Each is “cause and aim and justifier of the other” (1:3).

Let’s unpack that a bit: “cause and aim and justifier.”

First, attack and sin cause one another. If someone attacks me, I perceive it as sin. If someone sins, he or she seems to merit my attack. And it all becomes a vicious circle, feeding on itself and mushrooming from minor annoyances to genocide.

Second, sin is the aim of attack, and attack is the aim of sin. I think “aim” is used here in the sense of goal. This speaks to the twisted motivation of the ego. Our ego leads us to attack one another because it wants us to feel sinful and guilty. It leads us to perceive sin in others because it wants us to attack them.

Third, sin and attack justify one another, or seem to. This third term is emphasized; it is the most important of the three. When a person does something we judge as a sin, attack — some form of punishment — seems entirely justified; thus, sin justifies attack. As for the converse, attack justifying sin, I believe an example might be how when someone is “clearly” attacking us, we feel freed up to say and do things that we’d normally condemn as wrong. Our “imagined need to attack” is given freedom to express itself.

Without attack the concept of sin is meaningless; and without sin, the concept of attack is unimaginable (1:4). Why would anyone want to attack the perfectly innocent and benevolent? To have either one be real both must be real. Belief in one automatically implies belief in the other. “Sin” means you’ve been attacked (or about to be attacked); “attack” means someone has sinned (1:5–6).

These are the reasons why the sinless must lack any desire to attack.

Paragraph 2

2 Attack makes Christ your “enemy,” and God along with Him. ²Must you not be afraid, with enemies like these? ³And must you not be fearful of *yourself*? ⁴For you have hurt yourself and made your Self your enemy. ⁵And now you must believe you are not you, but alien to yourself and “something else,” a something to be feared instead of loved. ⁶Who would attack whatever he sees as wholly innocent? ⁷And who, because he wishes to attack, can fail to think it must be guilty to deserve the wish, and leave him innocent?² ⁸For who could see the Son of God as innocent and wish him dead?

• Study Question •

2. *List the false beliefs about yourself that arise from believing that you are guilty of attack (see 2:3–5).*

It gets worse. Desire to attack not only implies a belief in sin in another and creates a belief in sin in oneself, it makes God and Christ into your supposed enemies (2:1). After all, we know that “sin” is disobedience to God. If I am a dirty, rotten sinner, of course I will be afraid of God (2:2)! But it’s an important concept to get: Any fear I have of God comes from my belief in my own sinfulness. And if I believe that I have sinned and caused my own damnation, I must be afraid of myself as well (2:3).

Haven’t we all felt a nagging distrust of ourselves? We’re sure we are going to screw things up somewhere, somehow. After all, we’ve done it before, over and over (or so we think); the odds of our doing it again are pretty overwhelming. By our sinful acts we’ve hurt ourselves as well as others (2:4). We’re actually afraid of our Good Self because, like God, It must be terribly disappointed in us! Why else do we shout down our consciences, numb ourselves with mindless TV, or drink or do drugs to stop the accusing voice in our heads? We are afraid of what the Voice will say.

In a truly weird delusion, we’ve dissociated from our True Self and believe that we have become something else, a sinful self, afraid the judgment of our True Self, and afraid of what we believe we’ve become because of its perversity — we fear ourselves instead of loving ourselves (2:5). We think we are not only separate from God and from one another, we think we are separate from our Self!

As I said previously, “Who would attack whatever he sees as wholly innocent?” (2:6). If you are attacking anything or anyone, you must think it (or he/she) is guilty, and thus deserving of your wish to attack, leaving you completely innocent in the process (2:7). It’s really an egocentric way of thinking: “If I want to

². “It must be guilty” refers to whatever he wishes to attack (the previous sentence refers to “whatever he sees”). We could render this sentence’s meaning, therefore, as follows: “And who, because he wishes to attack, can fail to think that what he attacks must be guilty in order to *deserve* his wish to attack it, thus leaving himself innocent?”

attack it, it must be guilty!" If you actually saw the innocent Son of God in your brother or sister, you could never attack them, never wish them dead (2:8).

