

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM® Text, Chapter 6, Section I.8–19

The Message of the Crucifixion Part 2

Interlude from Part 1

As we continue studying T-6.I, I think it will be helpful to keep in mind what I presented in the previous commentary: the three insane premises of the ego and the conclusion to which they lead (T-6.In. 1:3-4), as well as the Holy Spirit's response (T-6.In.1:7 and 1:4):

Ego's Premises and Conclusion	Holy Spirit's Premises and Conclusion
1. You believe you have been attacked.	1. You cannot <i>be</i> attacked.
2. Your attack is justified in return.	2. Attack <i>has</i> no justification.
3. You are in no way responsible for it.	3. You <i>are</i> responsible for what you believe.
A brother is worthy of attack.	A brother is worthy of love.

As I said last time, the final sentence of paragraph 7 really makes more sense as part of paragraph 8, so I will include it here as we begin.

Paragraphs 7 & 8

⁶My brothers slept during the so-called "agony in the garden," but I could not be angry with them because I knew I could not *be* abandoned. [Ur: Peter swore he would never deny me, but he did so three times. It should be noted that he did offer to defend me with the sword, which I naturally refused, not being at all in need of bodily protection.]

8. ¹I am sorry when my brothers do not share my decision to hear [Ur: (and be)] only one Voice, because it weakens them as teachers and as learners. ²Yet I know they cannot really betray themselves or me, and that it is still on them that I must build my church. ³There is no choice in this, because only you can be the foundation of God's church. ⁴A church is where an altar is, and the presence of the altar is what makes the church holy [Ur: makes it a church]. ⁵A church that does not inspire love has a hidden altar that is not serving the purpose for which God intended it. ⁶I must found His church on you, because those who [Ur: you, who] accept me as a model are literally my disciples. ⁷Disciples are followers, and [Ur: but] if the model they follow has chosen to save them pain in all respects, they are [Ur: probably] unwise not [Ur: not] to follow him.

• Study Question •

1. *What do you think Jesus means when he says, "It is still on them that I must build my church" (8:2)?*

By prefacing the phrase "agony in the garden" with the word "so-called," and then putting the phrase in quotes, Jesus makes it clear that, as he saw things, there was no agony. The biblical account certainly sounds as if he was in some kind of distress. Matthew 26:37 says he "began to be grieved and agitated." He prays that "this cup" might pass from him. Luke even says that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). We have to remember, however, that these accounts were written down forty to fifty years after Jesus' crucifixion. Even if they represent the memories of first-hand witnesses (which is in doubt), they are no more than those persons' memories of how *they* perceived things. If we accept that the Course is being dictated by Jesus himself, his personal words referring to the "so-called 'agony in the garden'" bear a lot of weight. He is basically saying, "It didn't happen the way they remembered it." The bit about sweat like blood drops is particularly suspect. Several ancient manuscripts omit those verses, which indicates they were added later. And think about it: If the disciples were asleep, *who saw those sweat drops?* Not the disciples!

Jesus makes a point of the way Peter tried to defend him with a sword (John 18:10) but he refused it, and even healed the man whose ear Peter cut off. He says he was "not... at all in need of bodily protection," which underscores what he said, above, about the destruction of the body being unimportant. He continues on, in paragraph 8, to express his sorrow that his brothers (his disciples, like Peter) did not share his decision to hear and be only one Voice (8:1).

Much has been made of the way the disciples abandoned and betrayed Jesus. He asked them three times to pray with him; they went to sleep instead. He gets arrested and carried off. Mark reports, "All of them deserted him and fled" (Mark 14:50 NRSV). Peter and John follow him "at a distance" (John 18:15) and Peter three times vehemently

denies knowing Jesus (Matthew 26:69–75). None of them except John attend the actual crucifixion; only the women followers and John show up (John 19:25–27).

But here, Jesus says, “Yet I know they cannot really betray themselves or me, and that it is still on them that I must build my church” (8:2). *He does not perceive them as having betrayed him.* And he views us in the same light. He simply looks past that ego flare-up on their part. After the resurrection, when he talks with Peter by the side of the lake, he asks him three times, “Peter, do you love me?” and when Peter replies that he does, Jesus says, “Feed my sheep.” He leaves his message in their hands, as imperfect as they were, because he knows their inner reality. And he does the same with us. He is sorry when we don’t listen to the one Voice as he did, but he is not *angry* with us; he does not see us as betraying him. What we do weakens us as teachers. We end up teaching the ego thought system instead of the thought system of love.

