

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM Text, Chapter 9

### “The Acceptance of the Atonement”

#### Section I: 1–7

## The Acceptance of Reality

Chapter Nine is all about *acceptance*. The chapter begins with a section titled, “*The Acceptance of Reality*.” The whole chapter is about accepting reality rather than illusions about ourselves. It tells us that the reason some prayers don’t appear to be answered is that we are not ready to *accept* the answer. It says that our job is not to change our brothers, but to *accept* them as they are—to accept *their* reality as we accept our own. It points out that accepting our brothers’ reality is exactly what *forgiveness* is: Seeing that what we would want to judge in another is unreal, and *accepting* that innocence is their reality. It shows how the healer’s job is simply to *accept* the truth about her patient, and to help the patient to *accept* that reality for himself or herself — not to *heal* but to *let healing be*. It tells us that we receive the Atonement by *accepting* it in our brother. It says there are two ways of evaluating everything, one true and one false; therefore, accepting the Atonement is merely *accepting* the one true evaluation and letting the false one go.

*Acceptance* is passive. The word implies my response to what is so. Reality simply exists; it exists just as it is entirely apart from anything I might do. My responsibility is just to *accept the situation*. My part is just to say “yes” to it, rather than fighting it or disagreeing with it or condemning it or trying to change it. I allow myself to *agree* rather than to disagree. I *accommodate* myself to the truth, rather than trying to alter the situation. Something is being offered to me and I *take it*, I *accept* it, rather than pushing it away.

There is something very Buddhist or Taoist about this attitude. Buddhists sometimes refer to *dharma* as simply “the truth about the way things are, and will always be, in the universe or in nature.”<sup>1</sup> In Taoism, they call that “the tao.” Following the dharma way means, in part, accepting reality just as it is and not fighting against it. Buddhism argues that resisting the way things are just causes us pain. This does not mean we cannot work for social change or to preserve the environment, but it does mean that we choose not to link our mind’s happiness and equanimity to the success of our efforts.

The Course has a similar message but with a more positive view of reality. Reality is not just “the way things are,” although it is that, of course. Reality is *what God created* and is *good*. Although I seem to find myself in the middle of a painful illusion of separation, the Atonement is already accomplished. My part is simply to *accept* it. God created me as His innocent child, and all I am asked to do is to *accept* that—to accept it as true about myself and about everyone around me. I am asked to stop fighting with the

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truth, which is that God created me as a loving being. I am asked simply to *accept* that as true instead of arguing with the facts as defined by God.

This is a difficult section to summarize because it is a carefully reasoned, logical argument that attempts to show that the only possible conclusion we can come to is that God's Will and my own are identical. The reasoning of the section is already very condensed.

We will be covering it in two sessions rather than one because of its length.

## Paragraph 1

1. <sup>1</sup>Fear of the Will of God is one of the strangest beliefs the human mind has ever made. <sup>2</sup>It could not possibly have occurred unless the mind were already profoundly split, making it possible for **it** to be afraid of what it really is. <sup>3</sup>[It is **apparent that**] Reality **cannot** threaten anything except illusions, since reality can only **uphold** truth. <sup>4</sup>The very fact that the Will of God, which **is** what you are, is perceived as fearful [*to you*], demonstrates that you *are* afraid of what you are. <sup>5</sup>It is not, then, the Will of God of which you are afraid, but **yours**.

### • Study Question •

1. According to this paragraph, what are some things you are afraid of?

Many people who read the Course for the first time find it strange that the Course teaches that we are afraid of God, or afraid of God's Will. The Course *agrees* that it is a strange idea (1:1). We do not easily admit, even to ourselves, that we fear God's Will, and we may, at first, even argue that the Course is wrong, that we do not fear God but love Him. We may reason that the very fact that we are reading the Course as a way to seek God proves that we do not fear Him.

