

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 29

The Worship of Idols

Section IX

What Is an Idol?

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition.

Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview of Section VIII

Note: Idols. See the commentary on T-29.VIII (the previous section) for cross-references and suggestions for marking your books for the term "idol."

After a whole section in which he has talked about idols, Jesus shocks us by telling us that we don't even know what an idol is, although we may think we do (1:1–2). Try to take this quite seriously; set aside everything you think you know about what an idol is, even what you've read in the previous section, and let what he says here sink in.

• Study Question •

1. *The term "anti-Christ" is a term from the Christian Bible, but it is given a vastly different meaning in this section. Based on your knowledge of the Bible (great or small), what do you think the term in the Bible means to modern Christians? Watch as you read the section for the way the Course redefines it.*

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Paragraph 1

What is an idol? ²Do you think you know? ³For idols are unrecognized as such, and never seen for what they really are. ⁴That is the only power that they have. ⁵Their purpose is obscure, and they are feared and worshipped, both, because you do not know what they are for and why they have been made. ⁶An idol is an image of your brother which you would value more than what he is. ⁷Idols are made that he may be replaced, no matter what their form. ⁸And it is this which never is perceived and recognized. ⁹Be it a body or a thing, a place, a situation or a circumstance, an object owned or wanted, or a right demanded or achieved, it is the same.

• Study Question •

2. (1:1–5). According to these sentences, what is the only power an idol has? Why does that prove that you cannot know what an idol is?

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After reading the previous section, we may think we know what an idol is, but we probably don't fully grasp their significance (1:1–2). Notice that, while we may perceive something as a value we are seeking outside of ourselves, and recognize that thing as what the Course means by "idol," he begins by stating that we don't truly see idols "for what they really are." We don't truly see them as *idols*; we do not understand their purpose or why we made them (1:3,5). Their power lies in the obscurity of what they are doing (1:4–5), an obscurity that Jesus unmasks in what follows. Because of their obscure purpose and how the ego uses them, we fear idols even as we worship them (1:5).

The word *idol* is not much more than a word to us. It conjures up a picture of stone "gods" worshipped by tribes in primitive times, but we don't see quite how it applies to us. We don't "get" idols, and so our idols continue to undermine our spiritual progress even though we may have correctly identified them as idols.

Jesus tells us that all idols, regardless of the form they take, are made to take the place of your brother, made to be something you value more than you value the *reality* of your brother (1:6–9). An idol may take the shape of some person or body, some thing, some place or situation or circumstance, or an object you own or want, or even a right you have obtained or are insisting on having. The shape is irrelevant because they all have one purpose. You use all these things to replace your brother. *That is what an idol is*: a replacement for your brother. And this fact is what "*never* is perceived and recognized" (1:8).

So this is the new piece of information he wants to impart to us, what he means when he says we have not seen idols "for what they really are" (1:3). We may recognize we've made our job an idol, or our new house, or even abstract things like "the right to be recognized for what I accomplish." What we inevitably fail to recognize is why we've done so: We have designed these things to draw our love and devotion *away from our brothers*. We are using the idol to replace our brother's reality. The connection between our idols and our failure to see Christ in another person may be hard to grasp, to be sure. Of course, we should *expect* such difficulty if the connection is (as Jesus says) something we *never* perceive or recognize! But try to get it in

your mind that *somehow*, this is the purpose of all of your idols. They obscure and replace your brothers. The rest of the section will help us grasp this more fully and understand how it is so.

Let me try to make the concept a bit more approachable. Suppose you are holding some grievance against another person. To use a simple example: Suppose they stole money from you. Does that seem to make it difficult for you to love them and honor them as God's perfect creation? Of course, it does. But that's the point. The money (the idol) is more important to you than your relationship with the person's reality!

Paragraph 2

² Let not their form deceive you. ²Idols are but substitutes for your reality. ³In some way you believe they will complete your little self and let you walk in safety in a world perceived as dangerous, with forces massed against your confidence and peace of mind. ⁴They have the power to supply your lacks and add the value which you do not have. ⁵No one believes in idols who has not enslaved himself to littleness and loss, and thus must seek beyond his little self for strength to raise his head and stand apart from all the misery the world reflects. ⁶This is the penalty for looking not within for certainty and for a quiet calm which liberates you from the world and lets you stand apart in quiet and in peace unlimited.

• Study Questions •

3. (2:2). Notice here that the idol "substitutes for your reality," whereas in 1:6–7 an idol is said always to be a replacement (or substitute) for what your brother is. How can both of these statements be true?

4. (2:6). One of the things that can motivate us to change our minds is getting in touch with the penalty or cost of our current way of thinking. What is the penalty or cost for seeking after idols, and not looking within to find certainty and calm?