But, he says, he really has no other choice: “Only you can be the foundation of God’s church” (8:3). I think that when he speaks of God’s church he is referring to the Sonship. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, indicates a group of people who have been called out from the world at large. In T-1.III.1:6, Jesus invites us to join his “great crusade” to correct error; I understand that as a call to join his “church,” his group of those who have been called out. Eventually, of course, *everyone* will be part of that group. We who make the choice to begin listening to that one Voice, choosing to *not* perceive attack anywhere, in anyone, are the *foundation* of that group.

It is the altar that makes a church a church (8:4). In the previous chapter, Jesus told us what the symbol of the altar represents: “These altars are not things; they are devotions” (T-5.II.8:7). In that passage, he says that our devotion to hearing the one Voice is the altar we should choose. So what constitutes God’s church is a group of people who are devoted to hearing God’s Voice. Yet, in 8:5, it seems apparent that by “church,” Jesus is referring to the common usage—a group of people meeting as Christians. He says that if such a group does not “inspire love” it “has a hidden altar,” in other words a devotion to something other than to God, or to following Jesus.

He speaks of following him as our model (8:6–7). By and large, the established churches are not devoted to that purpose; rather, they worship him as Savior—the one who accomplished our salvation, rather than a model for us to follow. (The Unity Church is one prominent exception, explicitly acknowledging Jesus as their “way-shower,” who demonstrated the way to experience union with God and who calls us to do as he did.)

Paragraph 9

9. ¹I elected, [Ur: both] for your sake and [Ur: and] mine, to demonstrate that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does [Ur: did] not matter. ²As the world judges these things, but not as God knows them, I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed. ³It was clear that this was only because of the projection of others onto me, since I had not harmed anyone and had healed many.

• Study Question •

2. *Bring to mind a current situation in your life in which you are seemingly being attacked. Notice all of the specific ways in which you seem to be attacked, and notice the feelings this “attack” arouses in you. Then say, “I am here in this situation to demonstrate that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does not matter.”*

The first sentence is perhaps one of the clearest expressions of how the Course views the meaning of the crucifixion: a demonstration “that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does not matter” (9:1). Certainly, the “assault” on Jesus was outrageous and totally unjust. As he says, in the world’s eyes he was “betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed” (9:2). However, he says, this is “not as God knows” the situation and (as we saw earlier, in 5:3) not as Jesus himself perceived it.

Consider the extremity of what he is saying here: that the entire episode in which he was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and killed *does not matter!* There is nothing in all of that to justify anger or to incur judgment. That is a startling assertion! Jesus did not see any of this as attack.

He then says (9:3) that all of this “was only because of the projection of others onto me.” This assertion clearly counters any notion that the attack on Jesus was justified. It was pure projection; they saw Jesus as a threat, attacking their cherished beliefs and their privileged position. Those who perpetrated these things on him were not attacking *him*, they were attacking *their own projections*. Therefore, equally well, no counter-attack was justified. Their actions were a perfect example of the ego’s insane premises: Jesus’ crucifiers believed they had been attacked, their counter-attack (his death) was therefore justified, and they were not at all responsible for their actions—it was Jesus’ fault; he had it coming.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹We are still equal as learners, although we do not need to have equal experiences. ²The Holy Spirit is glad when you can learn from mine, and [Ur: when you can learn enough from mine to] be reawakened by them. ³That is [Ur; was] their only purpose, and that is the only way in which I can be perceived as the way, the truth and the life. ⁴When you hear only one Voice you are never called on to sacrifice. ⁵On the contrary, by being able [Ur: by enabling yourselves] to hear the Holy Spirit in others you can learn from their experiences, and can gain from them without experiencing them directly yourself. ⁶That is because the Holy Spirit is one, and anyone who listens is inevitably led to demonstrate His way for all.

• Study Question •

3. *How has Jesus traditionally been seen as the way, the truth, and the life? What, according to this paragraph, is the only way in which Jesus can be seen as the way, the truth, and the life?*

Once again, in a subtle way, Jesus asserts our equality with him: we are “equal as learners” (10:1). We probably do not think we are capable of learning the lessons he learned, particularly this seemingly difficult lesson that there is no such thing as attack, persecution, or sacrifice. He insists, however, that we are his equals as learners. We *can* learn this lesson. We do not, however, need to have equally horrendous experiences! If we choose, we can learn from Jesus’ experiences and be re-awakened by them (10:2), and in so doing avoid having to have similar experiences.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:6). Traditionally this has been understood to mean that accepting his death on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins is the only way into heaven. Jesus give these words an entirely different meaning. The only purpose of his crucifixion was to provide us with that extreme example so that we could be “saved” from “pain in all respects” (8:7; 10:3). This is the only way he “can be perceived as the way, the truth and the life” (10:3)—as a teaching example from which we can learn and thus be re-awakened. He demonstrated how it is to be done, and we can now follow his example.

