

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 26

Holy Ground

Section IX

For They Have Come

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

Overview of Section IX

This section is filled with glorious imagery, amazing comparisons of the result of forgiveness to dozens of beautiful things. It is a section that deserves to be read slowly, allowing yourself to stop and mentally picture all of the images being presented to you, and feeling the meaning of their application to you.

Paragraph 1

Think but how holy you must be from whom the Voice for God calls lovingly unto your brother, that you may awake in him the Voice that answers to your call. ²And think how holy must *he* be when in him sleeps your own salvation, with his freedom joined. ³However much you wish he be condemned, God is in him. ⁴And never will you know He is in *you* as well while you attack His chosen home and battle with His host. ⁵Regard him gently. ⁶Look with loving eyes on him who carries Christ within him, that you may behold His glory and rejoice that Heaven is not separate from you.

We all carry Christ within us. Within you is the Voice for God calling lovingly to your brothers and sisters, calling to awaken that same Voice in them. Jesus asks us to think how holy this makes us (1:1). And the same is true of your brothers and sisters. Your salvation is in him or her! It sleeps there, yes, awaiting your call to awaken. Our individual freedoms are profoundly joined together, and we are equally holy beings (1:2).

Think of a person you are tempted to judge; someone you think *deserves* to be condemned. Then, hear the voice of Jesus speaking directly to you about this person: “However much you wish he (she) be condemned, God is in him (her).” You might want to mentally speak to this person, and say, “God is in you, [name]” (1:3).

We all probably like to think of ourselves as non-judgmental, and yet there are some people we seemingly cannot help thinking, “They deserve to be condemned for that.” The family member who just won’t stop doing or saying things that offend you. “God is in him (her).” The erratic, unsafe driver who zooms past you at 85 MPH cutting in and out of traffic. “God is in him.” Your least favorite politician who takes steps that obviously lead to environmental pollution or some kind of hardship for hundreds of people. “God is in him.” The perpetrator of a mass shooting. “God is in him.” How holy must he be? (1:2–3)

Yes, holy. Yes, *that* person.

Judging or condemning someone is to attack them, to do battle with them. As long as we attack any person who is God’s “chosen home,” as long as we “battle with His host,” — and *everyone* is God’s chosen home, God’s host — we will never be able to recognize that God is in *us* as well (1:4). As Workbook Lesson 69 states so clearly, “My grievances hide the light of the world in me.” God does not judge anyone, so if I judge or hold a grievance, I can’t see God in myself.

So what must we do. “Regard him gently” (1:5). “Him? Gently?” Yes.

Look on that person with loving eyes because he “carries Christ within him.” In so doing, you will behold the glory of Christ and God, see it in yourself, and “rejoice that Heaven is *not* separate from you” (1:6).

I remember a powerful exercise I did in a Loving Relationships Training years ago, after two full days of examining all the various barriers to such relationships. We gathered in circles of about 8 to 10 people, and, one at a time, one person would sit in the center of the circle. Then, the people in the circle would begin to chant, softly, “We look on you with eyes of love, you radiant being, you.” Over and over again, sometimes loudly or almost shouting, sometimes barely whispering, the chanting went on for five minutes or so. Each person took a turn in the center.

I don’t think anyone who sat in the center was able to refrain from tears. I don’t think anyone who sat in the circle, chanting, was able not to feel overwhelmed with love for the person in the center, fired by the desire that they might realize just how radiantly lovely they are in truth.

I’ve never forgotten it.

That is what the Course is asking us to do with everyone we relate with. Regard them gently, and look on them with loving eyes. I think mentally chanting that in our minds, or even aloud, with people we “have trouble” with, for five or ten minutes, over a period of several days at least, would transform our relationship with those people. “I look on you with eyes of love, you radiant being, you.”

Paragraph 2

2 Is it too much to ask a little trust for him who carries Christ to you, that you may be forgiven all your sins and left without a single one you cherish still? ²Forget not that a shadow held between your brother and yourself obscures the face of Christ and memory of God. ³And would you trade Them for an ancient hate? ⁴The ground whereon you stand is holy ground because of Them Who, standing there with you, have blessed it with Their innocence and peace.¹ ⁵The blood of hatred fades to let the grass grow green again, and let the flowers be all white and sparkling in the summer sun. ⁶What was a place of death has now become a living temple in a world of light.

The payoff for this shift in our perception of another person is enormous. You can “be forgiven *all* your sins and left without a single one you cherish still” (2:1). After all, this person is carrying Christ to you! Just give them “a little trust,” and total forgiveness is yours!

We must always remember that holding a grievance against another person, here symbolically called “a shadow held between” you and another, will prevent you from seeing “the face of Christ” in that other, and remembering the Presence of God within you both (2:2). (From here on through the section, “Them,” capitalized, refers to “the face of Christ and memory of God.”) Do you really want to trade Them for your “ancient hate” (2:3)?

