

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 26

Holy Ground

Section VIII

The Immediacy of Salvation

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

Overview of Section VIII

The title of the section, “The Immediacy of Salvation,” is a great summary of its message. As the Course said earlier, “Now is the time for salvation, for *now* is the release from time” (T-13.VI.8:1 (CE, FIP)). Salvation is immediate; there is no need to wait for it.

Paragraph 1

The one remaining problem that you have is that you see an interval between the time when you forgive and will receive the benefits of trust.¹ ²This but reflects the little you would keep between yourselves that you might be a little separate. ³For time and space are one illusion, which takes different forms. ⁴If it has been projected beyond your minds, you think of it as time. ⁵The nearer it is brought to where it is, the more you think of it in terms of space. ⁶There is a distance you would keep apart from one another, and this space you see as time,² because you still believe you are external to each other. ⁷This makes trust impossible, and you cannot believe that trust would settle every problem now.

¹ As the section makes clear later on, to “receive the benefits of your trust” refers to your brother returning forgiveness to you and joining with you.

² In other words, the primary illusion is that you want a space between you and your brother. You then project this *space* and it becomes *time*: You want a time between when you forgive and when your brother returns your forgiveness and joins with you. You then fear this time lag and see it as reason to not forgive in the first place. But the truth is that you want it. You want a *time* delay before joining takes place because you want to “keep a little *space* between you still” (3:3).

Our problem with forgiveness is that we are afraid it will result in loss, not gain. The Course tells us that when we forgive someone, they will return the gift. The one who receives forgiveness from us will give forgiveness *to* us. To our perception, it does not always work that way. Often, it seems to take a long time after we forgive before the gift is returned (1:1).

Time isn't the problem, Jesus tells us. The problem is *distance*, the "little" bit of separation that we want to maintain between ourselves and our brothers and sisters (1:2). That subterranean desire for separateness gets projected into the material world as *time*. How can that be? It is so because "time and space are *one* illusion, which takes different forms" (1:3). Project the illusion outside of our minds and we perceive it as time; the more we realize that it is something *in* our minds we will "think of it in terms of space" (1:4–5). We will recognize that what's going on is our desire to keep some distance between us and our brothers. But because we still "believe you are *external* to each other" (1:6), the illusion of separation gets projected out and perceived as time.

Then, because we are convinced that the payoff for forgiveness will be delayed for a long time (if it ever comes), it becomes impossible to trust our brothers and sisters to return the gift. We just "cannot believe that trust would settle every problem *now*" (1:7). We don't realize that the real problem is our wish to stay at least a little separate from one another. We are holding back from the state of non-duality, which Cynthia Bourgeault calls "singleness" in her book, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*.³ To our egos, the thought that some other person or people are somehow going to become part of us, indistinct from us, one being with us... such a thought is terrifying. So we project time before it will happen, to stave it off.

³ it is a matter of moving beyond the opposites [male/female] to become a "living spirit." The inexorable unitive thrust of Jesus's teachings leaves no place for dualism, let alone cosmic dualism, and the "singleness" he seems to have in mind involves nothing short of a radical collapse of the binary mind with its insistence on paired opposites as its fundamental interpretive category. As he states categorically in the justly famous logion 22 in the Gospel of Thomas:

When you are able to make two become one, the inside like the outside, and the outside like the inside, the higher like the lower, so that a man is no longer male and a woman female, but male and female become a single whole . . . then you will enter in.

...a change of state is exactly what I am talking about. To make "two become one, the inside like the outside" implies some sort of metamorphosis; a transforming of the "lead" of egoic perception into the "gold" of unitive awareness. It announces the entry into a more spacious mind, into what the texts we have been working with call a state of oneness or "singleness."

Bourgeault, Cynthia. *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* (p. 172–173).

Paragraph 2

2 Thus do you think it safer to remain a little careful and a little watchful of interests perceived as separate. ²From this perception, you cannot conceive of gaining what forgiveness offers *now*. ³The interval you think lies in between the giving and receiving of the gift seems to be one in which you sacrifice and suffer loss. ⁴You see *eventual* salvation, not *immediate* results. ⁵Salvation *is* immediate. ⁶Unless you so perceive it, you will be afraid of it, believing that the risk of loss is great between the time its purpose is made yours and its *effects* will come to you. ⁷In this form is the error still obscured that is the *source* of fear. ⁸Salvation *would* wipe out the space you see between you still, and let you *instantly* become as one. ⁹And it is *here* you fear the loss would lie.