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Undoubtedly, the various forms that idols take seem to be very different. We may wonder how they can *all* be doing the same thing. But Jesus asks us not to be fooled by the forms (2:1). He insists they all do the same thing. Interestingly enough, he changes tack here to say they substitute, not for your *brother's* reality, but your own (2:2). Your brother's reality and yours refer to the same thing: the Christ, our shared Self. Whatever their form, we are hoping every idol will complete us in some way, to make us safe in a hostile world. We believe the idol has the power to make us whole and fill the emptiness within or supply what is missing in us (2:3–4). We believe in our inherent littleness and lack (2:5). We think we must look outside of ourselves for the strength to survive in the world (2:6). Of course, everything we seek is *already* within us. Thus, we make the idol substitute for our reality. We don't need to look outside. It would be easy to look within to find certainty, calm, and peace, standing apart, liberated from the world, but because we fail to look within, we *must* pay the penalty of looking for idols outside of ourselves (2:6).

As was said in T-29.VII.4:6 (FIP)/T-29.VIII.4:6 (CE), "The search implies you are not whole within." That's the basic argument here: When you attribute to an idol the ability to complete and protect you, you are belittling yourself. Think about some of your personal idols, and try to get in

touch with how you are giving away your power to them by making them idols that take the place of something within yourself.

Recognizing that I share one reality with my brother helps me understand how it can be that every time I seek an idol, I am trying to replace what my brother is. It is relatively easy to see how believing in an idol to complete *me* is making a substitute for my own reality (which is already complete). But if my reality and my brother's are one and the same, then in trying to substitute an idol for my reality (the Christ), I am *also* substituting for my brother's reality. Recognizing the Christ in my brother would show me my *own* completion, and I would not need idols.

Paragraph 3

3 An idol is a false impression or a false belief; some form of anti-Christ which constitutes a **gap** between the Christ and what you see. ²An idol is a wish made tangible and given form, and thus perceived as real and seen outside the mind. ³Yet they remain ideas, and cannot leave the mind that is their source. ⁴Nor is their form apart from the idea it represents. ⁵All forms of anti-Christ oppose the Christ, and fall before His face like a dark veil which seems to shut you off from Him, alone in darkness. ⁶Yet the light is there. ⁷A cloud does not put out the sun. ⁸No more a veil can banish what it seems to separate, nor darken by one whit the light itself.

Note: A small but significant difference occurs in 3:3 between the FIP and CE versions:

FIP: Yet it is still a thought, and cannot leave the mind that is its source.

CE: Yet they remain ideas, and cannot leave the mind that is their source.

The use of “idea” instead of “thought” makes a clear connection to the oft-repeated statement that “Ideas leave not their source.”

• Study Questions •

5. *Suppose I am making an idol out of my new home. How is that an anti-Christ?*
6. *How is my house “an image of your brother that you would value more than what he is” (1:6)?*
7. **(3:2–4).** *We see idols as concrete, objective things, existing outside of us. What are they really, and where are they?*

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An “anti-Christ,” then, is something that opposes Christ, and shuts you off from the light of His face. As the Course uses the term, it is a synonym for “idol.” It prevents us from seeing Christ in ourselves and our brothers (3:1, 5). You might condense 3:1 to the following: “An idol is... a gap between the Christ and what you see.” (There’s the word “gap” again.) Earlier in the Text we read, “The sight of Christ is all there is to see” (T-24.V.7:7 (FIP), T-24.V.8:1 (CE); see also preceding six sentences). Thus, *anything* that you see *besides* Christ is an idol. At any

moment, I could be seeing Christ in everything—all the “forms” mentioned before, such as bodies, situations, places, and people. (Workbook Lesson 28 speaks, for instance, of seeing a table differently and seeing that the light in it is the same light that is in everything.) Put this line next to 1:6, and it helps explain it:

An idol is an image of your brother that you would value more than what he is.

An idol is a false impression, or a false belief; some form of anti-Christ, that constitutes a gap between the Christ and what you see.

I said “anti-Christ” is a synonym for “idol,” but more precisely, the anti-Christ is the *idea* in our mind, our belief in lack, and something outside that will complete our lack. An idol is a form that idea takes when projected out and perceived as real (3:2). And yet, the idea and the form are tied inextricably together (3:3–4). The form we see as *outside* the mind is still an idea *within* the mind, because, as the Course repeatedly says:

Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be *external* to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has *not* left its source. (T-26.VII.4:7–9 (FIP), T-26.VII.4:6–8 (CE))

That identity of idea and form is beneficial. Because the idol is still really an idea in my mind, I can change my mind, and in so doing, change what I perceive in the world. I can cause the idol to disappear and see only Christ.

Whatever forms our idols take, they veil Christ from our vision; they prevent us from seeing Christ in one another (3:5). The light of His face still shines, however: “Yet the light is there. A cloud does not put out the sun” (3:6–7). The idols can *hide* the light of Christ from us, but cannot take that light away (3:8). It is still there, waiting for us to brush the veils aside and recognize the truth:

Those who seek the light are merely covering their eyes. The light is in them now. Enlightenment is but a recognition, not a change at all. (W-pl.188.1:2-4)

Practice Suggestion: Visualize the sun shining brightly, and then see a cloud coming to obscure the sun. Ask yourself, “Has the sun gone out? Did the cloud extinguish it?” Let yourself see how silly the question feels. And then let yourself realize that the sun is Christ, your Identity, and the clouds are your idols. No matter how dark the clouds, how heavy and thick they seem, the light of the Son still shines, unaffected in any way.

