

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Chapter 30

The New Beginning

Section III

The Search for Completion

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 III

As you read the section, note the frequent occurrence of words that have appeared in recent sections in this and the preceding chapter, words such as “idol,” “decision,” and “thought of God.” This section is linked to “Rules for Decision” and “Freedom of Will” in that it provides us with a strong motivation to choose to make our decisions with God rather than with idols, based on an elevated conception of our true nature.

• Study Question •

1. *The title given to the section in FIP, “Beyond All Idols,” gives us a clue as to how Section III may be related to the preceding two sections. Based just on the title, how do you think they are related?*

•

Paragraph 1

Idols are quite specific. ²But your will is universal, being limitless. ³And so it has no form, nor is content for its expression in the terms of form. ⁴Idols are limits; they are the belief that there are *forms* which will bring happiness, and that *by* limiting is all attained. ⁵It is as if you said, “I have no need of everything. ⁶This little thing I want, and it will be as everything to me.” ⁷And this must fail to satisfy, because it is your will that everything be yours. ⁸Decide for idols, and you ask for loss. ⁹Decide for truth, and everything *is* yours.

• Study Question •

2. (1:1–3). To make connections with Section I of Chapter 30, find the one mention of idols in that section. This will help you relate what is said here to the “Rules for Decision” practice.

T-29.VII, VIII, and IX (FIP), VIII, IX, and X in (CE) recently described idols in detail. In this section and the next three sections of Chapter 30, Jesus again makes idols a major topic. (You may wish to highlight the occurrences of the words “idol” and “idols.”) Here we see that if we make decisions without the Holy Spirit, we make decisions with idols, as T-30.I.14:7–8 (FIP), T-30.I.16. 2–3 (CE) told us. To decide by ourselves what will make us happy, so that we are looking for *our* answer to *our* question (T-30.I.7:3–5 (FIP), T-30.I.9:1-3 (CE), is to seek after an idol; to attach to form rather than to content, believing that the form will bring happiness (1:5). Yet idols are not what our Self wants (2:6).

Your will—what your Christ Self wants—has no form or is formless (1:3), unlike idols (1:1). The second part of sentence 1:3 means that your will cannot be satisfied [I read the word “content” as the adjective, conTENT rather than the noun, CONtent] with expression in terms of form. No form can adequately capture and convey the totality of your will. Form is too limited to express your limitless will, which is why our search for happiness in forms, in people or things in this world, is doomed to failure. “It is your will that everything be yours” (1:8). How, then, could something that is not everything, something limited, satisfy you?

Practice Suggestion: (1:4–10 (FIP), 4–9 (CE)). *In recent lessons we have looked at some of the things in our lives we have turned into idols, or “forms that [we believed] would bring happiness.” Pick one such example, and try to see how you were setting a limit, in effect saying, “I have no need of everything.” You were failing to recognize that your will is “that everything be yours,” and saying instead that this “little thing” could bring happiness.*

Paragraph 2

² It is not form you seek. ³What form can be a substitute for God the Father’s love? ³What form can take the place of all the love in the divinity of God the Son? ⁴What idol can make two of what is one? ⁵And can the limitless be limited? ⁶You do not want an idol. ⁷It is not your will to have one. ⁸It will not bestow on you the gift you seek. ⁹When you decide upon the form of what you want, you lose an understanding of its purpose, so you see your will within the idol, thus reducing it to a specific form.¹ ¹⁰But this could never be your will, because what shares in all creation cannot be content with small ideas and little things.

¹ Pronoun clarification: “thus reducing it [your will] to a specific form.”

• Study Question •

3. **(2:9–10).** *Relate this to the process in Section I and to deciding what kind of day you want. Do you tend to think of “what you want” in terms of forms? If you are not supposed to “decide upon the form of what you want,” then what do you think it means to decide the kind of day you want?*



The first sentence’s italics emphasize the clear message: Whatever the form might be, it isn’t *the form* we want (2:1). We are seeking for the content that the form represents, and that content, ultimately, is “God the Father’s Love” and “all the love in the Divinity of God the Son” (2:2–3). In a nutshell, we are seeking *the Love of God*:

“In this world, you believe you are sustained by everything but God. Your faith is placed in the most trivial and insane symbols; pills, money, “protective” clothing, influence, prestige, being liked, knowing the “right” people, and an endless list of forms of nothingness that you endow with magical powers.