The path being taught is to hear only one Voice, and when we do, we will never be called upon to sacrifice (10:4). We are not being asked to follow Jesus in crucifixion, but rather in his *perception* of those events as *not* a form of attack. He says we can hear the Holy Spirit in others (10:5) and thus learn from their experiences without having to directly experience them.

Clearly the prime example of this is learning from *Jesus’* experiences. But equally clearly, it is not limited to his experiences; it applies to “anyone who listens,” whose experiences then can “demonstrate His way for all” (10:6). This is one of the strengths of sharing our experiences with one another in a group: We can learn from one another. One person’s experience can be multiplied and bring benefit to many people.

Paragraph 11

11. ¹You are not persecuted, nor was I. ²You are not asked to repeat my experiences [Ur: experience] because the Holy Spirit, Whom we share, makes this unnecessary. ³To use my experiences constructively, however, you must still follow my example in how to perceive them. ⁴My brothers and yours are constantly engaged in justifying the unjustifiable. ⁵My one lesson, which I must teach as I learned it, is that no perception that is out of accord with the judgment of the Holy Spirit can be justified. ⁶I undertook to show this was true in an [Ur: a very] extreme case, merely because it would serve as a good teaching aid to

those whose temptation to give in to anger and assault would not be so extreme.
7I will with God [Ur: I will, with God Himself,] that none of His Sons should suffer.

• Study Question •

4. *In the last paragraph and in Paragraph 11, Jesus tells us that we don't need to repeat his experience of crucifixion in order to learn from it. What, however, do we need to do in order to learn from it?*

I'm sure there have been times in your life where it would have been difficult to accept the opening words of this paragraph: "You are not persecuted" (11:1). That is precisely the lesson we are being asked to learn and to emulate. Jesus reiterates that repeating his experiences is not necessary, but that we *must* follow his example in how to perceive them if we are to truly learn from them (11:2–3). Just as the people and rulers of Jerusalem justified the unjustifiable in crucifying him, so today our brothers are doing the same with us (generally in lesser ways, although incidents like 9-1-1 are certainly comparable). Just as Jesus chose not to perceive attack and persecution in the actions of his brothers, we are being called not to perceive attack and persecution in the actions of the people around us who believe they are justified in attacking us.

Jesus says that his "one lesson...is that no perception that is out of accord with the judgment of the Holy Spirit can be justified" (11:5). He'll present just what "the judgment of the Holy Spirit" is in Chapter 12, but we can summarize it with this quotation:

There is but one interpretation of motivation that makes any sense. And because it is the Holy Spirit's judgment it requires no effort at all on your part. Every loving thought is true. Everything else is an appeal for healing and help, regardless of the form it takes (T-12.I.3:1-4).

No action that comes from an unloving motivation should be perceived as attack; in the judgment of the Holy Spirit, it is nothing but "an appeal for healing and help," and that is how we are being asked to see it. That's all that Jesus did "in a very extreme case" (11:6). If the principle applies in such an extreme case it must certainly apply when someone snubs you, fails to acknowledge your contribution to their life, or even when a thug mugs you. The whole point of the crucifixion was demonstrating that *nothing* merits being perceived as attack. When we perceive ourselves as attacked, we experience suffering, and both Jesus and God will that we should *never* suffer. I believe that when we are the object of apparent assault, if we react as Jesus did, we will not experience suffering. We will experience it as a call to give a blessing, a call to extend help—indeed, an opportunity to experience ourselves as the Love that we are.

In fact, there is a short paragraph that originally appears at this point in the Text, but in the published version it has been relocated to the end of this section; I'll discuss it in more detail at that point. Yet, to me it definitely fits perfectly right here, and makes the

point I just made about experiencing every apparent assault as an opportunity to extend love:

Remember that the Holy Spirit is the communication link between God the Father and His separated Sons. If you will listen to His voice, you will know that you cannot either hurt or BE hurt, but that many need your blessing to help them hear this for themselves. When you perceive only this need in them, and do not respond to any others, you will have learned of me, and be as eager to share your learning as I am.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹The crucifixion cannot be shared because it is the symbol of projection, but the resurrection is the symbol of sharing because the reawakening of every Son of God is necessary to enable the Sonship to know its wholeness. ²Only this is knowledge.

This short paragraph is a bit enigmatic. None of the words are difficult but the overall meaning is hard to grasp. As you will recall, we've been told that opposing thoughts cannot be shared (T-5.IV.3:7). Because the crucifixion stems from a projected perception of attack, which is clearly an opposing thought, it cannot be shared (12:1). But the resurrection which, as we have been told, is nothing more or less than our reawakening, "the dawning on your mind of what is already in it" (7:1-2), is something that not only *can* be shared but that *must* be shared. It is the very symbol of sharing (12:1). What we reawaken *to* is our unity: "the reawakening of every Son of God is necessary to enable the Sonship to know its wholeness" (12:1). This is why Jesus is so eager to share his learning with us, and why he is urging us to share it with others. We cannot attain knowledge until the whole Sonship awakens; only that shared reawakening to wholeness is truly "knowledge" (12:2).