Paragraph 3

³ Christ stands before you both, each time you look on one another. ²He has not gone because your eyes are closed. ³But what is there to see by searching for your savior, seeing Him through sightless eyes? ⁴It is not Christ you see by looking thus. ⁵It is the enemy, confused with Christ, you look upon—and hate *because* there is no sin in him for you to see. ⁶Nor do you hear his plaintive call, unchanged in content in whatever form the call is made, that you unite with him, and join with him in innocence and peace. ⁷And yet, beneath the ego's senseless shrieks, such is the call that God has given him that you might hear in him His Call in *you*, and answer by returning unto God what is His own.³

• Study Question •

3. What does "looking thus" refer to? (3:4).

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In the Bible, Jesus reportedly said, "For where two or three meet together in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20, REB). The meaning there is referring to two or three who are recognizing the Christ nature in themselves and one another ("in my name" means "in my nature"), and asserts that Jesus is there as an additional Presence.

Here, the Course says, "Christ stands before you both, each time you look on one another" (3:1). It sounds similar but it means something quite different. When any two people look on one another, Christ is there in each of them. Christ is the True Self of all of us, and Christ stands before us when we look at anyone. When I look at you, I am looking at Christ. When you look at me, you are looking at Christ. And you or I could actually see Christ if we opened our spiritual eyes: "He has not gone because your eyes are closed" (3:2).

It does no good for us to search for Christ in a brother or sister using our physical vision; our body's eyes are "sightless" (3:3). Back in Chapter 22 we read:

Yet how can sight which stops at nothingness as if it were a solid wall see truly? It is held back by form, having been made to guarantee that nothing else but form will be perceived. These eyes, made not to see, will never see. (T-22.IV.6:1–3 (CE), T-22.III.5:8-6:1 (FIP))

Our body's eyes were made not to see! Their purpose was to distract us from the truth. So using them to try to see Christ in one another will never work. Using them, it isn't Christ we see (3:4)! Rather, we see an enemy whom we have confused

³. Luke 20:25 (KJV): "And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's." In the above allusion, what we render unto God that is God's is *ourselves*.

with Christ, and we hate this enemy (our false image of Christ, whom we have come to fear and to believe is our enemy), hate him just because there is no sin in him for us to see (3:5).

If you grew up in a Christian church that taught sin and damnation, you've probably experienced such feelings about Jesus. You may have thought, "Why does he have to be so damned perfect?" It's just unfair. He has all the advantages: Birthed by God in perfection, and actually God in human form, how can he expect me, who (according to what I've been taught) was born in sin, ever be expected to live up to his standards? So we harbor a secret, guilty resentment of Jesus, and we live in fear of his final judgment on us.

And, just because we feel so negatively about Christ, we cannot afford to see Christ in one another. Perfection or sinlessness in another person seems like a direct threat to us, who are so far from perfect in our eyes. Thus we don't hear the Christ in him or her calling to us to join with Him "in innocence and peace" (3:6). Our eyes see grotesque forms of this "call for love" that appear ugly to our eyes. Our ears hear "the ego's senseless shrieks" in one another, and fail to discern with our spirit the call in them that would enable us to hear the same call in ourselves, and answer that call by reclaiming for God the Christ He has given to us all (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4 The Son of God asks only this of you: that you return to him what is his due, that you may share in it with him. ²Alone does neither have it. ³So must it remain useless to both. ⁴Together, it will give to each an equal strength to save the other, and save himself along with him. ⁵*Forgiven* by you, your savior offers you salvation. ⁶*Condemned* by you, he offers death to you. ⁷In everyone you see but the reflection of what you chose to have him be to you. ⁸If you decide against his proper function,⁴ the only one he really has in truth, you are depriving him of all the joy he would have found if he fulfilled the role God gave to him. ⁹But think not Heaven is lost to him alone. ¹⁰Nor can it be regained unless the way is shown to him through you, that you may find it, walking by his side.

• Study Question •

4. *The phrase "return to him [the Son of God, i.e. your brother] what is his due" parallels the phrase in the previous sentence, "returning unto God what is His Own." They must mean the same thing. We answer God's Call in our brother; then, by returning something to our brother. Only by returning it to our brother can we share in it. What is it?*

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⁴. "His proper function" is to offer you salvation, to be your savior. You decide for this function by forgiving him. It is your forgiveness that sets him free to assume his function as your savior.

