

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 27

Holy Ground

Section VII

Sin's Witnesses

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

Overview of Section III

This section deals with pain and pleasure. We think of them as total opposites. Pain is terrible and to be avoided; pleasure is wonderful and we seek it in a myriad of ways. But the Course deems them *both* to be witnesses to sin. It tells us they are actually the same thing because they share a common purpose: to “prove” that the body is real and that we are that body. If we believe that we are bodies, we believe we are sinners who have wrested our lives away from God, encased them in flesh, and sought an existence separate from Him.

Paragraph 1

Pain demonstrates the body must be real. ²It is a loud, obscuring voice whose shrieks would silence what the Holy Spirit says and keep His words from your awareness. ³Pain compels attention, drawing it away from Him and focusing upon itself. ⁴Its purpose is the same as pleasure, for they both are means *to make the body real*. ⁵What shares a common purpose is the same. ⁶This is the law of purpose, which unites all those who share in it within itself.¹ ⁷Pleasure and pain are equally unreal, because their purpose cannot be achieved. ⁸Thus are they means for nothing, for they have a goal without a meaning. ⁹And they share the lack of meaning that their purpose has.

Our bodies never seem so real to us as when we are experiencing pain (1:1). Only rare individuals have learned how to ignore pain, to block it from awareness. Such people are able to have serious dental work done without any anesthesia. But for the rest of us,

¹ The law of purpose is described here as bringing about two kinds of union. It unites pain and pleasure, because they both share the same purpose (that of making the body real), and it unites different people who share the same purpose.

when pain arises we become its prisoners, unable to deny its reality, and hence the reality of the body. Pain's voice "is a loud, obscuring voice whose shrieks would silence what the Holy Spirit say and keep His words from your awareness" (1:2). As we've seen in the Course, the Holy Spirit is constantly telling us we are not bodies, and even makes this fact something we need to make a part of every period of spiritual practice we take. *Every day* (Lesson 199, 5:1–2; Review 6 and its ten lessons, 201–210).

And yet how many of us have come to firmly and consistently believe this and to carry on our lives in light of this fact? Our resistance is enormous, and the seeming reality of pain is a good part of the reason. It simply drowns out the message of the Holy Spirit. It "compels attention" (1:3). Our minds focus on our bodies when we are in pain, and focusing on spiritual thoughts seems almost impossible.

Then Jesus throws in a real kicker! Pleasure, he says, has the same purpose as pain: "to make the body real" (1:4). It's hard to disagree with that. Extreme pleasure, like extreme pain, just takes over our minds and focuses them on our bodies. But he goes even further. Having the same purpose means that, fundamentally, pain and pleasure are the *same thing* (1:5). (The thought occurs that, since we've read in the Course that "pain is illusion" (W-190.10), then if they are the same thing, logically it must be also true that pleasure is illusion. Hmm. He confirms this just a couple of sentences later in this paragraph.)

"What shares a common purpose is the same" (1:5). He calls this "the law of purpose" (1:6), and says that when two things — or two people — share in this law, it unites them. Thus, as the footnote in the CE points out, it sees pain and pleasure as united in their common purpose of making the body real, and it unites any two people who share a common purpose (which could be either a beneficial purpose or a detrimental one).

The body is *not* real. Therefore, since pain and pleasure unite in their purpose to make the body real, they must be as unreal as their impossible purpose (1:7). Their goal has no meaning, and they are "means for nothing," causes without any effect because what they are attempting to cause cannot exist (1:8). They are as meaningless as their purpose (1:9).

Paragraph 2

² Sin shifts from pain to pleasure and again to pain. ²For either witness is the same and carries but one message: "You are here, within this body, and you can be hurt. ³You can have pleasure too, but only at the cost of pain." ⁴These witnesses are joined by many more. ⁵Each one seems different because it has a different name, and so it seems to answer to a different sound. ⁶Except for this, the witnesses of sin are all alike. ⁷Call pleasure pain, and it will hurt. ⁸Call pain a pleasure, and the pain behind the pleasure will be felt no more. ⁹Sin's witnesses but shift from name to name, as one steps forward and another back. ¹⁰Yet which is foremost makes no difference. ¹¹Sin's witnesses hear but the call of death.