Paragraph 13

13. ¹The message of the crucifixion is [Ur: very simple and] perfectly clear:

²Teach only [Ur: *only*] love, for that is what you are [Ur: *are*].

• Study Question •

5. *What does it mean to "teach only love"?*

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This is it, the consummate summary of the meaning of the crucifixion. With all you have ever known and heard about the crucifixion in your past, would you *ever* have given it this meaning, or derived this message from its events? Or would you have focused on

the apparent suffering and sacrifice, as so many generations of Christians have done?
Hymn writers expressed it over and over:

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

In the cross of Christ I glory...

I will cherish the old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame.

Can you see, after the preceding twelve paragraphs, how the message of the crucifixion is not the suffering, but “teach only love”? It isn't what happened to Jesus that matters; it's how he responded to it. Our responses to apparent attack teach the thought system that is behind them. To teach love we must respond with only love, perceiving every situation as either love or a call for love, because *love is what we are*, and that is unassailable and immune to attack. It is only through teaching this to others by our actions that we can come to know the truth of what we are.

Paragraph 14

14. ¹If you interpret the crucifixion in any other way, you are using it as a weapon for assault rather than as the call for peace for which it was intended.
²The Apostles often misunderstood it, and [Ur: always] for the same reason that anyone misunderstands it [Ur: that makes anyone misunderstand anything].
³Their own imperfect love made them vulnerable to projection, and out of their own fear they spoke of the “wrath of God” as His retaliatory weapon. ⁴Nor could they speak of the crucifixion entirely without anger, because their [Ur: own] sense of guilt had made them angry.

• Study Question •

6. *Can you think of some ways in which Jesus' crucifixion has been used as a weapon for assault?*

Jesus begins now to address the fact that his crucifixion has been misunderstood. He asserts, in 14:1, that interpreting the crucifixion in *any other way* than a message to “teach only love” not only misses the intended lesson, it the crucifixion “as a weapon of assault”—the exact *opposite* of its intended message!

Many Christian churches use the death of Jesus on the cross as a kind of guilt inducing motive for holy living, as this hymn indicates:

I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed,
That thou might ransomed be, and raised up from the dead

I gave, I gave My life for thee, what hast thou given for Me?

What even worse, the teaching that Jesus suffered God's punishment for our sin makes God a vicious, merciless judge. As Jesus says here, the Apostles "spoke of the 'wrath of God' as His retaliatory weapon" (14:3). Although the teaching of Jesus' sacrifice for our sin is intended to be seen as the supreme act of love, it ends up fostering great fear of God, and even great guilt that I get to go free while Jesus had to suffer God's wrath on my behalf.

It's important, I think, to recognize what Jesus says here: that the Apostles (including the authors of the New Testament) "often misunderstood" the crucifixion (14:2). As I've pointed out, there are many verses in the New Testament that present the crucifixion as a sacrifice for sin, the outpouring of God's wrath on sin which, in some magical way, has been transferred from us to Jesus. The Course is saying that those passages represent the Apostles' *misunderstanding*, which is based on their own fear. They believed they were guilty sinners, and they projected their own punishing thoughts onto God, making Him the Cosmic Judge. Furthermore, they were angry about the crucifixion itself. They did not see it clearly with the eyes of Christ; they saw it as suffering and attack, and they were angry with those who perpetrated it (14:4).

Paragraph 15

15. ¹These are some of the [Ur: There are two glaring examples] examples of upside-down thinking in the New Testament, although its gospel is really [Ur: whose whole Gospel is] only the message of love. [Ur: These are not at all like the several slips into impatience which I made, because I had learned the Atonement prayer, which I also came to teach, too well to engage in upside down thinking myself.] ²If the Apostles had not felt guilty, they never could have quoted me as saying, "I come not to bring peace but a sword." ³This is clearly the opposite of everything I taught. ⁴Nor could they have described my reactions to Judas as they did, if they had really understood me. ⁵I could not [Ur: They could not have believed that I could] have said, "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" unless I believed in betrayal. ⁶The whole message of the crucifixion was simply that I did not. ⁷The "punishment" I was said to have called forth upon Judas was a similar mistake [Ur: reversal]. ⁸Judas was my brother and a Son of God, as much a part of the Sonship as myself. ⁹Was it likely that I would condemn him when I was ready to demonstrate that condemnation is impossible?