Oh, we'll talk up unity. We'll sing the praises of oneness with others. But we want the actual experience of singleness to be postponed a bit. We still believe we have separate interests. The implication, of course, is that we don't. To arrive at that state of mind is, indeed, as Cynthia Bourgeault says (see footnote to last paragraph), "a change of state," "a radical collapse of the binary mind." It seems safer to be at least a little careful about protecting our special interests (2:1).

In that protective frame of mind it is impossible to believe that we can gain the benefits of forgiveness *right now* (2:2). Instead, we see an interval of time, probably a long interval, in which we will undergo sacrifice and loss (2:3). Instead of immediate results we see only *eventual* salvation (2:4). I'm sure in my own teaching of the Course, I've fallen into the trap of saying, "Of course, other people don't always reciprocate immediately. You may have to wait a while. But eventually, they will return the gift." Do you see what I'm doing? I'm putting the blame for the delay on the other person. The Course says the blame is on us, on our clinging to separateness.

But, Jesus insists, "Salvation *is* immediate" (2:5). If we think otherwise, if we think the reward for forgiveness is put off far into the future, we'll be afraid of it. We're afraid of what might happen during that long interval, the sacrifice and loss we might experience (2:6). We are hiding the real error, the *source* of our fear: Our belief in separateness, which causes us to fear oneness (2:7, 9).

If we truly accept and give salvation, it will *wipe out* the space between us that we continue to see, allowing us to *instantly* become one with one another (2:8).

Why do we not experience the effects of forgiveness as immediate? Because we still do not *want* them.

Paragraph 3

3 Do not project this fear to time, for time is not the enemy that you perceive. ²Time is as neutral as the body is, except in terms of what you see it for. ³If you would keep a little *space* between you still, you want a little *time* in which forgiveness is withheld a little while.⁴ ⁴This makes the interval between the time in which forgiveness is withheld and given seem dangerous, with terror justified. ⁵But space between you is apparent *now*, and cannot be perceived in future time. ⁶No more can it be overlooked, except within the present. ⁷Future loss is not your fear. ⁸But present joining is your dread.

We take a present fear of becoming one and project it out as time. “Stop doing that,” Jesus is urging us (3:1). Time is not the enemy; time is neutral, just as the body is neutral (3:1–2). It is what we see as the purpose of time that gives it its positive or negative character. We use time to perpetuate our separateness (3:3), so the delay in returned forgiveness seems to justify our terror and support staying at least a bit apart (3:4).

You can’t see space as future; it is perceived as something here *now*. Similarly, now, in the present, is the only time space can be overlooked (3:5–6). Now is the time we can make a choice, either to see space between us or to overlook it.

The final two sentences sum up the first three paragraphs very well: “*Future* loss is not your fear. But *present* joining *is* your dread” (3:7–8).

Paragraph 4

4 Who can feel desolation except now? ²A future cause as yet has no effects, and therefore must it be that if you fear, there is a *present* cause. ³And it is *this* that needs correction, not a future state. ⁴The plans you make for safety all are laid within the future, where you cannot plan. ⁵No purpose has been given it as yet, and what will happen has as yet no cause. ⁶Who can predict effects without a cause? ⁷And who could fear effects unless he thought they had been caused and judged disastrous *now*? ⁸Belief in sin arouses fear, and like its cause is looking forward, looking back, but overlooking what is here and now.