We have been told earlier that sin is a term that is just as impossible and meaningless as the body. For instance:

To sin would be to violate reality and to succeed. Sin is the proclamation that attack is real and guilt is justified (T-19.II.2:2–3 (CE))

The Son of God can be mistaken; he can deceive himself; he can even turn the power of his mind against himself. But he cannot sin. There is nothing he can do that would really change his reality in any way, or make him really guilty. That is what sin would do, for such is its purpose. Yet for all the wild insanity inherent in the whole idea of sin, it is impossible. For the wages of sin is death, and how can the immortal die? (T-19.II.3:1–2 (CE))

To affirm the reality of the body and our identity with our bodies falls in the camp of what the Course means by “sin.” If the body is real, we *have* violated reality and succeeded. We have separated ourselves from God — if the body is real. So, in sharing the purpose of making the body real, both pain and pleasure are attempting to make *sin* real. The method the ego uses shifts back and forth between pain and pleasure (2:1), and both of them are serving sin by telling us, “You are here, within this body, and you can be hurt. You can have pleasure too, but only at the cost of pain” (2:2–3).

Is it so weird to think that these two things are the same thing in different forms? Some people actually find pleasure in pain; we have a name for them, sadomasochists. I’ve heard, and maybe even have had, the thought, “It hurts so good!” And many of us can testify that sometimes too much pleasure ends up being painful! The same physical nerves that cause pleasure can also cause pain. The ego grants us pleasure, but only at the cost of pain.

There are many other things that testify to the body’s reality. All are false witnesses, of course. Sickness is one such. Everything our physical senses show us are other examples. The body seems to say, “I see. I hear. Therefore, I am.” But all witnesses to sin are alike. They have many names; they appear in many guises, seemingly different from one another. We are besieged by these witnesses, one with this name, that with another, arising and fading away. None of the “differences” matter; they are all responding to the call of death and calling us to respond as well (2:4–11).

Paragraph 3

3 This body, purposeless within itself, holds all your memories and all your hopes. ²You use its eyes to see, its ears to hear, and let it tell you what it is it feels. ³*It does not know.* ⁴It tells you but the names you gave to it to use when you call forth the witnesses to its reality. ⁵You cannot choose among them which are real, for any one you choose is like the rest. ⁶This name or that, but nothing more, you choose. ⁷You do not make a witness true because you called him by truth’s *name*. ⁸The truth is found in him *if it is truth he represents*. ⁹And otherwise he lies, if you should call him by the holy Name of God Himself.

We’re being persuaded to dis-identify with our bodies. Not to mistreat them or ignore them; the Holy Spirit can use our bodies as vehicles through which to achieve His

purpose, the redemption of the world. In itself, the body has no purpose (3:1), but we've invested it with all of our memories and hopes. We see with its eyes and hear with its ears, and use its sense of feel to understand and navigate the world (3:2). Yet the body *does not know* what it sees, hears, and feels. We — the part of mind we've given over to ego — have *told* the body how to identify the sights and sounds and feelings (3:4). We are using the body's own senses to witness to the body's reality. The Course has made it clear that we cannot depend of the body's senses to know ourselves or the world:

Perception seems to teach you what you see, yet it but witnesses to what you taught. It is the outward picture of a wish, an image that you wanted to be true. Look at yourself, and you will see a body. Look at this body in a different light, and it looks different. And without a light, it seems that it is gone. Yet you are reassured that it is there, because you still can feel it with your hands and hear it move.

10 Here is the image that you want to be yourself. It is the means to make your wish come true. It gives the eyes with which you look on it, the hands that feel it, and the ears with which you listen to the sounds it makes. It proves its own reality to you. Thus is the body made a theory of yourself, with no provisions made for evidence beyond itself, and no escape within its sight. Its course is sure, when seen through its own eyes. It grows and withers, flourishes and dies. And you cannot conceive of you apart from it. You brand it sinful and you hate its acts, judging it evil. Yet your specialness whispers, "Here is my own beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." (T-24.VII.9–10 (CE))

It makes no difference which sense we think is most dependable; they are all the same: witnesses to unreality (3:5). We are just choosing among labels given to illusions (3:6). Even if we utilize a label belonging to something true, we do not thereby make the illusion true (3:7).

These last few sentences (7 to 9) could be applied to the names by which we refer to one another. I may call you "Jennifer," but what does that label signify to me? Does it refer to your body and your ego? If so, it's a lie. If it refers to you as the Christ, the holy creation of God and part of my True Self, then it is true. The label's value depends entirely on what it represents (3:8).

Paragraph 4

4 God's Witness sees no witnesses *against* the body. ²Neither does He harken to the witnesses by other names which speak in other ways for its reality. ³He knows it is not real. ⁴For *nothing* could contain what you believe it holds within, nor could it tell a part of God Himself what it should feel, and what its function is. ⁵Yet must He love whatever you hold dear. ⁶And for each witness to the body's death, He sends a witness to your life in Him Who knows no death. ⁷Each miracle He brings is witness that the body is *not* real. ⁸Its pains and pleasures does He heal alike, for all sin's witnesses do His replace.