“All these things are your replacements for the Love of God.” (W-pl.50.1:2-2:1)

All that is needful is to train our minds to overlook all little senseless aims and remember that our goal is God. His memory is hidden in our minds, obscured but by our pointless little goals, which offer nothing and do not exist. Shall we continue to allow God’s grace to shine in unawareness while we seek the toys and trinkets of the world instead? God is our only goal, our only Love. We have no aim but to remember Him. (W-pII.258.1:1-5)

We’ve seen this message several times already in the Course. Our longings, our cravings, and even our addictions are all “replacements for the Love of God” (W-pl.50.2:1). His Love is what we want.

Next time you find yourself craving for something that, in your better moments, you know isn’t good for you, remind yourself that what you are really looking for is God. “It isn’t *this* I want; I want God’s Love, and that is all I want.” No form can take the place of God’s Love. Nothing less than God’s Love will ever satisfy you. What you seek is not any form; it is the Love of God, both Father and Son. A form is a limit, and God’s Love is limitless (2:5). A form is a separate thing, and God’s Love is one.

(2:3). This is one of only three places in the Course where the words “God the Son” refers to the Son *as* God. (The other two are in the Workbook: W-pl.45.8:4 and W-pl.125.9:4.) It emphasizes, I believe, how strongly the Course views the unity of our will with the Father’s will.

(2:4–5). Sentence 4 is somewhat enigmatic. What is referred to by “what *is* one”? And in what way does an idol “make two” of this one thing? The previous paragraph referred to how an idol attempts to limit our “everything” to a particular form, in the delusion that the form will bring us happiness (1:4–7). And 2:5 asks if it is possible to limit the limitless. To limit means to draw a boundary. I think the notion of making something into two is a variation of that thought: dividing the all, the everything, into smaller parts and then trying to find satisfaction in just the part. The point is that no idol can subdivide the infinite, universal, formless Everything given to us by God in creation.

Jesus continues to reiterate that we do not want idols. We may think we do; we may be deluded enough to believe we want certain forms and need them to be happy, but in truth, that is *not our will* (2:6–7). Idols will not give us what we are looking for (2:8). We will never be content with such a small, limited offering. Jesus made this point before, back in Chapter 15:

Be not content with littleness. But be sure you understand what littleness is and why you could never be content with it. Littleness is the offering you give yourself. You offer this in place of magnitude, and you accept it. Everything in this world is little because it is a world made out of littleness, in the strange belief that littleness can content you. When you strive for anything in this world, believing that it will bring you peace, you are belittling yourself and blinding yourself to glory. (T-15.III.1:1-6)

(2:9,–10). Here we read some of the reasons why the littleness of idols can never content us. For one thing, choosing a particular form blinds us to the underlying purpose. For example, perhaps the Holy Spirit is guiding us to a deeper relationship with a specific person, which can involve many things: telephone calls, e-mail or text messages, sharing activities and everyday interests, being spiritual support partners, and other things. If we focus on a particular form, such as forming a romantic relationship, we can completely lose track of the reason for the deeper relationship. Perhaps that isn't the form the Holy Spirit intends; perhaps it is more of a friendship or spiritual partnership. Yet, you think you must have the form you have envisioned to be happy.

In seeking guidance, we need to be careful that we do not limit the possibilities. We need to focus on the formless content rather than specific forms. To give a concrete example, if we believe we require material supply (money or some physical needs), we need to ask ourselves, “Why?” “What is this for?” The purpose always comes down to some form of fulfilling our function as expressions of God.

By becoming involved with tangential issues, the ego hopes to hide the real question and keep it out of mind. The ego's characteristic busyness with nonessentials is for precisely that purpose. Preoccupations with problems set up to be incapable of solution are favorite ego devices for impeding learning progress. However, in all these diversionary tactics, the one question that those who pursue them never ask is, “What for?” That is the question that you must learn to ask in connection with everything. What is the purpose? Whatever it is, it will direct your efforts automatically. (T-4.V.6:4-10)

We focus on obtaining the actual goal, the content, and not on obtaining any particular form. We don't try to tell God how to reach the goal.