I find it interesting that we are asked to “return” something to the Son of God (4:1). What, exactly, are we asked to return? What does it mean to return it? Who is the “Son of God” in this transaction? Is the Son Jesus? The abstract Christ?

I find a clue in the second sentence: “Alone does neither have it” (4:2). Clearly this is talking about me and my brother/sister. What this implies, to me, is that the Son of God who is asking us to return to him what is his due is not Jesus or the abstract Christ, but our brother, or more precisely, Christ in our sister or brother. This is confirmed by 3:1: “Christ stands before you both, each time you look on one another.”

What, then, is “what is his due” that we are being asked to return, and how do we return it? The preceding paragraph said that when we look on one another, Christ is there, calling to us “to unite with him, and join with him in innocence and peace” (3:6). To answer that call is to return “unto God what is His own” (3:7). What is due to Christ, what belongs to God, is the recognition and praise of God’s perfect creation, the sinless Christ in our brothers and sisters. In a word, total forgiveness, which is our only function here. “Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world” (W-62.title). To give God His own, to return to the Son of God what is his due, is to embrace our function of forgiveness, as saviors of the world through forgiveness. It is to set aside what our eyes and ears show us and to use our spiritual sight to behold the Christ in one another.

When Jesus says that alone none of us “has it” (4:2), it’s not exactly clear what “it” means. The previous use of “it” was in 4:1, where we are asked to return to the Son of God what is his due, “that you may share in it with him.” The key seems to be the words “share” and “alone.” It seems to mean that we cannot experience the fullness of our Identity as Christ as long as we are operating as separate, distinct individuals. Egos. This is a shared Identity, as we are told in the Workbook:

”Christ is God’s Son as He created Him. He is the Self we share, uniting us with one another, and with God as well” (W-pII.6.1:1-2 (FIP)).

Because it is shared it cannot be experienced alone. Our Christ Self is useless to us (4:3) if we try to experience it in isolation, refusing to acknowledge its shared nature in our brothers and sisters. Shared with another, “together,” it empowers us to save one another and ourselves (4:4).

What’s clear here is that recognizing in and sharing the Christ Identity with another person is equivalent to forgiving that person. To see another as an individualization of Christ is to see them without sin, and when I do that for anyone, I do it for myself as well (4:5). But if I condemn this other person, seeing sin in them, they will reflect that back to me and thus “offer death” to me (4:6).

My perception of anyone else as sinful or sinless is solely the result of my own choice of how I want to see them (4:7). If I choose to deny that they are the Christ, my savior — which is the only function anyone actually has — I am denying him the possibility “of all the joy he would have found if he fulfilled the role God gave to him” (4:8). By refusing to forgive, I deny the possibility he has any divine purpose in

my life. I shut him out of salvation, out of Heaven⁵. Any not only him — you shut yourself out as well (4:9). The only way you can regain Heaven for yourself is if you show the way back to your brother or sister (4:10). Heaven must be shared to be experienced. As Ram Dass has said, “We’re all just walking each other home” (Ram Dass, in How Can I Help?).

It is impossible to remember God in secret and alone. For remembering Him means you are not alone, and are willing to remember it. ... If you undertake the search together, you bring with you a light so powerful that what you see is given meaning. The lonely journey fails, because it has excluded what it would find. (T-14.XI.9:1-2, 6-7 (CE), T-14.X.10:1-2, 6-7 (FIP))

Paragraph 5

5 It is no sacrifice that he be saved, for by his freedom will you gain your own. ²To let his function be fulfilled is but the means to let *yours* be. ³And so you walk toward Heaven or toward hell, but not alone. ⁴How beautiful his sinlessness will be when you perceive it! ⁵And how great will be your joy when he is free to offer you the gift of sight God gave to him for you! ⁶He has no need but this: that you allow him freedom to complete the task God gave to him. ⁷Remembering but this: that what he does you do, along with him. ⁸And as you see him, so do you define the function he will have for you, until you see him differently and let him be what God appointed that he be to you.