Paragraph 4

4 This world of idols is a veil across the face of Christ, because its purpose is to separate your brother from yourself—a dark and fearful purpose, yet a thought without the power to change one blade of grass from something living to a sign of death. ²Its form is nowhere, for its source abides within your mind where God abideth not. ³Where is this place where what is everywhere has been excluded and been kept apart? ⁴What hand could be held up to block God's way? ⁵Whose voice could order Him to enter not? ⁶The “more-than-everything”¹ is not a thing to make you tremble and to quail in fear. ⁷Christ's enemy is nowhere. ⁸He can take no form in which he ever will be real.

• Study Questions •

8. *Though the purpose of idols is dark and fearful, we need not be afraid. Why not?*

9. (4:2). Does “its” in 4:2 refer to the “world of idols,” the “dark and fearful purpose,” or the “thought without...power”? See 3.2–3 for some additional clues.

10. (4:2–8). *The world of idols is Christ's enemy, the anti-Christ, but this enemy is nowhere and “can take no form in which he ever will be real” (4:8). That is the basic message of the paragraph. What is the reasoning Jesus gives to support this statement? (Note how this argument is based on the same thought as the opening line of this chapter, T-29.I.1.1.)*

11. (4:6). *The term “more-than-everything” refers to something in the previous section; can you identify the sentence referred to? This becomes personalized (“He takes no form...”) and refers to the anti-Christ, or the idol.*

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I find the emphasis on “because” in 4:1 quite interesting. If an idol's purpose is to separate me from my brother (the true nature of idols, which we never recognize until we stop valuing the idol over our brother; see 1:6–8), *the way to accomplish that separation* is to hide the face of Christ. Suddenly that makes sense! If I *saw Christ* in my brother and valued his reality more than anything else, I would never want to be separate from him. But if I value, say, my house, then I may indeed *want* to keep apart from my brother to protect my private property from him. Whatever form an idol may take, it can become a point of contention, something I strive for at the expense of unity with my brothers and sisters. Separating me from my brother is “a dark and fearful purpose,” and yet it is so powerless it cannot affect even a single blade of grass² (4:1).

The next sentence's punctuation makes it challenging to know what the pronoun “Its” refers to (in 4:2). It could refer to any of three words from the preceding sentences: *world*, *purpose*, or *thought*. We might think the “its” here means the same as “its” in 4:1 (“because its purpose...”). There, it refers to the world of idols. But the most logical choice is the nearest referent: “a

¹ T-29.VIII.2:3 (CE), T-29.VII.2:3 (FIP): “And therefore, *by* his coming, he denies the truth about himself and seeks for something more than everything, as if a part of it were separated off and found where all the rest of it is not.”

² I note again here the mention of “one blade of grass” as “something living,” something that is a part of the face of Christ, implying that all aspects of the physical world are in some sense alive and part of Christ.

thought without the power to change one blade of grass” (4:1). This interpretation is likely because the next sentence speaks of “its form” (4:2). An idea can take many forms, but the world *is* the form of the powerless thought. As for “its” referring to “purpose,” 4:1 equates them; the dark purpose *is* a thought.

What clinches the interpretation of “its” meaning “thought” for me is the latter part of the sentence. It says, “its source abides within your mind,” which is an apparent reference to the oft-repeated dictum of the Course: “Ideas leave not their source” (T-26.VII.4:6 (CE)—4:7 in FIP—and elsewhere). Here is how I’d fill in the referents for the pronouns:

This world of idols *is* a veil across the face of Christ, because **the world’s** purpose is to separate your brother from yourself. [The world’s purpose is] A dark and fearful purpose, yet [this purpose is] a thought without the power to change one blade of grass from something living to a sign of death. **This powerless thought’s** form [**which is the world**] is nowhere, for **the thought’s source** abides within your mind where God abideth not.

The form (i.e., the world) is nowhere; the thought or idea remains in your mind. The point the Course is making is that we need not fear the dark purpose of idols because *the world of idols does not exist in form*; “its form is nowhere” (4:2) The *reason* that the world of idols has no form comes in the rest of the sentence and the sentences that follow.

First, the source of the thought that produces this world is a place in your mind from which God is absent (4:2). But, Jesus asks, “Where is this place?” (4:3). How can God be absent from any part of your mind if, as Jesus said at the start of the chapter, “There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent (T-29.I.1:1). Such a place does not exist. Who could hold up their hand to block out God? The idea is absurd! Who would have the power to tell God to stay out? (4:4–5) Nobody! Thus, the *source* of the world of idols cannot exist, and since its source does not exist, that world does not exist.

The “more-than-everything” (the world of idols) is a toothless tiger. All the dark, convoluted plots of the ego are completely impotent (4:6). The anti-Christ, Christ’s “enemy,” cannot take form (4:7). He is an illusion, not real, and can never be real (4:8). Opposition to Christ cannot exist except in dreams.

