

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 25

The Holy Spirit's Justice

Section IX

A Witness to Sinlessness

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

Overview of Section IX

Your special function in this world, whatever its form, has only one purpose: to demonstrate that love and justice are the same, and that no one deserves vengeance because everyone is sinless. We are called to put this into practice in our special relationships, just on an individual basis, and we have the help of the Holy Spirit to make it possible as we surrender to His love within us.

Paragraph 1

As specialness cares not who pays the cost of sin, so it *be* paid, the Holy Spirit heeds not who looks on innocence at last, provided it *is* seen and understood. ²For just *one* witness is enough, if he sees truly. ³Simple justice asks no more. ⁴Of each one does the Holy Spirit ask if he will be that one, so justice may return to love and there be satisfied.¹ ⁵Each special function He allots is but for this: that each one learn that love and justice are *not* separate, and both are strengthened by their union with each other. ⁶Without love is justice prejudiced and weak. ⁷And love without justice is impossible, for love is fair and cannot chasten without cause. ⁸What cause can *be* to warrant an attack upon the innocent? ⁹In justice, then, does love correct mistakes, but not in vengeance. ¹⁰For that would be unjust to innocence.

¹ In normal terms, justice is satisfied when the injustice is balanced out by some kind of restitution or punishment. Thus, the satisfaction theory of Atonement (originating with Anselm in the eleventh century) states that Jesus had to suffer and die to satisfy God's justice. In the above passage, justice is finally "satisfied" when it is no longer seen as demanding punishment, but can instead return to its real nature as *love*.

• **Study Question** •

1. *We have been told that each of us has been given a special function, a special part in salvation that only we can fill. Here we are told that this special function has only one purpose (it is “but for this”). What is it, and what does that purpose mean to you?*

A few paragraphs before, the Course pointed out that specialness demands that *someone* must pay the price for sin (vengeance, and ultimately death), but that it does not care *who* pays (see VIII.3:3–5). Now, it tells us that the Holy Spirit has a similar disregard for who sees innocence first (1:1). It may be you, or your brother or sister. It does not matter who, a principle we’ve seen before.¹ It only takes one who truly sees innocence in the other to trigger the chain reaction of love (1:2).

And *that* is how justice shows up (1:3). All of us, each of you, is being asked by the Holy Spirit to “be that one, so justice may return to love and there be satisfied” (1:4). Ask yourself, “Am I willing to be ‘that one’ in this relationship? In this one? And in *this* one?” That’s why you are here: to “learn that love and justice are *not* separate,” but indeed are united, one and the same (1:5).

All you need do to dwell in quiet here with Christ is share His vision. Quickly and gladly is His vision given to anyone who is but willing to see his brother sinless. (T-22.III.13:3–4 (CE), T-22.II.13:1-2 (FIP))

Your question should not be “How can I see my brother without the body?” Ask only, “Do I really wish to see him sinless?” (T-20.VII.9:1–2 (CE), T-20.VII.9:1-2 (FIP))

The question really is, do I want to see her or him as completely without guilt? Or do I want her or him to continue to feel guilty—about something? Does seeing them without guilt seem like letting them off the hook, letting them “get away with” something? Or am I willing to return justice to love, to be that “just one witness” to innocence? I may be just one, but “just *one* witness is enough, if he sees truly” (1:2). Have I truly realized that this is the whole purpose of each of my relationships?

What we are learning is that justice and love exist in union with one another, each strengthening the other (1:5). If you imagine justice without love, it would be cruel and cold, “prejudiced and weak” (1:6). Administered in the ego mind-set, justice would reward one and penalize another, a process in which prejudice often enters to favor one over another. We see this weakness often reflected in our so-called justice system. On the other hand, “love *without* justice is impossible” (1:7). Love is always fair, always impartial. It “cannot chasten without cause” and there *is* no cause that warrants “an attack upon the innocent” (1:7–8). Love sees our mistakes and corrects them, but it never punishes, because punishment “would be unjust to innocence” (1:9–10).

That should give us a clue as to how to behave in our relationships when our relationship partner makes a “mistake,” something we probably would have seen as “sin” previously, and for which we would have desired and perhaps implemented some kind of

punishment. That kind of behavior is unjust because mistakes do not cancel out innocence. All mistakes are innocent mistakes seen through the eyes of the Holy Spirit. We may speak or act in some way to help our partner *correct* his or her mistakes, but we will never *attack* them because of them.