The first sentence (4:1) declares that we can feel “desolation” only in the present moment (4:1). Synonyms for desolation include “isolation, loneliness, misery, depression, dejection, and devastation.” You cannot feel such things in the future. They are a present experience, always. Therefore, Jesus asserts, “there is a *present* cause” (4:2). That present cause is what we need to deal with, not some anticipated future state (4:3). The future is

4. “Withheld” here (and in the next sentence) means withheld by your brother. After giving forgiveness to your brother, you want him to withhold returning it to you, for if he returned it, that would wipe away the space between you, and this space is what you want to keep.

really unpredictable; perfectly safe plans are not possible (4:4). As the poet Robert Burns put it: “The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.”⁵

The general thought behind the rest of this paragraph is that the cause of the future always lies in the present, and that cause consists of the purpose we give to the future. If we have not given it a purpose, the future has no cause, and therefore no known form on which to base any plans (4:5). There is no way to predict future effects if their present cause is unknown (4:6). If that is so, what possible reason could there be to fear the future (4:7)? We fear the future only when we believe it has a present cause that will produce disastrous results. And that is what we do with our belief in the reality of sin in the past, meriting punishment in our future (4:8). We are looking at the past and at the future, but “*overlooking* what is here and now” (4:8). *What* is “here and now”? The next paragraph will make that clearer.

Paragraph 5

5 Yet only here and now its cause must be, if its effects already have been judged as fearful. ²And in overlooking this is it protected and kept separate from healing. ³For a miracle is *now*. ⁴It stands already there, in present grace, within the only interval of time which sin and fear have overlooked, but which is all there is to time. ⁵The working out of all correction takes no time at all. ⁶But the *acceptance* of the working out can seem to take forever. ⁷The change of purpose the Holy Spirit brought to you in your relationship has in it all effects that you will see. ⁸They can be looked at *now*.⁶ ⁹Why wait till they unfold in time, and fear they may not come, although already there?

The *cause* of fear is what is here and now. The cause has to be in the present if we have already judged its effects to be fearful (5:1); unless the cause already existed there would be no effects to be feared. That cause is our thinking, our belief that the future holds retribution for our past “wrongs.” Because we are overlooking this present cause, it remains “safe” from healing (5:2).

The miracle of healing is always *now* (5:3). God has sent present forgiveness into the world, and it is already here “in present grace.” Sin and fear, with their focus on past and future, overlook this instant of time in which forgiveness dwells. And yet the present is “all there *is* to time” (5:4).

Since full forgiveness exists *now*, “The working out of *all* correction takes no time at all” (5:5). Even so, our acceptance of that full salvation “can *seem* to take forever” (5:6).

⁵ Adapted from the original Scottish dialect, which ended “gang aft a-gley”.

⁶ This refers to the Course’s teaching that when the two people join in a common goal, the Holy Spirit enters their relationship and heals it at a deep level. On that level, the two have already given forgiveness to each other and joined. And this underlying reality “can be looked at *now*.” They do not have to wait until it manifests on the surface, in their physical interaction.

Every instant in which we overlook present forgiveness seems to extend time's duration, over and over again.

Jesus turns again to the practical application of this teaching: our relationship, that is, the holy relationship we have with the one(s) assigned to us for forgiveness. The change of purpose in those relationships refers to our choice to shift them from getting, or making us whole (We're already whole, of course), to giving and joining as one. That change is enough to bring us "all effects that you will see" (5:7). He asserts that we can look at these effects now, in the present, without any wait (5:8). They are already here. But if we are still believing that the effects need time to unfold, that the future still holds suffering for us, delay in blessing, we will experience it that way (5:9). We are afraid of joining with our brother or sister in the present, so we postpone the effects of forgiveness.

I believe that this holds true even if the other person doesn't appear to receive our gift of forgiveness. Lesson 197 says,

It does not matter if another thinks your gifts unworthy. In his mind there is a part that joins with yours in thanking you. It does not matter if your gifts seem lost and ineffectual. They are received where they are given. In your gratitude are they accepted universally, and thankfully acknowledged by the heart of God Himself. (W-197.4:1-5 (CE))

When this occurs, if we are willing, we can see past the appearance to recognize that part of his mind that "joins with yours in thanking you."

Paragraph 6

6 You have been told that everything brings good that comes from God.⁷ ²And yet it seems as if this is not so. ³Good in disaster's form is difficult to credit in advance. ⁴Nor is there really sense in this idea. ⁵Why *should* the good appear in evil's form? ⁶And is not this deception if it does? ⁷Its cause is here, if it appears at all. ⁸Why are not its effects apparent, then? ⁹Why in the future? ¹⁰And you seek to be content with sighing, and with "reasoning" you do not understand it now, but will some day. ¹¹And then its meaning will be clear. ¹²This is *not* reason, for it is unjust, and clearly hints at punishment until the time of liberation is at hand.