There are multiple references in this section to this “ancient hate.” It bears reflection on its meaning. There is a passage in Chapter 27 that I think explains it fairly well.² This

¹ Exodus 3:5 (RSV): “Then [God] said [to Moses], ‘Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’” In the biblical story, the ground is holy because of the presence of God in the burning bush. The Course is saying that we stand on holy ground, in the presence of God, whenever we look on our brother “with loving eyes.” This is similar to the earlier reference to holy ground in this chapter (“The holy place on which you stand is but the space that sin has left”—T-26.IV.2:7), where what makes the ground holy is forgiveness and joining between two people.

² A brother separated from yourself, an ancient enemy, a murderer who stalks you in the night and plots your death, yet plans that it be lingering and slow—of this you dream. And underneath this dream is yet another, in which you become the murderer, the secret enemy, the scavenger and the destroyer of the brother and the world you fear alike. Here is the cause of suffering, the space between your dreams and your reality. The little gap you do not even see, the birthplace of illusions and of fear, the time of terror and of ancient hate, the instant of disaster—all are here. Here is the cause of unreality. And it is here that it will be undone.

⁶ You are the dreamer of the world of dreams. No other cause it has, nor ever will. Nothing more fearful than an idle dream has terrified God’s Son and made him think that he has lost his innocence, denied his Father, and made war upon himself. So fearful is the dream, so seeming real, he could not waken to reality without the sweat of terror and a scream of mortal fear, unless a gentler dream preceded

ancient hate arises in our original desire in that “unholy instant” that begat time, a desire to be separate. We believed it succeeded, that we had defeated God, destroyed His creation, and that we had created a world apart from us and against us. We had become the destroyer of the universe, the enemy of God. Unable to bear that guilt, we projected it onto the world, and made our brothers and sisters into the enemy who constantly plot *our* destruction. And so we hate them with an ancient hatred, which we do by judging and condemning them, by refusing to see that God is in them, and in us.

You stand on holy ground, like Jacob when he dreamed of the ladder to Heaven at Bethel, like Moses at the burning bush, like Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Just as in those biblical instances, the place where you are is made holy by the Presence of “Them.” They stand there with you, in you, blessing wherever you are with “*Their* innocence and peace” (2:4). In your dream of guilt They are not with you. You have lost Their Presence. But They are here, now, and have never left you.

Jesus launches into a beautiful image of the transformation that comes as we reaffirm Their Presence in our brothers and sisters, and feel the same recognition returning to us. Let yourself visualize this image.

We are standing in a place, and it is seen as a field. The soil is soaked in blood from the terrible battles that we have dreamed about.

As you recognize and accept Their Presence, the soil that has been soaked in the blood of battle fades away, and “lets the grass grow green again, and lets the flowers be all white and sparkling in the summer sun” (2:5). This, which was a “place of death,” “has now become a living temple in a world of light” (2:6). The white and sparkling flowers symbolize the holiness of the forgiveness that has taken place, and they have formed into a temple.

Paragraph 3

3 Because of Them. ²It is Their presence Which has lifted holiness again to take its ancient place upon an ancient throne. ³Because of Them have miracles sprung up as grass and flowers on the barren ground which hate had scorched and rendered desolate. ⁴What hate had wrought have They undone. ⁵And now you stand on ground so holy Heaven leans to join with it and make it like itself. ⁶The shadow of an ancient hate has gone, and all the blight and withering have passed forever from the land where They have come.

“Because of Them” (3:1). This miraculous change from bloody field to a radiant temple of flowers, surrounded by lush, green grass, is all because God and Christ are present and acknowledged. Once again holiness sits in its “ancient place upon an ancient throne; and all because of “Their Presence” (3:2).

his awaking and allowed his calmer mind to welcome, not to fear, the Voice that called with love to waken him. A gentler dream, in which his suffering was healed, and where his brother was his friend. God willed he waken gently and with joy, and gave him means to waken without fear (T-27.VII.5:2-6:6 (CE) ,T-27.VII.12:1-13:5 (FIP)).

Note the recurrence of the word “ancient.” I think in the Course, ancient does not mean exactly “very old.” Really, it means “before time.” This ancient place on an ancient throne exists now and always, but it has become visible here where miracles have sprung up (the grass and flowers symbolize miracles) (3:3). All effects of that ancient hate have been obliterated by the grass and flowers, the miracles of our forgiveness(3:4).

This is what happens when we forgive. The ground we stand on becomes so holy that Heaven is drawn to it, to make the earth like Heaven (3:5). The dark shadow cast by that ancient hate has been shined away. The blighted and withered plants have disappeared, replace by luxuriant foliage, symbolizing the removal of all effects of our insane belief in sin (3:6).