Paragraph 2

2 You can be perfect witness to the power of love and justice, if you understand it is impossible the Son of God could merit vengeance. ²You need not perceive in every circumstance that this is true. ³Nor need you look to your experience within the world, which is but shadows of all that is really happening within yourself. ⁴The understanding that you need comes not of you, but from a larger Self so great and holy that He could not doubt His innocence. ⁵Your special function is a call to Him that He may smile on you whose sinlessness He shares. ⁶His understanding will be yours. ⁷And so the Holy Spirit's special function has been fulfilled. ⁸God's Son has found a witness unto his sinlessness, and not his sin. ⁹How little need you give the Holy Spirit that simple justice may be given you!

• Study Question •

2. Note that the condition for becoming the perfect witness is “if you understand it is impossible the Son of God could merit vengeance.” Are we asked to see that this is universally true, or to find evidence for it in our experiences in this world? What, then, does this imply we are being asked to do?

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Speaking now to each of us, Jesus says that each of us can “be the perfect witness to the power of love *and* justice”² on one condition: We must understand that no one could ever merit vengeance, because everyone is the Son of God (2:1).

Perhaps your response is a bit like mine. “That seems to leave me out! I get the *concept* that no one deserves vengeance, but I can't say I've been able to apply that consistently. There are still some people who seem to me to *demand* punishment.” Fortunately for us all, Jesus offers some emendations to that one condition.

First, he says you do *not* need to see that vengeance is unmerited in *every* circumstance (2:2). If you still believe that punishment is called for in some instances, that's OK.

Second, he says that you do not need to successfully apply the notion of unmerited vengeance to all of your experiences within the external world (2:3). You are probably not going to find the idea substantiated by things you see going on outside of yourself. All of your external experiences are shadows, projections of something that “is *really* happening within *yourself*” (2:3). Therefore, until *you* have been totally straightened out, the world will keep offering evidence that contradicts “the power of love and justice.”

Third, you must come to realize that the understanding that you need does not come from yourself, but “from a larger Self so great and holy that He *could* not doubt His innocence” (2:4), as you, in your little self, surely do. To carry out your special function of forgiveness, you must draw upon that larger Self (2:5). Your small self will always doubt its ability to forgive others because it doubts its own innocence, and projects that doubt onto the world. If you draw on Him, you will have His understanding of the situation (2:6). In transmitting that understanding of innocence to you, the special function of the Holy Spirit will be fulfilled (2:7). You will see your brother sinless, thus witnessing to the sinlessness of God’s Son instead of to His imagined sin (2:8).

So you are not being called, yet, to forgive the entire world. You are being called to forgive *one other person*, to understand that he or she is innocent, and does not deserve any kind of punishment or vengeance. And you are asked to do that not by yourself alone, but in partnership with the Holy Spirit. That is all you need give “that simple justice may be given *you*” (2:9).

Paragraph 3

3 Without impartiality there is no justice. ²How can specialness be just? ³Judge not because you cannot, not because you are a miserable sinner too.² ⁴How can the special really understand that justice is the same for everyone? ⁵To take from one to give another must be an injustice to them both, since they are equal in the Holy Spirit’s sight. ⁶Their Father gave the same inheritance to both. ⁷Who would have more *or* less is not aware that he has everything. ⁸He is no judge of what must be another’s due, because he thinks *he* is deprived, and so must he be envious and try to take away from whom he judges. ⁹He is not impartial, and cannot fairly see another’s rights because his own have been obscured to him.

• Study Question •

3. *A common idea of why we should not judge others is that we are as guilty as they are. What reason for not judging is given here? (Compare with M-10.2:1–9. Notice also how giving up your own judgment allows the judgment of the Holy Spirit, “God’s Son is guiltless,” to come through you.)*

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Justice, by definition, cannot be partial to one person over another. Everyone agrees that simply isn’t fair, isn’t just (3:1). Specialness, by definition, cannot be impartial because it attributes more value to one person than to another; therefore, specialness cannot be just (3:2). That is precisely why none of us are capable of true judgment! We are commanded to “judge not”³, not because we’re as bad as the person we are judging (which may be so), but because specialness cannot judge fairly, ever (3:3).