Practice Suggestion: *Think of other ways in which you may blind yourself to the underlying purpose of something by focusing on a particular form.*

Paragraph 3

³ Behind the search for every idol lies the yearning for completion. ²Wholeness has no form *because* it is unlimited. ³To seek a special person or a thing to add to you to make yourself complete can only mean that you believe some *form* is missing, and by finding this you will achieve completion in a form you like. ⁴This is the purpose of an idol: that you will not look beyond it to the source of your belief that you are incomplete. ⁵Only if you have sinned could this be so, for sin is the idea you are alone and separated off from what is whole. ⁶And thus it would be necessary for the search for wholeness to be made beyond the boundaries of limits on yourself.

• Study Question •

4. (3:1–4). Think of some “special person or thing” you have hoped would complete you. Instead of condemning yourself for that search for an idol, let yourself think that behind your searching was your yearning for completion, what the Pathwork teachings call “the valid desire to love and be loved.”² Was your yearning wrong? If not, then how were you mistaken? When you find yourself beginning to pine after some idol, pause, and remember what it is you are truly yearning for.

•

There is a clear connection between this section and the section we studied in the previous chapter, “Seek Not Outside Yourself” (T-29.VII (FIP), T-29.VIII (CE)), where the discussion of idols started. Both sections contain the idea that there is something *beyond the idol*, and it is that something we truly seek for. Here (3:1), Jesus tells us clearly that the “something” we seek for is *completion*. Chapter 29 told us that, “God dwells within, and your completion lies in Him. No idol takes His place” (T-29.VII.6:3–4) (FIP), T-29.VIII.5:5–6 (CE)).

Everything in the world we seek after is sought to fill some perceived emptiness or lack within us (3:3). We believe that we are incomplete, and we are seeking for completion.

Everyone is looking for himself and for the power and glory he thinks he has lost.
(T-8.III.5:3 (FIP), T-8.II.7:3 (CE))

We look for food to fill our empty belly. We gather friends to fill our loneliness. We acquire possessions to inflate our sagging self-esteem. These idols all are poor substitutes for what truly completes us: God, and our life in God. We hope that the person, place, or thing we seek will complete us (3:3), but no form can complete the formless (3:2), and our wholeness is formless spirit.

Idols are designed to prevent us from looking beyond them to uncover the false premises that cause us to believe in our incompleteness (3:4). How could we *possibly* be incomplete, since God

² *The Pathwork of Self-Transformation*, by Eva Pierrakos, Message # 69, “The Valid Desire to Love and Be Loved,” available at Amazon.com and other bookstores. The Pathwork writings are among the most compatible with the Course and the most psychologically helpful that I know of. They were given to a woman in New York City by a similar method of inner dictation, at almost the same time period as the Course was coming through to Helen Schucman.

created us? “*Only* if you had sinned could this be so” (3:5). To sin is to attack God, to choose a will other than God’s; thus, to split ourselves off from God and become separate from Him (3:5). If we have not sinned we have not done this. Therefore we are still one with God, part of Him, united with His Will, and if that is true we *cannot* be incomplete. Only if we had sinned and become separated from wholeness would it be necessary to search for wholeness outside ourselves (3:6). The whole imagined need for idols, for things of this world to satisfy and complete us, arises from our belief in sin, our belief that we are *not* one with God.

Paragraph 4

4 It never is the idol that you want. ²But what you think it *offers* you, you want indeed, and have the right to ask for.³ ³Nor could it be possible it be denied. ⁴Your will to be complete is but God’s will, and this is given you by being His. ⁵God knows not form. ⁶He cannot answer you in terms which have no meaning. ⁷And your will could not be satisfied by empty forms made but to fill a **gap** which is not there. ⁸It is not this you want. ⁹Creation gives no separate person and no separate thing the power to complete the Son of God. ¹⁰What idol can be called upon to give the Son of God what he already *has*?

• Study Question •

5. 5.(4:5–10). Spend some time thinking about how to apply this kind of teaching to your prayer life. If God does not answer in terms that have no meaning, that is, with forms, what does that say about the best way to pray?

•

Note: In the Manual for Teachers, Jesus answers a question about the place of words in healing (see below). The discussion turns to the subject of prayer. What he says there is another way of explaining the message of these paragraphs. This passage from the Manual says that “words” symbolize what the current discussion calls “forms” or “idols.” The Manual uses the term “the prayer of the heart” to refer to what our section calls “content.”