• Study Question •

7. *Call to mind a situation in which you have seemingly been betrayed by someone. See your "betrayers" standing before you, and note the feelings that come up for you, especially those of condemnation. Then say, "This person is my brother and a Son of God, as much a part of the Sonship as myself. How can I condemn him, when Jesus demonstrated, in a much more extreme situation, that condemnation is impossible?"*

This paragraph continues with the theme of the Apostles' misunderstanding of Jesus' message. We have already seen examples of Jesus reinterpreting the Bible to rid it of fearful connotations (T-5.VI.6-9, for instance), but this time, he is going a bit further. Rather than *reinterpreting* the New Testament verses discussed in this paragraph, he flat out says that they *don't belong* in the New Testament. They reflect the Apostles' sense of guilt (15:2) and fear of punishment, not anything Jesus actually said or did.

Here, then, Jesus is unequivocally saying that the Bible is *not* the inerrant Word of God. The Gospels contain *mistakes*; they are distorted to a certain degree by the egos of the Apostles. Nonetheless, he *also* tells us that the New Testament's gospel "is really only the message of love" (15:1). I think we as Course students should really take this to heart. I have heard Course students and teachers reject the Bible outright, calling it "the ego's religion." But that is not the picture presented here. Yes, Jesus says, the Bible is not wholly accurate (modern Bible scholars would wholeheartedly agree with him). But underneath the distortions, it is still a message of love.

Now let's look at the two examples of "upside-down thinking in the New Testament" (15:1) that Jesus mentions. Notice that both examples reflect the same idea that led to the Apostles' distortion of the meaning of the crucifixion: the idea that God is a wrathful punisher.

1. "*I come not to bring peace but a sword*" (15:2). Placing this quote (from Matthew 10:34) in its larger context shows just how foreign this statement is to Jesus' message in the Course:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matthew 10:34-36, NIV)

Could Jesus, the messenger of peace and of joining, really have said this? It is clearly preposterous.

2. *Jesus' reaction to Judas*. "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" (15:5) is what the Bible (Luke 22:48) tells us Jesus said to Judas when Judas kissed him as a signal to the authorities to arrest him. Judas *did* "betray" Jesus on a form level, at least if the

Gospel accounts are accurate, but as we've already learned, Jesus knew that in truth he could not *be* betrayed (8:2, 15:5).

The "punishment" he is said to have called forth upon Judas (15:7) is a reference to Matthew 26:24-25:

But woe to the man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.

I find Jesus' explanation of *why* he could not have said this strangely moving, because he states so matter-of-factly that Judas was his brother and "as much a part of the Sonship" as himself (15:8), as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. History has seen Judas as the wicked betrayer who sold out his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. His name has entered our language as a virtual synonym for "back-stabber." But Jesus here dismisses that completely. He turns it on its ear by elevating Judas to the exalted category history has reserved for *Jesus*: Son of God. He says, in essence, "Well, it is obvious that Judas was my brother and every bit the Son of God that I am. How could I possibly have condemned him when I was about to go to the cross to prove that condemnation is impossible?" (15:9).

The remark from the Urtext about "the several slips into impatience which I made" most likely refers to things such as what is called "the cleansing of the temple," when Jesus overturned the money-changers tables and chased them out of the temple. He seems, here, to be both confirming the historicity of such incidents and admitting that they were "slips," imperfections in his behavior. That degree of slip may have happened, he is saying, but the two examples above are so extreme that such "upside down thinking" simply could not have come from one who knew the Atonement as well as he did.

Paragraph 16

16. [Ur: I am very grateful to the Apostles for their teaching, and fully aware of the extent of their devotion to me. But] ¹As you read the teachings of the Apostles, remember that I told them myself that there was much they would understand later, because they were not wholly ready to follow me at the time. ²[Ur: I emphasize this only because] I do not want you to allow any fear to enter into the thought system toward which I am guiding you. ³I do not call for martyrs but for teachers. [Ur: Bill is an outstanding example of this confusion, and has literally believed for years that teaching *is* martyrdom. This is because he thought, and still thinks at times, that teaching leads to crucifixion rather than to re-awakening. The upside down nature of this association is so obvious that he could only have made it *because* he felt guilty.] ⁴No one is punished for sins, and the Sons of God are not sinners. ⁵Any concept of punishment involves the projection of blame, and reinforces the idea that blame is justified. ⁶The result [Ur: The behavior that results] is a lesson in blame, for [Ur: just as] all behavior teaches the beliefs that motivate it. ⁷The crucifixion was the result of [Ur: was a

complex of behaviors arising out of] clearly opposed thought systems; [Ur: As such, it is] the perfect symbol of the “conflict” between the ego and the Son of God. ⁸This conflict seems just as real now, and its lessons must be learned now as well as then. [Ur: It was as much intrapersonal as interpersonal then, just as it is now, and it is still just as real. But *because* it is just as real now, its lesson, too, has equal reality *when it is learned.*]

• Study Question •

8. 7. Why do you think the word “conflict” in Sentence 7 is in quotation marks?