In a way, this paragraph is a full exposition of the argument summarized in T-29.I.1:1–2, which says there is nothing to fear because God cannot be absent from any time, place, or state. If there is no place from which God is absent, there can be no source for the world of idols, and we need not fear idols’ dark purpose.

Paragraph 5

5 What is an idol? ²Nothing! ³It must be believed before it seems to come to life, and given power that it may be feared. ⁴Its life and power are its believer’s gift, and this is what the miracle restores to what *has* life and power worthy of the gift of Heaven and eternal peace. ⁵The miracle does not restore the truth, the light the veil between has not put out. ⁶It merely lifts the veil and lets the truth shine unencumbered, being what it is. ⁷It does not need belief to be itself, for it has been created; so it *is*. ⁸An idol is established by belief, and when it is withdrawn, the idol “dies.”

• Study Questions •

12. (5:3-4). *What makes an idol seem to come alive? What gives it its fearful power over us?*

13. *Since we know that in this context the “veil” is the world of idols (4:1), what do you think this means: “the miracle...lifts the veil, and lets the truth shine unencumbered”?*

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The formula established in the last paragraph runs through the rest of this section: An idol can have no source and no form (and therefore is nothing); it has no location (and therefore is nowhere). Notice how this paragraph begins with the question, “*What is an idol?*” and paragraph 7 begins with, “*Where is an idol?*” The surrounding paragraphs fill out the meaning of the one-word answer to both questions, “nothing” (5:2) and “nowhere” (7:2).

Because their source cannot exist, idols are nothing (5:2). All that empowers them with life and strength is our belief in them (5:3). We have endowed our idols with life and power. Miracles restore to us the life and power we have given away, the life and power that we never really lost in the first place (5:4). The Course insists on this point. We might mistakenly think that:

- We gave life and power to the idols, who then had them and we did not.
- Miracles, then, take the life and power away from idols and restore them to us.

In other words, we tend to think in terms of a real loss and a real restoration. But that isn't the true picture, according to this paragraph. “The miracle does not restore the truth” (5:5). This sentence recalls the emphasis early in Chapter 28, that “the miracle does nothing” (T-28.I.1:1-4; 28.II.7:10 (FIP), 28.II.8:1 (CE); 28.III.3:1 (FIP), T-28.III.2:7 (CE); see also W-pII.13.1:1-3).

The transfer of life and power to the idols was an illusion (as are the idols themselves); we *never lost* our life and power. The light in us never went out (5:5). The transfer to idols never took place; we just *thought* it had taken place. All the miracle does is *lift the veil* that has covered the light in us so that the light can shine out without any hindrance (5:6). The light in us does not require our belief to exist. God created it, so it just is (5:7). It exists in us whether or not we believe in it. And when our belief in idols is gone, nothing stands in the way of the light's shining.

It's the same concept expressed elsewhere that in this unreal world, true learning is really *unlearning* (M-4.X.3:7). We are just removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is our natural inheritance (T-In.1:7).

“An idol is *established* by belief” (5:8). The next paragraph fleshes out this idea and the preposterous nature of the belief required.

In 5:3, we read that when we believe in idols, they *seem* to come to life and have power. The second part of the 5:8, “...when it [belief] is withdrawn the idol ‘dies,’” is the flip side of that thought. The word “dies” is in quotes, I believe, because the author means to imply that we should understand the word as not strictly accurate. We could correctly add the word “supposedly” or the phrase “seems to” in front, like this: “the idol supposedly dies” or “the idol seems to die.” If the idol only seems to come to life, its death can only be apparent, not real. The

generic idea, I think, is that when we cease to believe in an idol, it loses its apparent power and life, which it never really had in the first place.

Withdrawing belief in idols is equivalent to lifting the veil from the face of Christ. It means that we cease believing that the world has any objective reality or even exists outside of us. We see that it is a manifestation of our fearful thoughts, and we choose to see the face of Christ in it instead. Every blade of grass is alive with Christ, and no longer a sign of death. The world is not outside of us as idols to be sought after and grasped at and fought over; it is within us and part of us.

Paragraph 6

6 This is the anti-Christ: the strange idea there is a power past omnipotence, a place beyond the infinite, a time transcending the eternal. ²Here the world of idols has been set by the idea this power and place and time are given form, and shape a world where the impossible has happened. ³Here the deathless come to die, the all-encompassing to suffer loss, the timeless to be made the slaves of time. ⁴Here does the changeless change; the peace of God, forever given to all living things, give way to chaos; and the Son of God, as perfect, sinless, and as loving as his Father, come to hate a little while, to suffer pain, and finally to die.

• Study Questions •

14. Note the repetition of the word “here” in 6:2, 6:3, 6:4, and 6:5 (which begins with the word “here” implied, like this: “And [here does] the Son of God, ... come to hate...”). What does “here” refer to?