We are told that God is good, and we profess to believe that everything that comes from God is good (6:1). But in the case of forgiveness, we have doubts. We are afraid that if we forgive, things won't work out well, at least not for a long time. We expect "good in disaster's form"; that is, things will be bad but we have to believe that somehow all this is for our good in the end. We sigh. We tell ourselves that some day we'll understand it all,

⁷ T-10.IV.3:4: "The laws of God work only for your good, and there are no other laws beside His." James 1:17 (GNT): "Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change or cause darkness by turning." Romans 8:28 (RSV): "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

but we cannot understand now. One day it will be worth it all. Some day we'll look back and see that what seemed like disaster was really a blessing in disguise (6:2–11).

This kind of explanation has always seemed like a cop-out to me, and Jesus says here, “This is *not* reason. It's unjust; it's deception. It “clearly hints at punishment until the time of liberation is at hand” (6:6, 12). This isn't how God works! Salvation is immediate. Salvation is now. Our fear of joining with our brother is what seems to push the blessing off to the future. “Future loss is not your fear. Present joining is your dread” (3:7–8),

Paragraph 7

7 Given a change of purpose for the good, there is no reason for an interval in which disaster strikes, to be perceived as good someday but now in form of pain. ²This is a sacrifice of now, which could not be the cost the Holy Spirit asks for what He gave without a cost at all. ³Yet this illusion has a cause which, though untrue, must be already in your mind. ⁴And this illusion is but one effect which it engenders, and one form in which its outcome is perceived. ⁵This interval in time, when retribution is perceived to be the form in which the good appears, is but one aspect of the little space that lies between you, unforgiven still.

If we truly change the purpose of our relationship to joining, this idea of good delayed and pain for now has absolutely no reason (7:1). The gift of the Holy Spirit has no cost; He never calls for sacrifice (7:2). The cause of this illusion of “retribution...perceived to be the form in which the good appears” (7:5) is in our minds *now* (7:3). It is “the little space that lies between you, unforgiven still” (7:5). That's what causes what seems to be the “interval in time” between forgiveness and blessing.

But it isn't the only form the illusion takes (7:4,5). The Text does not make clear at once what the other forms may be, but we can surmise they include things like sickness, psychological disorder, and experience of lack in many forms.

Paragraph 8

8 Be not content with future happiness. ²It has no meaning and is not your just reward, for you have cause for freedom *now*. ³What profits freedom in a prisoner's form? ⁴Why should deliverance be disguised as death? ⁵Delay is senseless, and the reasoning that would maintain effects of *present* cause must be delayed until a *future* time is merely a denial of the fact that consequence and cause must come as one. ⁶Look not to time, but to the little space between you still, to be delivered from. ⁷And do not let it be disguised as time, and so preserved because its form is changed and what it is cannot be recognized. ⁸The Holy Spirit's purpose now is yours. ⁹Should not His happiness be yours as well?

Here's a good motto: “Be not content with future happiness” (8:1). Traditional Christianity used to be accused of teaching “pie in the sky bye and bye,” which is another

form of this error. “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,” so the evangelical song goes. This is meaningless. It is *not* our just reward; we are free *now* (8:2).

Freedom in a prisoner’s form; deliverance disguised as death; these are meaningless (8:3–4). We do not have to wait through a period of sacrifice before our reward is given. “Delay is senseless... consequence and cause must come as one” (8:5). If we delay forgiving because we think the payback will be long in coming, we delay the resultant blessing. We are causing the delay.

We do not need to be delivered from a time of delay. Rather, we need deliverance from our fear of joining with another, “the little space between you still” (8:6). When we disguise that little space as time before the payoff, it is “preserved *because* its form is changed and what it *is* cannot be recognized” (8:7). We don’t realize it is our own mind’s continued hold on separateness that is preventing us from experiencing the happiness of the Holy Spirit that is our inheritance. If we share His purpose (oneness, joining) we will share His happiness (8:8–9). We don’t need to wait until the benefits of our forgiveness “unfold in time” (5:9); we can look at them *now* (5:8).

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.