The Course contends, however, that if we did not *fear* God we would not need to *seek* God. The separation that we sense and are striving to overcome must come from *somewhere*, and it does not come from God. The only other possibility is that it comes from us, from our own minds. Therefore, whether we are aware of it or not, some part of our mind *must* fear God and shut Him out.

If we reflect on things a bit, and watch how our minds work, we will find that we *do* act as if we are afraid of God's Will. We are apparently suspicious of God's motives. We seem to think that He wants us to sacrifice.

This is particularly true in more traditional branches of Christianity. I remember when I was a young man in the graduate program at a Bible college, I met a girl I liked. And once, when I asked her what she envisioned for her future, she told me, "I don't really know in detail. I just know it will involve suffering and sacrifice." I was very impressed, and very attracted to her because I had the same thoughts about my own future. We both believed, at that time, that God wanted us to sacrifice for His sake. We wanted God's Will, and at the same time we were both terrified of it.

In order for this insane fear to be present, the human mind must be "profoundly split" (1:2). Since what we are is a part of God, in order to fear God we must become capable of fearing *ourselves* (1:2). Our mind must be so severely dissociated from its true nature that we do not even recognize that nature as a part of us; we fear it and reject it!

What we are afraid of is our own reality, as bizarre as that may seem. Obviously, reality cannot be any danger to us (1:3). Reality is just what is so, what is true. If you can recognize the fear of God and His Will in yourself, it “demonstrates that you *are* afraid of what you are” (1:4). *It isn't really God's Will you fear; it is your own* (1:5).

The main point of the paragraph is exactly that. Jesus wants to call our attention to the fact that we are actually afraid of our own reality. That is so hard for our minds to grasp that he takes a slightly less incredible idea—the fear of God—and shows that if fear of God is present, it proves that fear of our reality is also present.

How can we possibly be afraid of *reality*? It could only happen if we were attached to illusions, to a wish for something *other than* reality. If God is God and God created me, then I must be what He created me to be. I can't be anything else! But if I have an *illusion* that I am something else, that *illusion* can be threatened by the truth.

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>Your will is **not** the ego's, and that is why the ego is against you. <sup>2</sup>What seems to be the fear of God is really [only] the fear of **your own reality**. <sup>3</sup>It is impossible to learn anything consistently in a state of panic. <sup>4</sup>If the purpose of this course is to help you remember [learn] what you are, and if you believe [if you have *already decided*] that what you are is **fearful**, then it **must** follow that you will **not learn this course**. <sup>5</sup>Yet [But you might remember that] the reason **for** the course is that you do **not** know what [who] you are.

### • Study Question •

2. If you are afraid of your own reality, what effect does that have on your ability to learn the Course?

The Course continually distinguishes between what the ego wants and what you *truly* want. We simply don't realize how closely we are identified with the ego. When the ego introduces fear into our minds, it seems to us like *our* fear. When guilt arises, it is *our* guilt. When depression looms, it is *our depression*. But none of those things is true. It is *not* our fear, our guilt, or our depression; it is the ego's. Likewise, when wishes to act in a way that is not loving arise—a wish that is contrary to God's Will—it is not *our* will, it is the ego's. “...that is why the ego is against you” (2:1).

We are not really afraid of God; we are afraid of our own reality (2:2). But that is not really my fear; it is the ego's. The illusion that I think I am is threatened by the reality of what I really am. Or in other words, the ego is threatened by my true will, as God created it. The Course declaims forcefully that, in truth, I *do* love God and want Him (“God is Love and you do want Him,” 9:7). Yet the insanity in my mind that thinks it is separate from God and self-created hates God and fears Him. That recoil from God is part of what makes the ego the ego. It is very much a recoiling from our Self as God created it.

When the very thought of God induces panic, we cannot possibly learn the truth about our own being in any consistent manner (2:3). The Course's aim is “to help you remember what you are” (2:4). Yet we are afraid of the very thing it is trying to teach us! That has to have a very negative effect on our ability to learn what it is teaching.