Practice Suggestion: Meditate for a while on T-29.I.1:1. Let various situations, persons, and events come to your mind that seem to be somehow, at least in part, devoid of God, including things about yourself and your own thoughts, and remind yourself that what you are seeing cannot exist if God exists and is omnipresent.

15. (6:3). To what do these terms refer: “the deathless”, “the all-encompassing,” and “the timeless”?

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“This” in 6:1 refers, I think, to the final sentence of Paragraph 5, or perhaps to the whole concept and description of “idols” that we have just read. Idols, whose impossible existence is established in our minds only by our irrational belief in them, are the anti-Christ. They block our awareness of our divine identity. Can there be “a power *past* omnipotence”? Impossible by definition. Can there be “a place *beyond* the infinite?” Impossible. Can there be a time that transcends eternity, which (as is said elsewhere in the Text) *means* there is no time? Impossible.

6:1–5 is like an expanded description of “the ‘more-than-everything’” (4:7) we are seeking in idols, showing how absurd this “strange idea” really is. Note the close parallel with T-29.I.1:1, “time,” “place,” and “state” in that line, and here, “power,” “place,” and “time.” The world we see is *impossible*; it rests on the notion that there is a place where God is not, and how can what

is infinite, omnipotent, and eternal ever be absent from any place or time? This “strange idea” is the anti-Christ (6:2).

In question 14, I pointed out the recurrence of the word “here” in these sentences. And in the answer key, I say that it refers to a place where “this place and power and time are given form” (6:3). Since such a place and power and time are impossible by definition (*nothing* is beyond the infinite; omnipotence means *all* power so none can surpass it, and eternity *means* there is no time), the “here” refers to a place that does not exist. The entire world of idols *cannot* exist; it resides nowhere except *within* the strange idea that such a place can take form. In other words, it is a dream, a figment of the mind’s imagination.

The paragraph is full of paradoxes and impossibilities: the deathless die; the all-encompassing suffer loss; the timeless become slaves of time; the changeless changes; God’s peace becomes chaos; the perfect Son of God, created as an extension of God’s Love, comes to hate, suffer, and die. It’s all impossible, impossible because of what we are as God’s Son. If God created us by extending His Love as us, imparting to us all the qualities of God—deathless, infinite, eternal, changeless, omnipotent—then none of these things can happen to us in reality. Therefore, this world of idols in which such things *seem* to happen must be a dream.

Paragraph 7

7 *Where* is an idol? ²Nowhere! ³Can there be a **gap** in what is infinite, a place where time can interrupt eternity? ⁴A place of darkness set where all is light, a dismal alcove separated off from what is endless, has no place to be. ⁵An idol is beyond where God has set all things forever and has left no room for anything except His will to be. ⁶Nothing and nowhere must an idol be, while God is everything and everywhere. ⁷What purpose has an idol, then? ⁸What is it *for*? ⁹This is the only question which has many answers, each depending on the one of whom the question has been asked.

• Study Question •

16. (7:3). *Can you recall a line from Chapter 27 about the absurdity of the idea that time can interrupt eternity?*

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In 5:1–2, we read, “What is an idol? Nothing!” The first two sentences of Paragraph 7 parallel that by saying, “*Where* is an idol? Nowhere!”. Jesus already answered this question in the preceding paragraph: It’s a place beyond the infinite, a place where the impossible has happened, and thus a place that cannot exist. The answer given in 7:2 summarizes the logical conclusion from paragraph 6: “Nowhere!” Jesus then reiterates the obvious: there cannot be a gap in the infinite or eternity, a place of darkness in light, or someplace separate from the endless (7:3–4). There is no room in God’s creation for anything except His Will (7:5). Therefore, “Nothing and nowhere *must* an idol be, while God is everything and everywhere” (7:6).

Sentence 7:6 summarizes the message of paragraphs 5 to 7. Jesus could have used only this single sentence, but instead, he has spent three paragraphs saying the same thing repeatedly in

different words. He must believe we desperately need to hear this message and to spend time thinking about it.

“What is an idol?” “Where is an idol?” There is yet a third question about idols: What are they *for*? What is their purpose? 7:7–8 focus on this last question. The first two questions had simple, one-word answers: “Nothing” and “Nowhere.” But this question “has many answers,” depending on who is being asked (7:9). Yet all the specific answers boil down to one general thing, as we see in the next paragraph.

Practice Suggestion: Try formulating a prayer to God that expresses some of this in your own words, in a way that is meaningful to you. As an example only: “Dear God, You are everything. You are everywhere. No place without you exists. When I see a person in whom You seem to be absent, I am not seeing the truth; I am seeing an impossibility.” And so on. Another good example is Psalm 139:1–12 in the Bible.

Paragraph 8

8 The world believes in idols. ²No one comes unless he worshipped them, and still attempts to seek for one that yet might offer him a gift reality does not contain. ³Each worshipper of idols harbors hope his special deities will give him more than other men possess. ⁴It must be “more.” ⁵It does not really matter more of what: more beauty, more intelligence, more wealth, or even more affliction and more pain. ⁶But more of *something* is an idol for. ⁷And when one fails, another takes its place, with hope of finding more of something *else*. ⁸Be not deceived by forms the “something” takes. ⁹An idol is a means for getting *more*. ¹⁰And it is this that is against God’s will.