“The prayer of the heart does not really ask for concrete things. It always requests some kind of experience, the specific things asked for being the bringers of the desired experience in the opinion of the asker. The words, then, are symbols for the things asked for, but the things themselves but stand for the experiences that are hoped for.”
(M-21.2:4-6)

The forms are not what we really want, but we *do* want *something*: completion. And we have the *right* to ask for completion *because we are already complete* (4:1–4, 4:10). Just by being God’s creation, we *are* complete.

The idea that, in prayer, we have a *right* to what we ask for may seem foreign to you. So many of us have learned to pray along the lines, “If it be Thy will,” or, “Please, God, have mercy
³. “What you think it *offers* you” is completion or wholeness.

and grant me what I ask.” When we pray (*if* we pray), how many of us approach it thinking we have a *right* to what we ask and can therefore lay claim to it?

Notice the emphasis here that the Son of God “already has” completion (4:10). How can you go wrong in asking for what you already have? It would seem that what we are doing in prayer is not so much asking to obtain something we don’t have as asking to recognize and become aware of what we *do* have, to *be* what we already *are*. Science of Mind refers to this kind of prayer as “affirmative prayer.” We affirm the truth. We claim what *must* be so. We do not entreat or beg; we *announce* the truth.

When the people of Israel escaped from Egypt under Moses and came, forty years later, to the borders of the land promised to them by God, God told their leader, Joshua: “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses” (Joshua 1:3). Notice the past tense, “I have given.” God had already given them the land. All they had to do was *walk on it*. Claim it. Take possession. Over and over, through the book of Deuteronomy, God told the people to enter the land He had given to them to possess and *possess* it.

That’s the idea here, the idea of having been granted something by divine fiat, to which, now, we are laying claim. We have a *right* to completion. God’s Will for us *is* perfect happiness! (W-pI.101.Title). We are not going to find it in any form, but we are entitled to have it. No one can possibly deny it to us because it is God’s Will (4:3–4).

In the biblical story, I will concede that possessing the land involved driving out the pagan tribes who were living there. That may seem savage. Metaphorically, however, this represents our vigilance in taking control of our thoughts and “driving out” the thoughts we no longer want.

According to this paragraph, God does not answer our prayers in specific forms. He doesn’t *know* forms, and to Him, they are meaningless; He knows the reality, the content (4:5–6). God will not mistreat us by offering us forms; He gives us that which *truly* completes and satisfies us. That reminds me of the words of Jesus in the Bible:

“Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”
(Luke 11:11-13, NASB)

No idol can offer us what we already have in God (4:10). Our prayer should not attempt to persuade God to *give* us something; it should persuade *us* that we already have it!

Practice Suggestion: (4:1–4). Think of some “idol” you have currently been craving. Remind yourself that the form, the idol, isn’t what you really want; you want what it offers. Spend a few moments meditating and affirming that you really do want the experience you think the idol offers you and that you have a right to ask for that “formless” something; in fact, it cannot be denied you. In this, your will to be complete is God’s Will, so you are joining with God’s Will in this desire.

Paragraph 5

5 Completion is the *function* of God’s Son. ²He has no need to seek for it at all. ³Beyond all idols stands his holy will to be but what he is, for more than whole is meaningless. ⁴If there were change in him, if he could be reduced to any form and limited to what is not in him, he would not be as God created him. ⁵What idol can he need to be himself? ⁶For can he give a part of him away? ⁷What is not whole cannot make whole. ⁸But what is really asked for cannot be denied. ⁹Your will is granted—not in any form that would content you not, but in the whole, completely lovely thought God holds of you.

• Study Question •

6. (5:8–9). *If God does not answer us in forms, and yet He always grants our will, how does He answer?*

•

The first sentence is a thought often expressed in the Course [for example, see W-192.1:1], that God created the Son to complete Himself (completing God was his function) (5:1). A search on the word “completion” in the Course finds that most references are referring to this quality of the Son: “Remember you are His completion and His Love” (M-29.7:1). How could that which God created *to complete* be *incomplete*? Therefore, the Son does not need to seek completion (5:2). He is already whole. No idol, which is not whole in itself, can make the Son whole (5:7). All the Son needs is to be himself (5:5–7), to “be but what he is” (5:3).