² Matthew 7:1 (KJV): “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

Think for a bit about why justice is simply not possible to us as special, individual, separate persons. Given the variety we see in one another, the many ways we see each other as greater than or less than ourselves, how could we “really understand that justice is the same for everyone” (3:4)? As we learn in the next paragraph, each of us has “the right to all the universe” (4:1). From any separated point of view that simply isn’t understandable. Only with the infusion of understanding from the Holy Spirit can it truly make any sense, but it’s really simple logic.

The world’s justice consists in taking something from one person and giving it to another, in one form or another. Because both persons are equal in the sight of the Holy Spirit, this has to be *injustice* (3:5). God gave both persons the same gift of inner divinity, the gift of literally everything (3:6). Anyone wanting to have more than someone else, or for someone else to have less because of their supposed sin, is not aware that they both possess everything (3:7). Whenever you or I want someone to suffer or be punished because of something they said or did, or whenever we think that about ourselves, we have lost the awareness of God’s gift of everything to us all.

When we believe we have been wronged somehow, we think someone has deprived us of something, in some way. Therefore, we become envious, and we try to extract payment from the person we are judging (3:8). We cannot accept that the other person has a right to everything just as we have. We have become *partial* as opposed to *impartial*, and can no longer accurately judge or see *anyone’s* rights fairly, because we have lost sight of our *own* rights (3:9).

I believe that our perception of one another and of ourselves are reciprocal things, two sides of the same coin. If I have properly understood my own divine “right to all the universe” (4:1), I will be able to see that others deserve the same thing as God’s offspring. Conversely, if I come to see that about even one other person, it opens the door in my mind to see myself in the same way. Which comes first? Either or both.

Paragraph 4

4 You have the right to all the universe; to perfect peace, complete deliverance from all effects of sin, and to the life eternal, joyous, and complete in every way, as God appointed for His holy Son. ²This is the only justice Heaven knows, and all the Holy Spirit brings to earth. ³Your special function shows you nothing else but perfect justice can prevail for you, and you are safe from vengeance in *all* forms. ⁴The world deceives, but it cannot replace God’s justice with a version of its own. ⁵For only love is just, and can perceive what justice must accord the Son of God. ⁶Let love decide, and never fear that you, in your unfairness, will deprive yourself of what God’s justice has allotted you.

• **Study Question** •

4. *What fear of ours are we asked to abandon here?*

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The final paragraph of this short section sums up what is your due as God's offspring, and declares that the only true meaning of justice is the acknowledgement of that fact about everyone. Expressing that is what your special function is all about.

We have a right to all the universe.

We have a right to perfect peace.

We have a right to complete deliverance from *all* effects of sin.

We have a right to “life eternal, joyous, and complete in *every* way.”

These are the rights “God appointed for His holy Son” (4:1). These are the components of justice that Heaven knows and that the Holy Spirit is bringing to earth⁴ (4:2). This is what each of us is learning in the process of fulfilling our special function, guaranteeing this justice for us and assuring our safety from all vengeance (4:3).

The world's distorted form of justice can blind us for a while, but it will never prevail or replace God's justice (4:4). The only real justice is love, and only love is truly just, giving to everyone their just portion, which is “all the universe” (4:5). Let us give ourselves to love, allowing love to decide through us, and abandoning any fear that we can be ultimately deceived into depriving ourselves of what God wills us to have (4:6).

Legend:

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

The 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 identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely 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. To learn that love and justice are not separate. To me, that means learning that what love, in generosity, mercy and acceptance, desires to give to my brothers is exactly what they deserve; that what is due to my brother in justice is everything that total love wants to give him. That he “merits everything,” and so do I. It means seeing that any thought that he or I deserves less than complete love is simply not the truth.
2. No. We are being asked to understand, in relation to just one brother or sister (to begin with, at least), that he or she does not merit vengeance, even though our experiences with that them in this world don't seem to demonstrate that fact.
3. Because we cannot judge; it is impossible for us.
4. The fear that I, in my unfairness (my confusion about what I and my brother truly merit), will somehow succeed in depriving myself of all the gifts of God, which as His Son I merit.