“God’s Witness” is the Holy Spirit; He has nothing against the body; nothing he sees speaks negative things about the body (4:1). By the same token, however, He does not listen to any witness that purports to demonstrate the body’s *reality* (4:2). He isn’t for the body, nor against it. “He knows it is not real” (4:3). And that’s all that matters. This is why the Course has us declare, “My body is a wholly neutral thing” (W-294). That lesson gives us this prayer to use:

"My body, Father, cannot be Your Son. And what is not created cannot be sinful nor sinless; neither good nor bad. Let me, then, use this dream to help Your plan that we awaken from all dreams we made." (W-pII.294.2:1-3 (FIP)).

What you are cannot possibly be contained in the body; in fact, *nothing* could contain It because It is unlimited and infinite. You are a part of God Himself! Nothing “outside” of you can tell you what you should feel, or what your function is (4:4).

Still, the body is “dear” to you, and so God loves it (4:5)! This line, I think, completely destroys any notion that the Course is “anti-body” or that it asks us to ignore or mistreat our bodies in any way. God *loves* it! So when the body sends us a message about its death, which includes everything about sickness, frailty and vulnerability, God sends us a witness to our life in God, God Who “knows no death” (4:6). He sends miracles demonstrating that the body is *not* real (4:7). He heals all our pains but also *all our pleasures*, because they are equal witnesses to sin (4:8).

That’s worth thinking about: What does healing pleasures mean? The latter part of the sentence says, “for all sin’s witnesses do His replace.” So, apparently, what heals the pain or pleasure is replacing it with the witnesses of the Holy Spirit. Pain and pleasure are both witnesses to sin, because they witness to us of the body’s reality, thus substantiating the ego’s claim that we sinned, that is, separated from God. The Holy Spirit witnesses to us of our unity with God and one another. What this seems to mean is that instead of listening to our pain or our pleasure and what they are saying, we will instead be listening to the Holy Spirit’s message of union with God, and the unreality of our bodies.

I do not believe this means we will experience no pleasure, nor no pain. It means we won’t believe their message. Ultimately, when we exist without bodies, of course there will be no *physical* pleasure, but I don’t think we become totally numb. Rather, our pleasure will come from somewhere other than our bodies.

Paragraph 5

5 The miracle makes no distinctions in the names by which sin's witnesses are called. ²It merely proves that what they represent has no effects. ³And this it proves because its own effects have come to take their place. ⁴It matters not the name by which you called your suffering. ⁵*It is no longer there.* ⁶The One Who brings the miracle perceived them all as one, and called by name of "fear." ⁷As fear is witness unto death, so is a miracle the witness unto life. ⁸It is a witness no one can deny, for it is the effects of life it brings. ⁹The dying live, the dead arise, and pain has vanished.² ¹⁰Yet a miracle speaks not but for itself, but what it represents. ¹¹Love, too, has symbols in a world of sin. ¹²The miracle forgives because it stands for what is past forgiveness and is true.

5:1: This first sentence supports what I've just said. When we experience a miracle, with our perceptions of pain and pleasure replaced by the perception of the Holy Spirit, it makes no difference whether we are talking about pain or pleasure. The names given to sin's witnesses are irrelevant (5:4); beneath the name they are the same. The miracle just proves neither that pain nor pleasure has any effects (5:2). We are no longer listening to what they are trying to say. We are experiencing the effects of the miracle instead (5:3), things like love and life instead of fear and death. The suffering, however it is named, is no longer there (5:5).³

One name actually can be used to identify all sin's witnesses, no matter what form they take: *fear* (5:6). Fear speaks to us of death; the miracle speaks of life (5:7). You may wonder how pleasure speaks of death. To me the answer is that pleasures end. As bodies age, there is less pleasure and more pain. The pleasures speak of death by reminding us that they do not last.

Miracles are undeniable witnesses to life because what they impart are the effects of life: "the dying live, the dead arise, and pain has vanished" (5:8–9). This is as true of relationships as it is of bodies. But these effects are not the message of a miracle. Miracles point to something far beyond healthy bodies or healed relationships. A miracle represents the love that is past forgiveness, the love that *is* the Truth (5:10–12), the Love that is God. It points to that unthinkable, unspeakable, unknowable Oneness that is beyond all perception, as we discussed in reading T-27.IV, "Power Unopposed."