• Study Question •

5. *God has given your brother the task of bring salvation to you, but it is up to you to “allow him freedom to complete the task.” What is it that seems to be the determining factor as to what function or role your brother plays in your life: to offer you salvation, or to bring you death? (Compare 5:8 with 4:5-7.)*

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When we are confronted with the necessity of forgiving the seemingly unforgivable, it may seem as if we are being asked to sacrifice something. We’re not. Granting your brother salvation is how you find it (5:1). Allowing your brother to function as your savior is how you are enabled to fulfill your function (5:2).

You are walking either toward heaven or toward hell. What determines the direction is tied directly to your brother or sister, to whether or not you allow yourself to perceive the sinlessness of your brother or sister. If you are dragging him or her to hell, that’s where you are going; if you are lifting them up to heaven, you lift yourself as well (5:3). And when you finally allow to see the sinlessness in them,

⁵ This is not referring to Heaven as a place we go to when we die (if we’re good), but to a state of conscious oneness with all that is.

you will be overcome with the beauty of it (5:4)! And you cannot imagine the joy you will feel when your brother or sister, in turn, offers to you the sight given them by God, the sight of your sinlessness (5:5).

I can only get a glimpse of what this will be like. There have been times when I've been down on myself, even disgusted with myself, and someone else has come along and seen me differently, seen me in a better light, and shared it with me. In those times, I've been overtaken by a relieved joy, a realization that maybe I'm not as screwed up as I thought I was. What the Course is talking about here must be like that, but magnified 1000 times, with not one shred of self-doubt left.

God has given each of us a function. The Workbook is full of talk about our function or our purpose; the word "function" occurs 170 times in the Workbook. I'm going to give a lot of quotations here because I want you to get the feel of how important this concept is in the Course:

"Your purpose is to see the world through your own holiness. Thus are you and the world blessed together" (W-pI.37.1:2-3).

"I am the light of the world. That is my only function. That is why I am here" (W-pI.61.5:3-5).

Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world (W-pI.62.title)

"You are indeed the light of the world with such a function. The Son of God looks to you for his redemption. It is yours to give him, for it belongs to you. Accept no trivial purpose or meaningless desire in its place, or you will forget your function and leave the Son of God in hell" (W-pI.63.2:1-4).

"To review our last few lessons, your function here is to be the light of the world, a function given you by God. It is only the arrogance of the ego that leads you to question this, and only the fear of the ego that induces you to regard yourself as unworthy of the task assigned to you by God Himself. The world's salvation awaits your forgiveness, because through it does the Son of God escape from all illusions, and thus from all temptation. The Son of God is you" (W-pI.64.3:1-4).

"This is the world it is my function to save" (W-pI.64.8:4).

"My only function is the one God gave me" (W-pI.65.title)

"Salvation is our only need. There is no other purpose here, and no other function to fulfill" (W-pI.69.3:2-3).

"It is through accepting my function that I will see the light in me. And in this light will my function stand clear and perfectly unambiguous before my sight. My acceptance does not depend on my recognizing what my function is, for I do not yet understand forgiveness. Yet I will trust that, in the light, I will see it as it is." (W-pI.rII.81.3:2-5).

"I would not forget my function, because I would remember my Self. I cannot fulfill my function if I forget it. And unless I fulfill my function, I will not experience the joy that God intends for me" (W-pI.rII.82.3:2-4).

"Salvation is my only function here" (W-pI.99.title).

"Salvation must reverse the mad belief in separate thoughts and separate bodies, which lead separate lives and go their separate ways. One function shared by separate minds unites them in one purpose, for each one of them is equally essential to them all" (W-pI.100.1:2-3).

A lot of quotes, and I've left out over half of them. And that isn't even one third of the way through the lessons!

The only need you have, the only need your brother has, is to be allowed to "complete the task God gave to" you and to him (5:6). We have all been given the task, the function, of offering salvation to one another through forgiveness. You allow me to fulfill my function by forgiving me, seeing me as sinless, so that I can do the same for you. And vice versa. All we need to remember, in every moment, is that "what he does you do, along with him" (5:7). And what he does depends on how you see him; your perception of him defines "the function he will have for you" (5:8). Until you see him differently, you are not letting him "be what God appointed that he be to you."