What strikes me here is that we can use our very attraction to idols to remind us of what lies “beyond all idols”: our “holy will to be but what [we are]” (5:3). When I feel myself drawn to some idol, I can remind myself that it isn’t the form I see that I want; what I want is the completion that I think the idol offers to me. I can then let this remind me that I already have that completion; I already am complete. I can look the idol square in the face and proclaim, “I don’t need this to be complete! I claim my completion now. I know it is mine because it is my eternal will, and God’s eternal Will as well.” The Course has its own version of the US Army’s motto, “Be all that you can be”; it is, “Be all that you *are* in God.”

God created you whole and perfect. If you could be changed somehow, reduced to form or limited, you would no longer be what God created (5:4)! Therefore, those things cannot happen. You cannot give away a part of yourself (5:6). What God creates stays created. You remain as God created you. This lesson is the one lesson the Workbook repeats multiple times. You may want to read over Lessons 94, 110, and 162.

The paragraph ends by saying that our will *is* granted; it cannot be denied (5:8–9). But our prayers are not answered with concrete forms; the forms are not what we want, nor would they satisfy us. We all have proven this to ourselves many times. What *does* satisfy us is “the whole completely lovely Thought God holds of you” (5:9). This instance of “not what I really wanted” is not like the times when someone gives us a gift that isn’t what we really wanted, but we comfort ourselves with the idea, “It’s the thought that counts.” God’s Thought is powerful and effective. Forms are illusions; God’s Thought is reality. We give up the imitation in exchange for the real thing.

“God created His Sons by extending His Thought and retaining the extensions of His Thought in His Mind. All His Thoughts are thus perfectly united within themselves and with each other because they were created neither partially nor in part.” (T-6.II.8:1-2 (FIP), T-6.III.2:5–6 (CE))

To be told that God answers us with His Thought is no empty reassurance. The following section is dedicated to explaining, in an outstandingly beautiful and poetic description, just how wonderful, powerful, and meaningful God’s Thought is.

Answer Key

1. Section I spoke about what rules would give us a happy day. The main rule was to recognize that we make no decisions by ourselves. Decisions are made with God or *with idols*; there are no other options (T-30.I.14:7–8). Something in us drives us to search for idols, but it is a misguided search; the inner longing we seek to satisfy with idols has a true object, something “beyond all idols.”
2. T-30.I.14:8 mentioned idols.
3. It apparently means deciding upon the *content* of the day you want. You want your day to be filled with the Love of God. You do not need to decide what *form* that love should, or might, take. To decide upon a form is to “set an answer in your terms” (T-30.I.6:2).
4. Seeking for completion in a special person or thing is not entirely a “bad thing.” It is an expression of a valid yearning for completion. The mistake is not in the wanting; the mistake is in what we believed would satisfy it.

Relate only with what will never leave you, and what you can never leave. The loneliness of God’s Son is the loneliness of his Father. Refuse not the awareness of your completion, and seek not to restore it to yourself (T-15.VIII.3:1–3).

Heaven waits silently, and your creations are holding out their hands to help you cross and welcome them. For it is they you seek. You seek but for your own completion, and it is they who render you complete. The special love relationship is but a shabby substitute for what makes you whole in truth, not in illusion (T-16.IV.8:1–4).

To everyone Heaven is completion. There can be no disagreement on this, because both the ego and the Holy Spirit accept it. They are, however, in complete disagreement on what completion is, and how it is accomplished. The Holy Spirit knows that

completion lies first in union, and then in the extension of union. To the ego completion lies in triumph, and in the extension of the “victory” even to the final triumph over God (T-16.V.5:1–5).

All idols of this world were made to keep the truth within from being known to you, and to maintain allegiance to the dream that you must find what is outside yourself to be complete and happy. It is vain to worship idols in the hope of peace. God dwells within, and your completion lies in Him. No idol takes His place. Look not to idols. Do not seek outside yourself (T-29.VII.6:1–6).

5. Our prayers are often filled with asking for forms, for specific things or persons. In aligning with what is being said here, we need to get more in touch with the true desire of our hearts, the will to completion, and to claim that completion as our right.
6. God does not grant us form that would not content us; He grants our will in His “whole completely lovely Thought” of us. He grants our yearning for completion with His Thought of our completion.

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.³ The "tiny spark" seems to be the entire concept expressed in this series of sentences: You can't wake yourself, but you can let yourself be wakened by forgiving your brother's illusions, so that he then returns the gift and awakens you.