• Study Questions •

17. (8:3-10). What is the key new idea being presented here about idols?

18. The general idea expressed in 8:1–2 is similar to what line in the preceding section, T-29.VII?

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The general answer about idols’ purpose is that we seek them to offer us “a gift reality does not contain” (8:2). Everyone in the world *believes* in idols (8:1), but for differing reasons, although all the reasons fit the general description I just highlighted. As worshippers of idols, each of us clings to the hope that our “*special* deities,” the form of idol we have chosen to worship, will give us “*more* than other men possess” (8:3). Some seek fame. Some seek money. Some strive for mental superiority. Some attach their hope to a delusion of racial superiority. Whatever the form, “*It must* be ‘more’” (8:4): More of something, more of anything, “even more affliction and more pain” (8:5). This latter example hints at mental disorders such as sadomasochism or hypochondria. But in the Course’s lexicon, seeking more beauty, intelligence, and wealth fall into the same category: insanity!

Let me stop for a moment to dwell on the phrase in 8:2: “No one comes unless he worshipped them” (idols). The Course teaches that ultimately reincarnation cannot be a valid

teaching because “the idea of birth into a body has no meaning either once or many times” (M-24.1:2). Nevertheless, when speaking *within the context of the illusion* of this world, the Course implies that reincarnation exists. Sentence 8:2 is one such instance. The use of the past tense, “worshipped,” seems to imply a past life in which the person sought after idols, trying unsuccessfully to find something here that would satisfy, and having failed the “last time,” this person “returns” to the world to try again. The last section hinted at the same thing when it spoke of “some *lingering* illusion” (T-29.VII.2:1 (FIP), T-29.VIII.2:1 (CE)) that motivated a person to come to this world. Where would the illusion be lingering *from*, if not a previous life? Perhaps our very first venture into the world was precipitated by the insane thought that there must be some gift beyond what God had given, our nascent belief that idols do exist.

So we all came to this world because we once worshipped idols, and we still seek for an idol that can give us something reality cannot offer (8:2), something “more than other men possess” (8:6). Each of us has our own “special” idols. Your idols may be quite different from mine and those of other people, but all of them have the purpose of offering us *more* of something. Some of us seek more beauty, some for more intelligence, and some for more wealth; others may even seek more hardship or more pain (8:8). The form is irrelevant; what counts is that “It *must* be more” (8:7); “*more of something* is an idol *for*” (8:9). “Different strokes for different folks” may be right, but all of us want “strokes” of some kind, and getting those strokes is the purpose of idols. They make us feel special, “more” than others.

It may seem strange to think of someone wanting more affliction or pain. Still, you probably have met someone like that, if you think about it: a person who can't wait to tell you of their latest troubles, the details of their most recent illness, the terrible way someone else has treated them, or awful service they received in a local store or restaurant. Their claim to fame seems to be that *their* problems are worse than anyone else's. If someone else tells a story of some disaster that happened to them, another person may exclaim, “That's nothing! Let me tell you what happened to *me!*” Somehow, having the worst disaster story seems to make such people feel special, in some way “more” than others. I'd be surprised if there were any one of us who has not engaged in such can-you-top-this contests from time to time.

When one idol fails, another will pop up to take its place (8:7). We may give up on getting more money than everyone else (Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos seem to have a lock on that one), and start pursuing fame instead. Or we may settle for having the worst luck in relationships of anyone we know. And if we don't manage to win the game of idols by the time we die, we come back for another round.

Let's not be fooled by “forms the ‘something’ takes” (8:8). Whatever the form, whether it appears to be good or bad, “getting more” is the purpose (8:9). And *that* is the attribute of idols that places them in opposition to God's Will (8:10). Specialness, or one child of God who has more than another, is not part of the plan of God. This thought leads into the next paragraph.

Paragraph 9

9 God has not many Sons, but only one. ²Who can have more and who be given less? ³In Heaven would the Son of God but laugh if idols could intrude upon his peace. ⁴It is for him the Holy Spirit speaks and tells you idols have no purpose here, for more than Heaven can you never have. ⁵If Heaven is within, why would you seek for idols which would make of Heaven less, to give you more than God bestowed upon your brother *and* on you, as one with Him? ⁶God gave you all there is, and to be sure you could not lose it did He also give the same to every living thing as well. ⁷And thus is every living thing a part of you as of Himself. ⁸No idol can establish you as more than God. ⁹But you will never be content with being *less*.

• Study Question •

19. (9:3–5). *If somehow idols could appear in Heaven, the Son would laugh because idols have no purpose in Heaven. What is the Holy Spirit telling you, here on earth, about idols? Why is that so?*

•

Who is there that could get more or less if there is just one of us? Idols are for getting more, but if everyone is the one Son, how is “more” even possible? God wills to have only one Son; that’s why “getting more” is against His Will. If idols could reach the Son of God in Heaven, where he is aware of perfect oneness (“Heaven...is merely an awareness of perfect oneness” (T-18.VI.1:5-6), the Son would laugh at the whole idea (9:1–3). Suppose you set a goal to make more money than yourself! Can you imagine a more ludicrous goal? Yet that is what all of us who share Christ’s one life are doing when we attempt to become special in some way.