Paragraph 6

6 Against the hatred that the Son of God may cherish toward himself is God believed to be without the power to save what He created from the pain of hell. ²But in the love he shows himself is God made free to let His will be done. ⁶ ³In each of you, ⁷ you see the picture of your own belief of what the will of God must be for you. ⁴Through your forgiveness will you understand His love for you; through your attack believe He hates you, thinking Heaven must be hell. ⁵Look once again upon your brother, not without the understanding that he is the way to Heaven or to hell, as you perceive him. ⁶But forget not this: The role you give to him is given you, and you will walk the way you pointed out to him because it is your judgment on yourself.

⁶. Matthew 6:10 (RSV): "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." Here, what allows God's will to be done on earth is our love for ourselves, which comes through loving our brother.

⁷. "Each of you" refers to two holy relationship partners; the original reference was to Helen and Bill. See also the statement in the previous section that "Christ stands before you both" (T-25.V.3:1).

• **Study Question** •

6. *How does the way you see your brother affect your relationship with God, and why? (See 6:4.)*

This final paragraph of the section sums up its message. How you perceive yourself determines how you perceive your brother. The reverse is also true: How you perceive your brother determines how you perceive yourself. This is so because you and your brother are, in reality, one. “The role you give to him is given you, and you will walk the way you pointed out to him because it is your judgment on yourself” (6:6).

Even more importantly, how you perceive yourself or your brother determines how you perceive God. Hate yourself (or your brother) and you will believe God cannot save you. Love yourself (and your brother), and you free God to let His will be done (6:1–3).

The way you come to know God’s love for you is to extend forgiveness to all the world; if you judge the world as sinful and attack it, that’s how you will think God sees both it and you (6:4).

“Your brother...is the way to Heaven or to hell, as you perceive him” (6:5). Next time you look at someone, allow yourself to remember this and understand it: “This person is my way to Heaven or to hell, as I perceive him.” Toward the end of the Text, Jesus sums up this whole message nicely:

And to each one has He allowed the grace to be a savior to the holy ones especially entrusted to his care. And this he learns when first he looks upon one brother as he looks upon himself, and sees the mirror of himself in him. Thus is the concept of himself laid by, for nothing stands between his sight and what he looks upon, to judge what he beholds. And in this single vision does he see the face of Christ, and understands he looks on everyone as he beholds this one (T-31.VII.8:3-6 (FIP), T-31.VIII.2:3–6 (CE)).

Application: Think of someone against whom you’re holding a grievance. Apply the following words to this person:

In [name], I see the picture of my own belief in what the Will of God must be for me.

If I attack [name], I will think God hates me and condemns me to hell.

If I forgive [name], I will know God loves me and embraces me in Heaven.

Holy Spirit, let me help [name] find his way to Heaven instead condemning him to hell,

And thus free him to show me the way to Heaven.

(This wonderful exercise is quoted from *The Illuminated Text*, by Robert Perry and Greg Mackie.)

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. Attacking another seems to cause us to be guilty, and the fact that we have attacked someone seems to justify our guilt. On the other hand, guilt seen in another justifies our attacking them, and even to cause our need to attack them; our own guilt (of being an attacker) causes others to attack us, and to justify their doing so.
2. You become afraid of yourself. You believe you have hurt yourself. You think your true Self is now an enemy to what you have become. You believe you have become something else that is alien to your Self, a something else that cannot be loved, but only feared.
3. Looking with sightless eyes; that is, with purely physical vision.
4. To return “what is his due” to our brother, in the light of the context of all that has proceeded, seems to mean seeing him as the Son of God, the Christ, innocent of attack and free of all guilt. In a word: forgiveness. (Incidentally, this is a subtle lead-in to one of the main themes of this chapter, that “justice” (what is his due) looks on everyone as equally innocent, carries no taint of vengeance, releases us from all the effects of sin, and offers to us all that we deserve as the sinless Son of God. See the final sentence of the chapter.)
5. The way I choose to see him: as guilty (condemning him) or as innocent (forgiving him). To forgive him and see him as innocent is the way I “let him be what God appointed that he be to me.” If I choose to see him as my innocent savior, that is what he will be, and what he does, I will do along with him.
6. Forgiving my brother enables me to accept God’s Love; when I attack my brother, I will think God hates me. This is so because my perception of my brother is nothing more than the mirror of my judgment on myself.