² Matthew 11:5 (KJV): "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." In both the Bible verse and the Course passage the miracle is what causes the dead to arise. See also Isaiah 26:19 (KJV): "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

³ I believe this means physical healing in the case of physical sicknesses; present love in the case of hatred.

Paragraph 6

6 How foolish and insane it is to think a miracle is bound by laws which it came solely to *undo*! ²The laws of sin have different witnesses with different strengths, and they attest to different suffering. ³Yet to the One Who sends forth miracles to bless the world, a tiny stab of pain, a little worldly pleasure, and the throes of death itself are but a single sound: a call for healing, and a plaintive cry for help within a world of misery. ⁴It is their *sameness* that the miracle attests. ⁵It is their *sameness* that it *proves*. ⁶The laws which call them different are dissolved, and shown as powerless. ⁷The purpose of a miracle is to accomplish this. ⁸And God Himself has guaranteed the strength of miracles for what they witness to.

The world we seem to live in has all kinds of rules, definitions and distinctions. Pain and pleasure are not the same; they are opposites. And there are a multitude of forms that both of them come in, all defined by what the Course here calls “laws of sin” (6:2). The function of these laws is to “call them [the various forms of sin’s witnesses] different” (6:6). They “have different witnesses with different strengths, and they attest to different suffering” (6:2).

These are the laws that miracles “came solely to *undo*” (6:1). Therefore, it is “foolish and insane” to think that miracles are somehow bound by these laws. For instance, to say that it is harder to heal cancer than to heal a cold, or to heal the rift in a casual friendship than to heal a long-standing, bitter feud with someone you view as an enemy. That’s the first law of miracles: “There is no order of difficulty in miracles.” So to the Holy Spirit, Who “sends forth miracles to bless the world, a tiny stab of pain, a little worldly pleasure, and the throes of death itself are but a single sound” (6:3). A miracle is a universal healer, a universal antidote to whatever ails you! Whatever the “whatever” is, the Holy Spirit views it as the same thing: “a call for healing, and a plaintive cry for help within a world of misery” (6:3). The miracle attests (provides clear evidence that) all “whatevers” are the same; it *proves* they are the same (6:4–5). The seeming differences vanish; the laws of the world are powerless against the miracle (6:6).

Demolishing the laws of the world is the whole purpose of miracles (6:7). Their potency is guaranteed by God (6:8).

Paragraph 7

7 Be witness, then, unto the miracle, and not the laws of sin. ²There is no need to suffer any more. ³But there *is* need that you be healed, because the suffering of the world has made it deaf to its salvation and deliverance. ⁴The resurrection of the world awaits *your* healing and *your* happiness, that you may demonstrate the healing of the world. ⁵The holy instant will replace all sin if you but carry its effects with you. ⁶And no one will elect to suffer more. ⁷What better function could you serve than this? ⁸Be healed that you may heal, and suffer not the laws of sin to be applied to you. ⁹And truth will be revealed to you who chose to let love's symbols take the place of sin.

We are called to be witnesses to the power of miracles, not to the laws of sin (7:1). How? By ceasing our needless suffering (7:2). By being healed, because that *is* needed to witness to the world of its salvation and deliverance (7:3).

“The resurrection of the world awaits *your* healing and *your* happiness, that you may demonstrate the healing of the world” (7:4).

This is what the Course means when it says that the salvation of the world depends on you: "Today's exercises will apply to you, recognizing that *your salvation is crucial to the salvation of the world*" (W-pI.39.3:6 (my emphasis)). You must be healed to bring healing to the world.

If we accept and enter the holy instant, it will replace sin (pain, pleasure) in us and, if we carry its effect (healing, forgiveness) into the world, it will replace sin there as well (7:5). When the world accepts this healing, no one will ever again choose to suffer, as we all have done by coming here (7:6; see T-29.VIII.4:8 (CE), T-29.VII.5:2 (FIP)).

"Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him" (W-pII.3.2:4 (FIP)).

It seems too much to think that if I am healed the entire world will follow! But that's the implication here. Jesus was healed in this way, and that is one reason why the healing of the whole world is guaranteed in the end.

This is a very high calling indeed (7:7)! "Be healed," Jesus says to us, and according to our faith it will be so. If we allow "love's symbols [to] take the place of sin," the Truth will be revealed to us. We won't learn it; it will be revealed (7:8–9). We'll just *know*. And the Truth, I believe, means that unthinkable, unspeakable, unknowable Oneness that is God.

To allow love's symbols to replace sin seems to mean, again, that total shift of perception so that we no longer perceive any witnesses to sin anywhere, but instead see only love or a call for love. Those are love's symbols, and they are the transitional forms within this world that open us to the revelation of the Absolute Truth.



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.