The imagery reminds me of several “fantasy” stories I’ve read, such as the Narnia Chronicles by C. S. Lewis. The land of Narnia, governed by a wicked witch, is in perpetual winter. Always winter, but never Christmas. When the rightful king, Aslan the lion (who represents Christ) is restore to his throne, all the ice and snow magically melts, and all the plants spring back to life again.

If you’ve not read this marvelous fantasy, don’t be put off by its classification as a children’s book. Lewis once said something like, “A book is not worth reading at six unless it is worth re-reading at sixty,” and his books meet that criteria. I divested myself of half my books when we moved recently, but one I refused to give up was the one-volume set of the seven Narnia novels. You owe it to yourself to read at least the first volume, “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.” There are many overtones of traditional Christian theology, but I think you’ll find the story inspiring nevertheless.

Paragraph 4

4 What is a hundred or a thousand years to Them, or tens of thousands? ²When They come, time’s purpose is fulfilled. ³What never was passes to nothingness when They have come. ⁴What hatred claimed is given up to love, and freedom lights on every living thing and lifts it into Heaven,³ where the lights grow ever brighter as each one comes home. ⁵The incomplete is made complete again, and Heaven’s joy has been increased because what is its own has been restored to it. ⁶The bloodied earth is cleansed, and the insane have shed their garments of insanity to join Them on the ground whereon you stand.

We are so in awe of huge time periods: a hundred years seems so long, a thousand almost inconceivable, and tens of thousands unimaginable. I recall being in such awe when I once spent the night in a Swiss farmhouse that was over 600 years old. But to Them, such periods are nothing. “When They come, time’s purpose is fulfilled” (4:1-2).

All that seemed to transpire during those inconceivably long stretches of time “passes to nothingness when They have come” (4:3). Every recipient of hatred is now bathed with love instead. Every living thing is lifted into Heaven. I like the image that comes to my

³. Freedom here is pictured as a bird that alights (“lights” being a poetic version of “alights”) on each living thing and then lifts off with it, carrying it to Heaven.

mind when I read about freedom “lighting on” every living thing, like a bird perhaps, or a strong sunbeam that beams them up to Heaven like a Star Trekker beamed up to their space ship.

And in Heaven, filled with light, “the lights grow brighter as each one comes home” (4:4). This section is so filled with visual images! Can’t you picture it? Can’t you almost feel the excitement, watching the growing brightness and knowing what each increment of light means? “Heaven’s joy has been increased because what is its own has been restored to it” (5:5). “The bloodied earth is cleansed,” all effects of sin erased. Every insane person on earth (and there are billions of us) has “shed their garments of insanity to join *Them* on the ground whereon you stand” (4:6).

There is a passage in the Gospel of Thomas where the image of shedding garments is used as it is here, to depict removal of our insane thinking, our mad desire for separateness:

LOGION 37 His disciples asked: “When will be the day that you appear to us?” “When will be the day of our vision?” Yeshua replied: On the day when you are naked as newborn infants who trample their clothing, then you will see the Son of the Living One and you will have no more fear.

Leloup, the author of this book, comments:

Here, clothes symbolize all the suppositions and impositions with which we have veiled our essential being.

Leloup, Jean-Yves. The Gospel of Thomas: The Gnostic Wisdom of Jesus . Inner Traditions/Bear & Company.

May we all shed the garments of insanity!

Paragraph 5

5 Heaven is grateful for this gift of what has been withheld so long. ²For They have come to gather in Their Own. ³What has been blocked is opened; what was held apart from light is given up, that light may shine on it and leave no space nor distance lingering between the light of Heaven and the world. ⁴The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love. ⁵And They come quickly to the living temple where a home for Them has been set up. ⁶There is no place in Heaven holier. ⁷And They have come to dwell within the temple offered Them to be Their resting place as well as yours.

It’s an amazing thought, that Heaven is grateful *to us* when we give back what we have withheld for so long: our Self, our recognition of ourselves and others as God’s offspring, God’s creation, God’s extension (5:1). God and Christ have come to gather in what has always belonged to them (5:2). Us. The mental blockage we have all built and maintained has been torn down, “given up” by us, so that Heaven’s light can shine on our minds. This light will remove all space or distance “between the light of Heaven and the

world,” making them one (5:3). All this from forgiveness, from looking on one another gently instead of with judgment.

And then comes one of my all-time favorite sentences in the Course:

The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love” (5:4).

Forgiveness is not simply letting someone off the hook. It is loving them instead of hating them. Can you imagine yourself *loving* that person you were thinking about earlier in this section? That is just how dramatic the shift of perception brought about by the miracle is. It is from darkness to light, from winter to spring, from hate to love.