In Heaven, all of us, who comprise the one Son of God, already have everything (9:6). Having more is, therefore, impossible. Within our confused minds, the Holy Spirit speaks from the perspective of that One Son to remind us that idols have no purpose *here on earth*, either (9:4–5). Heaven is not a place we will all go to one day; it is *within us now* (9:5).

“Heaven is here. There is nowhere else. Heaven is now. There is no other time” (M-24.6:4-7; see also T-25.IV.5).

Since that is so, why would we seek after idols? Why would we want to make Heaven less than it is so that we could have more than our brothers, who were given everything along with us as the one Son of God (9:5–6)? *Every living thing has everything*; that guarantees that it can never be lost (9:6). So all of these brothers and sisters, human or otherwise, are a part of us, a part of *me*, and a part of God. We are neither more nor less than God Himself! And nothing less than that union with God will ever content us (9:8–9).

*Thou hidden love of God, whose height,
Whose depth unfathom'd no man knows,
I see from far thy beauteous light,
Inly I sigh for thy repose;
My heart is pain'd, nor can it be
At rest, till it finds rest in thee.*

*'Tis mercy all, that thou hast brought
My mind to seek her peace in thee;
Yet while I seek, but find thee not,
No peace my wand'ring soul shall see;
O when shall all my wand'rings end,
And all my steps to thee-ward tend!*

*Is there a thing beneath the sun
That strives with thee my heart to share?
Ah! tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of ev'ry motion there;
Then shall my heart from earth be free,
When it hath found repose in thee.*

*Each moment draw from earth away
My heart that lowly waits thy call:
Speak to my inmost soul, and say,
I am thy love, thy God, thy all!
To feel thy power, to hear thy voice,
To taste thy love, be all my choice.
—John & Charles Wesley, 1738*

Answer Key

1. The modern Christian understanding of this biblical term is that it refers to a person, image of a person, or other entity that is the embodiment of evil and utterly opposed to truth, while convincingly disguised as wholly good and a bringer of truth. This person is expected by many Christians to appear in the final days before the return of Christ, and to engage with Christ in a great final battle known as Armageddon. The Course's use of the term, as we shall see, is much broader, and is not tied to a person or to a particular time.
2. The only power an idol has is that it is *not recognized as an idol*, and *never* seen for what it really is. If that is literally true, then it would be *impossible* for anyone to know what an idol is. If you recognize it, then it isn't an idol any more! The way to ending idols, then, is to recognize them, because the instant you see through the disguise it loses its only power over you.
3. They can both be true because "what he is" and "your reality" are the same thing: the Christ.
4. The penalty is enslaving ourselves to littleness and loss, forced to seek outside ourselves for strength.
5. Idolizing my house keeps me from recognizing that my only real completion lies in Christ within me: thus, it is an *anti-Christ*.

6. I could be seeing Christ in everything, and (like me) my brother *is* Christ. Yet if I perceive what I believe is there, and believe it is there because I want it there (or because I value it) (T-25.III.1:3), then when I perceive my house as an idol, a “thing” that completes me somehow, rather than as a reflection of Christ, I must value that alternate perception of the house more than I value the Christ—who is the reality of my brother. So I am valuing the idol more than Christ, who is my brother’s reality.
7. Idols are thoughts or wishes. They are in the mind and cannot leave it. This idea about thoughts or ideas is often repeated in the Course:

Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has not left its source. (T-26.VII.4:7–9 (FIP), T-26.VII.4:6–8 (CE))

There is no world apart from what you wish, and herein lies your ultimate release. Change but your mind on what you want to see, and all the world must change accordingly. Ideas leave not their source. This central theme is often stated in the text. (W-pl.132.5:1–4)
8. Because this dark purpose is only a thought in our minds, unable to make any change at all in reality (4:1).
9. Based on 3:2–3, “its” here must refer to the “thought without...power” whose *form* is the world of idols. If that is so, then this is saying that the world of idols is nowhere, because its source abides in a part of your mind where God is not present—and no such place exists, as the rest of the paragraph will make clear. Therefore, there is no “source” for the world, and thus no form. Only a dream.
10. The source of the world is a thought in our mind that comes from a place where God is not. But there is no place where God is not. What is everywhere cannot be excluded. No hand or voice can prevent God’s entry. Since the location of the source doesn’t exist, the source can’t exist; since the source doesn’t exist, it cannot take any form; therefore, the world’s form is nowhere. This basic formula—the idol has no form (and therefore is nothing) and has no location (and therefore is nowhere)—runs through the rest of the section.
11. T-29.VIII.2:3: “By his coming, he...seeks for something *more* than everything, as if a part of it were separated off...”
12. We do, by believing in it and ascribing power to it.
13. If the world of idols is the veil hiding Christ’s face, then lifting the veil must mean opening our eyes to see Christ everywhere, in everyone. It must mean realizing that none of the forms, or idols, in this world will complete us; only in Christ are we complete.
14. The word “here” refers to the “place beyond the infinite,” where “this place and power and time are given form” (6:3). It is the world of form, which cannot exist in reality.
15. All three terms refer to the Son of God, that is, to us.