“As you read the teachings of the Apostles...” (16:1)—I want to point out here that Jesus assumes you *are* reading the teachings of the Apostles, a phrase that includes the entire New Testament, not just the Gospels. He really seems to approve of the practice. At one point during the dictation of the Course, Jesus asked Helen to examine his credentials, and then pointedly said to her, “You haven’t read the Bible in years” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 229). I don’t think that it is a *requirement* for Course students to do so, but I *do* think it can be quite helpful, if read from a Course perspective.

“...remember that I told them myself that there was much they would understand later” (16:1)—this is a reference to the farewell discourse in the Gospel of John:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when the spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.
(John 16:12-13, NIV)

The “spirit of Truth” is the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus would call down upon the earth to teach the Apostles after he was gone (for the Course version of this event, see C-6.1). The fact that the Apostles did not have a full understanding of Jesus’ message once again shows that the New Testament is not inerrant. Therefore, Jesus tells us that we must read it with a discerning eye, being on the lookout for things (like the examples cited in the last paragraph) that are more a reflection of the Apostles’ egos than of the true inspiration of spirit.

Sentences 2-4 reiterate a theme that runs through all the Course’s discussions of the crucifixion (or the entire Bible, for that matter): Do not interpret the crucifixion in a way that allows the concepts of fear and punishment to enter into your thought system. As he says earlier, “It is so essential that all such thinking be dispelled that we must be sure that nothing of this kind remains in your mind” (T-3.I.2:9). Continuing in this vein, sentence 4 directly refutes the traditional teaching that we are all sinners who deserve punishment, a teaching based on a very fearful picture of God. And notice that, as in Paragraphs 10-11, he addresses our fear that his call for *us* to be teachers will require us to undergo suffering and sacrifice on behalf of God. “I do not call for martyrs, but for teachers” (16:3). He cites Bill as a prime example of this error about teaching.

“Any concept of punishment involves the projection of blame, and reinforces the idea that blame is justified” (16:5). This sentence ties in, I think, with the theme that the

Apostles' guilt led to belief in a punishing God. I find the following passage from later in the Text helpful in clarifying it:

If you did not feel guilty you could not attack, for condemnation is the root of attack. It is the judgment of one mind by another as unworthy of love and deserving of punishment (T-13.In.1:1-2).

The concept of punishment is rooted in our own guilt—we condemn ourselves for the “sin” of separation from God. This is so painful that we try to get rid of it by projecting the blame for separation onto others, seeing *them* as sinners deserving of punishment. We see them as worthy of attack rather than worthy of love (T-6.In.1:4). And so we attack them—we punish them (or promote a thought system that says *God* will punish them). This attack on them only reinforces the idea that our projection of blame onto them is justified, “for all behavior teaches the beliefs that motivate it” (16:6). And so the entire insane cycle of attack/counter-attack is set in motion.

When this insane thought system encountered the Son of God in Jesus, the result was the crucifixion (16:7). Remember the discussion in Paragraph 9 of how the crucifixion was the result of others' projection onto Jesus? Jesus' crucifiers had been “attacked” by Jesus, their counter-attack was thus justified in return, and they weren't in any way responsible for it. The crucifixion, as the crucifiers perceived it, was a perfect expression of the ego's thought system. But Jesus countered this by seeing the crucifixion as a perfect demonstration of *his* thought system: He recognized he could not *be* attacked, so he *had* no justification for counterattack, and he took *full* responsibility for how he perceived the situation. He chose to see his brothers as worthy of love rather than attack. The crucifixion was thus the place where the ego thought system and the thought system of God were brought together, “the perfect symbol of the ‘conflict’ between the ego and the Son of God” (16:7). This same “conflict” happens every day in much less extreme ways in our own lives, and our job, as this section has repeatedly pointed out, is to learn Jesus' lesson by using his extreme example as a model for how to perceive our own experiences of “crucifixion.”

Paragraph 17

17. ¹I do not need gratitude [Ur: any more than I needed protection.], but you need to develop your weakened ability to be grateful, or you cannot appreciate God. ²He does not need your appreciation, but *you* do. ³You cannot love what you do not appreciate, for [Ur: and] fear makes appreciation impossible. ⁴When you are afraid of what you are you do not appreciate it, and will therefore reject it. ⁵As a result, you will teach rejection.