When that joining in present love occurs between any two individuals, “They come quickly to the living temple.” That’s what any two become: a living temple for God and Christ. They become “a home for Them” (5:5). Not even Heaven contains a holier place than a healed and loving relationship (5:6).

The temple or dwelling place established is the mutual love between us, the recognition that we are one. It is a temple and resting place for God, Christ, and us as well (5:7).

Paragraph 6

6 What hatred has released to love becomes the brightest light in Heaven’s radiance. ²And all the lights in Heaven brighter grow, in gratitude for what has been restored. ³Around you angels hover lovingly, to keep away all darkened thoughts of sin, and keep the light where it has entered in. ⁴Your footprints lighten up the world, for where you walk forgiveness goes with you. ⁵No one on earth but offers thanks to one who has restored his home and sheltered him from bitter winter and the freezing cold. ⁶And shall the Lord of Heaven and His Son give less in gratitude for so much more?

Indeed, a relationship turned from hatred to love becomes the brightest light in Heaven (6:1). The light from your relationship brightens every other light in Heaven as they experience gratitude for your restoration (6:2).

There are angels hovering around you both, messengers from God who assist you in keeping any thoughts of sin, judgment, or condemnation out of your minds, guarding and keeping the light that has entered in (6:3). Angels in the Course seem to be some kind of sentient spirits, sent to help guard us from misguided, worldly thinking.⁴ They may be aspects of the Holy Spirit. I, for one, do not think the traditional picture of angels as winged, human-like creatures is accurate, even though the Course speaks of them as “hovering” and spreading their wings over us. The Bible even speaks of Jehovah God as hovering over us like a mother bird, and Jesus once said:

⁴. Say His Name, and you invite the angels to surround the ground on which you stand, and sing to you as they spread out their wings to keep you safe, and shelter you from every worldly thought that would intrude upon your holiness (W-pl.183.2:2).

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34 NRSV)

I believe the pictures of angels are metaphorical representations of the activities of Spirit toward us when we turn our hearts to love. The angels alert us if our thoughts begin to go off the rails, returning to any thoughts of judgment and condemnation, or of separation of any kind. Once we are on track, they help us stay there.

Imagine yourself leaving footprints glowing with light wherever you walk! You bring the light of forgiveness with you wherever you go (6:4).

Any human being on earth would be profoundly grateful to a person who has somehow restored that person's home, providing shelter from the freezing cold of winter (6:5). Likewise, “shall the Lord of Heaven and His Son give *less* in gratitude for so much *more?*” (6:6). You have given God's home back to Him! Your act of forgiveness and joining is far more than just restoring a person's home. There are rich rewards for forgiveness: “Forgiveness offers everything I want” (W-122).

Paragraph 7

7 Now is the temple of the living God rebuilt as host again to Him by Whom it was created.⁵ ²Where He dwells, His Son dwells with Him, never separate. ³And They give thanks that They are welcome made at last. ⁴Where stood a cross stands now the risen Christ, and ancient scars are healed within His sight. ⁵An ancient miracle has come to bless, and to replace an ancient enmity that came to kill. ⁶In gentle gratitude do God the Father and the Son return to what is Theirs and will forever be. ⁷Now is the Holy Spirit's purpose done. ⁸For They have come! ⁹For They have come at last!

God created us as His temple. Our choosing separation was like the destruction of the temple when Jerusalem was conquered and the temple was torn down, stone from store. When we forgive, when we join with another, we are like the stones of the temple coming back together (7:1), or like Ezekiel's valley of dry bones that join together to form a living army (Ezekiel 37). We've given God's home back. And where He lives, so do we; “*never separate*” (7:2).

Once more, we read of God giving us thanks for welcoming Him back to His home (7:3). This idea, as startling as it is, occurs over and over in the Course. We think of thanking God, but it seldom occurs thus that God would thank *us*.

⁵ Ezra 6:3 (NKJV): “In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: ‘Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid.’” In the above allusion, God's earthly temple is rebuilt, and His presence invited back in, through our ancient hatred toward our brother being replaced by a present love.

This act of joining together is being painted in the most significant images: the risen Christ taking the place of a cross; ancient scars being healed; an ancient enmity replaced by an ancient miracle (7:4–5). Jesus certainly want to lay it on thick, stressing just how important and far-reaching and momentous this is.

Actually, this is the whole purpose of the Holy Spirit (7:7)! Bringing God home! They gently return to their eternal home, the temple we are, with gratitude (7:6). And the purpose now is done because “They have come! For They have come at last!” (7:7–9).

To me, this speaks of unification, of God and God’s creation living as one in the temple of their shared love. It also reminds me of the final chapters of the Revelation of John in the Bible, which speaks of the New Jerusalem coming down from Heaven to earth.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”” (Revelation 21:1–4 NRSV)

“I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” (Revelation 21:22–26 NRSV)

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.