16. “It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity, which *means* there is no time” (T-27.VIII.6:5 (FIP), T-27.X.6:5 (CE)).
17. The key new idea about idols is that an idol is supposed to give me something “more than other men possess” (8:6). “...more of something is an idol for” (8:9); if one fails, another is sought to give “more of something else” (8:10). “...an idol is a means for getting more” (8:12).
18. T-29.VIII.8:4–5 (FIP), T-29.IX.8:1–2 (CE) expresses an idea similar to T-29.VII.2:1 (FIP), T-29.VIII.2:1 (CE).
19. He is telling us that idols have no purpose here on earth, either, because you can't have more than Heaven. Idols are for getting more, but “more” isn't possible, in Heaven or here. Therefore idols are useless.

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.

Effects of Switching Editions of the Course

The commentaries on Chapters 29, 30, and 31 were written prior to the publication of the Complete and Annotated Edition (CE) of the Course in 2017. Originally they were based on the edition published by the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP). The references to other parts of the Course were based on the FIP edition, and the comments themselves were based on the same edition. There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and these final chapters had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate CE reference if it differs from the FIP reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE restored the plural use of "you" where the FIP had substituted the phrase "you and your brother." One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

FIP: Thus you and your brother but shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point you both agreed to keep intact.

CE: You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.

Appendix: Quotations from *The Quantum Revelation* by Paul Levy

The Cartesian worldview, in which the world was split into mind and body, into subject and object, is a self-propagating idea—a way of viewing the world—that has “penetrated” the human mind. Not simply an impotent and passive idea, seeing the world as if it exists separate from us actively draws the landscape of the world to manifest itself to our mind as if it is truly other than ourselves, which then “proves” to us the rightness of our unexamined viewpoint in an endlessly self-reinforcing and self-generated feedback loop whose ultimate source is our own mind. (Levy, Paul. *Quantum Revelation* (p. 25).)

Wheeler writes, “What we call reality consists of a few iron posts of observation between which we fill in by an elaborate papier-mache construction of imagination and theory.”¹³⁰ In other words, what we refer to as reality is a “construction” made out of, by, and in our imagination. (Levy, Paul. *Quantum Revelation* (p. 34).)

To quote Philip K. Dick, “Regard this as a scientific hypothesis: what we call ‘reality’ is in fact an objectification of our prior thought formations . . . projected onto a pseudo-world.” (Levy, Paul. *Quantum Revelation* (p. 35).)

What we call reality is simply a theory, a mental map, an internalized mental model which at bottom is simply a way of looking at the world. It is a perspective rather than a form of absolutely true knowledge of how the world “really” is. (Levy, Paul. *Quantum Revelation* (p. 35).)

The Course affirms it as well:

The world can give you only what you gave it, for being nothing but your own projection, it has no meaning apart from what you found in it and placed your faith in. (T-13.X.3:1 (CE), T-13.IX.3:1 (FIP))

There is no world apart from what you wish, and herein lies your ultimate release. Change but your mind on what you want to see, and all the world must change accordingly (W-pl.132.5:1-2 (FIP)).

The interesting thing is that quantum physics seems to be “discovering” the same truth! There is no “objective reality” other than the projections of our collective minds.

Levy calls this collective madness “the wetiko virus.” He says: Wetiko works through the projective tendencies of the mind in such a way that, to the extent we are unconscious of it, we unknowingly become instruments through which it acts itself out in the world while simultaneously hiding itself from being seen. The wetiko virus induces a form of

psychic blindness in which those afflicted believe they can see. (Levy, Paul. Quantum Revelation (p. 27).)

[Philip K.] Dick writes, “There is some kind of ubiquitous thinking dysfunction which goes unnoticed especially by the persons themselves, and this is the horrifying part of it: somehow the self-monitoring circuit in the person is fooled by the very dysfunction it is supposed to monitor.” When we have fallen under the spell of the wetiko virus, we aren't aware of our affliction. From our point of view we don't have a problem, and if there is a problem, the cause is always seen as residing in someone else. Dick continues, “The criminal virus controls by occluding (putting us in a sort of half sleep) so that we do not see the living quality of the world. . . . The occlusion is self-perpetuating; it makes us unaware of it.” Wetiko occludes us in such a way that we can't even tell that we are occluded, a situation that Dick refers to as “the most ominous kind of occlusion.” Being self-perpetuating, this occlusion in our consciousness will not go away of its own accord; it acts as a feedback loop that perpetually self-generates itself until the spell is broken. (Levy, Paul. Quantum Revelation (p. 27).)