• Study Question •

9. *The last several paragraphs have presented a picture of God as a punisher of sins, a scenario which leads us to fear God's punishment. But what, according to this paragraph, are we really afraid of?*

The discussion now seems to make an abrupt shift, turning to a discussion of the importance of *gratitude*. I think to get a sense of how this fits with the preceding paragraphs, we have to review the scenario presented by those paragraphs. They have shown us a thought system in which we are *sinners* and God is seen as a *punisher of sins*, a God to be *feared*—a thought system exemplified in the traditional interpretation of the crucifixion. Given such a belief about ourselves and God, will we be able to love and appreciate either? No, because “fear makes appreciation impossible” (17:3). Nor will we love and appreciate God's representative, Jesus. When Jesus is seen as the emissary of a fearful, punishing God, we will reject him.

And this is *exactly* what the ego wants. It deceives us into believing we are guilty sinners trembling before a fearful God in order to give us a justification for rejecting ourselves and rejecting Him. It wants us to reject God and Jesus because they represent *what we really are*. We are not really guilty sinners; rather, we are *love* (13:2), and the ego is afraid of love, because love is the ego's doom. So it convinces us to be afraid of what we really are (telling us that we are sinful), so we will reject our true nature (17:4). It attempts to blot out anything that comes into our lives to remind us of our true nature—this was its motivation for crucifying Jesus. When we listen to the ego, we reject love, and therefore teach others to reject love as well (17:5).

And here's where gratitude comes in. We escape this grim scenario by developing our “weakened ability to be grateful” (17:1)—grateful to God for creating us, grateful to Jesus for teaching us, and grateful for the love that we really are. This is necessary not to appease God, but simply in order for *us* to develop true appreciation for God and His creation (17:2). We must learn to *appreciate* God's Love, and our true Self created by that Love, rather than reject it. We won't be able to do this as long as we believe that we are sinners in the hands of an angry God, and that is why Jesus has gone to such great lengths to convince us that we are *not* sinners and God is *not* to be feared. He has given us a loving interpretation of the crucifixion to enable us to undo our belief that we are guilty and that God will make us pay for our sins. By accepting Jesus' loving interpretation, we can come to appreciate and love our true Self, along with Jesus our brother and God our Father, once again.

I love the fact that Jesus (and by implication, God) does not need our gratitude. Many traditional Christian churches give the impression that we are somehow *obligated* to appreciate, give thanks to, be grateful to, and worship God. As this paragraph makes clear, the gratitude and appreciation is for *our* benefit, not His (17:2)! In appreciating God, we are appreciating our own nature, which is God's. If we are not grateful to God—

which means we reject God and teach rejection—we will not recognize the greatness of our own divinity, and we will discourage others from doing so.

Paragraph 18

18. ¹The power of the Sons of God is present [Ur: operating] all the time, because they were created as creators. ²Their influence on each other is without limit, and must be used for their joint salvation. ³Each one must learn to teach that all forms of rejection are [Ur: utterly] meaningless. ⁴The separation is the notion of rejection. ⁵As long as you teach this you will [Ur: you still] believe it. ⁶This is not as God thinks, and you must think as He thinks if you are to know Him again.

• Study Question •

10. *Sentences 1 and 2 are very impactful if put into the first person. So let's do that right now. Say to yourself, "My power as a Son of God is present all the time, because I was created as a creator. My influence on my brothers is without limit, and must be used for our joint salvation."*



Jesus has spent this entire section presenting us with two diametrically opposed interpretations of the crucifixion: the ego's fearful interpretation of it, and his own loving reinterpretation. He has made it clear that we can choose how to interpret the "crucifixion" experiences of our lives, and that this choice will determine what lesson we will teach to others, and thus what lesson we will learn. Now, in this paragraph, Jesus reminds us just how much power our choices really have, and implores us to use that power for the benefit of the entire Sonship.

The first two sentences pack a real wallop. The idea that our "influence on each other is without limit" (18:2) is one that I think we should really reflect upon. *All* of our choices, even our so-called private thoughts, have a profound effect on those around us. We really shy away from this idea, partly because it seems so preposterous, and partly because we don't like the idea of having such a profound responsibility for others, which seems to imply profound guilt if we screw up. The Course tells us that the reason we've denied the real power of our minds is *because* we're so afraid we'll screw up (or already have): "You prefer to believe that your thoughts cannot exert real influence because you are actually afraid of them" (T-2.VI.9:10). What we must remember is that as powerful as our minds are, they do *not* have the power to cause *real* damage, and so there is no cause for guilt or fear: "Nothing real can be threatened" (T-In. 2:2).

But we *do* have immense influence over one another, and so we must choose to use it for our joint salvation (18:2). We must use it to teach our brothers that rejecting our true Identity as God's Son—the whole idea behind the separation—is meaningless (18:3-4). Refraining from *teaching* rejection is the only way we'll stop *believing* in it

(18:5). We must redirect our powerful minds to think as God thinks, so we can know Him again (18:6).

Paragraph 19

19. ¹Remember that the Holy Spirit is the communication link between God the Father and His separated Sons. ²If you will listen to His Voice you will know that you cannot either hurt or be hurt, and [Ur: but] that many need your blessing to help them hear this for themselves. ³When you perceive only this need in them, and do not respond to any other, you will have learned of me and will be as eager to share your learning as I am.

• Study Question •

11. *Based on this paragraph, how do you teach others that they can neither hurt nor be hurt?*

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The first sentence of this paragraph recalls the discussion of the Holy Spirit in Paragraphs 10-11. There, we learned that because we share the Mind of the Holy Spirit with Jesus, we can learn his lesson without experiencing crucifixion as he did (11:2). That lesson was that “no perception that is out of accord with the judgment of the Holy Spirit can be justified” (11:5). Listening to the Holy Spirit is thus the key to learning Jesus’ lesson and correctly perceiving situations in which we appear to be attacked.

The rest of this paragraph tells us what we will learn when we listen to the Holy Spirit’s Voice. It is actually a good summary of the message of the crucifixion. Therefore, I’d like to draw out this message now, emphasizing how the message of the crucifixion is the Holy Spirit’s refutation, not just of the first ego premise, but of all three of the ego premises we discussed at the beginning.

In summary, then, the message of the crucifixion is this: When you are in a situation in which you appear to be attacked, you must remember:

1. *You cannot **be** attacked.* When your brothers seemingly attack you, you must remember that “you cannot either hurt or be hurt” (19:2).

2. *Attack has **no** justification.* When your brothers seemingly attack you, you have no justification to attack them back, because you haven’t really been hurt. Instead of counter-attacking, your job is to *give them a blessing*, so that they too will learn that they can neither hurt nor be hurt (19:2). Your blessing is what they are *really* calling for when they attack you. Your blessing is the only thing that is justified in this situation; “Pardon is *always* justified” (T-30.VI.2:1). Offering your blessing instead of attack is the way you “teach only love” (13:2).

3. *You **are** responsible for what you believe.* When your brothers seemingly attack you, it is *up to you* to decide how to perceive the situation. Their seeming attack has no power to determine your response; rather, *you* must decide whether to respond to their *real* need by giving them your blessing, or to some other need they think they have (such

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as their ego's need for you to attack them back) (19:3). You are fully responsible for seeing their seeming attack as either a call for counter-attack, or a call for a blessing.

If you remember all of this, you will see that your brothers are worthy of love rather than attack. You will have learned the message of the crucifixion from Jesus, and will be as eager as he is to share it with others (19:3).

Answer Key

1. “Them” refers to *us*—all of Jesus’ brothers. “My church,” I believe, basically refers to Jesus’ teaching or message. He must build his church on us because we are the Sons of God, and his message is rooted in that recognition. He also must build his church on us because we are literally his disciples (8:6), and so we are charged with extending his message to the world.
2. No written answer is expected.
3. The main way in which Jesus has been seen as the way, the truth, and the life is as a savior who cleansed us of our sins through his death on the cross. Seeing him in this way is traditionally the *only* way that one could be saved. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:16). But in this paragraph, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life only in the sense that he has offered his life to us as a teaching example, which will help us reawaken if we will learn from his example (10:2-3).
4. We need to follow his example in how to *perceive* the crucifixion (11:3)—both Jesus’ crucifixion and our own experiences of “crucifixion.”
5. We teach the thought system we are devoted to, so to teach only love means that we must be devoted to a thought system of love. We must look on every situation with the judgment of the Holy Spirit, and see nothing but love or a call for love, no matter how extreme the apparent attack.
6. Some examples that come to mind: Using it to justify anger at the Jews for being “Christ killers,” using it to justify persecution of heretics and non-believers, using it to justify punishment of any kind, using it to instill fear in others by claiming that belief in Jesus’ sacrificial death is the only way to salvation, using it to instill guilt by saying, “Look what Jesus did for you—don’t you owe it to him to be a good Christian?”, using it to convince others of the gravity of their sins.
7. No written answer is expected.

8. Because it is not really a conflict, only a *seeming* conflict (sentence 8 goes on to say that the conflict only *seems* real). While the ego *is* in conflict with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is *not* in conflict with the ego, because He knows the ego is really nothing. “The ego attacks and the Holy Spirit does not respond” (W-pI. 66.2:4).

9. We are afraid of what we *are* (17:4), which is *love* (13:2). This is consistent with the Course's teaching that while we appear to fear God's wrath, this is merely a cover for our deeper fear of God's love (see, for instance, T-29.I.2).

10. No written answer is expected.

11. By giving them a blessing (19:2), even when they appear to be attacking you.