Does it seem to you, at times, that your mind is very slow to grasp what the Course is saying? Does it seem that the words of the Course are, at times, impossibly opaque? That, try as you might, you will never understand them? Have you wondered why? It isn't

because you are incredibly dense! The reason is that you are afraid of the truth about yourself because that truth “threatens” your illusions of independent existence. We don’t know what we are in reality, and yet, despite that fact, we are afraid of that reality. *Whatever* our reality is, it is something that competes with what we think we are and want to be.

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>If you do not know what your reality is [do not know your reality], why would you be so sure that it is fearful [how would you know whether it is fearful or not]? <sup>2</sup>The association of truth and fear, which would be highly artificial at most [best], is particularly inappropriate in the minds of those who do not know what truth is. <sup>3</sup>All this could mean [All that this kind of association means] is that you are arbitrarily associating [endowing] something [quite] beyond your awareness with something you do not want. <sup>4</sup>It is evident, then, that you are judging something of which you are totally unaware. <sup>5</sup>You have set up this strange situation so that it is impossible [completely impossible] to escape from it **without** a Guide Who *does* know what your reality is. <sup>6</sup>The purpose of this Guide is merely to remind you of what **you** want. <sup>7</sup>He is not attempting to force an alien will **upon** you. <sup>8</sup>He is merely making every possible effort, within the limits **you** impose on Him, to **re-establish** your **own** will in your awareness [consciousness].

#### • Study Question •

3. Left to yourself you can’t learn the truth about yourself because you fear that truth and actively resist it. What is the only possible solution to this dilemma?

To *assume* that something is bad for us simply because we don’t know what it is is not very intelligent; in fact, it is rather “inappropriate” (3:2) or childish. My grandson, Peter, came to visit me when he was only three. My partner, Peggy, is often a rather inventive cook, so there were frequently things on the table that Peter had never eaten. Every time something appeared that he had not seen before, Peter would ask, “What’s that?” We would tell him, “That’s a taco,” or whatever. And Peter would loudly declaim, “I *don’t* like tacos!” or whatever the item was.

His parents would calmly persuade him to try a bite. Not very long afterwards, Peter would declare, with equal vigor, “I *love* tacos! Tacos are my *favorite*.”

We’re being rather like that in fearing the reality of our Christ Self. And, like Peter, once we discover what that reality is like, we will probably say, “I *like* being the holy Son of God!”

Like Peter, though, left to our own devices we might never “taste” our reality. We might allow our fear to keep us away from it. We need a parent figure, Someone a bit wiser than we are, someone who knows what we really want better than we do ourselves, who will gently persuade us to “take a taste” (3:5–6). Just as my son and daughter-in-law did with Peter, the Holy Spirit isn’t trying to force something on us against our will, He is acting on superior knowledge, trying to help us regain an awareness of just how good it is, and how natural it feels, to do the Will of God.

## Paragraph 4

4. <sup>1</sup>You have **imprisoned** your will beyond your own awareness [**in your unconscious**], where it remains [**available**], but cannot help you. <sup>2</sup>When I said that the Holy Spirit's function is to sort out the true from the false in your mind [**unconscious**]<sup>2</sup>, I meant that He has the power to look into what **you** have hidden and recognize [**perceive**] the Will of God there. <sup>3</sup>His recognition [**perception**] of this Will can make it real to **you** because **He** is in your mind, and therefore He **is** your reality. <sup>4</sup>If, then, His perception of your mind brings its reality **to** you, He *is* helping you to remember what you are [**He is teaching you what you are**]. <sup>5</sup>The only source of fear in this [**whole**] process is [**can only be what you think you will lose**]. <sup>6</sup>Yet it is only what the Holy Spirit sees that you can possibly **have**.

### • Study Question •

4. We are not afraid of the Christ Self so much as we are afraid of what we will lose if we accept It as our reality. What are some things that you are afraid of losing if you accept the truth about yourself?



The idea presented here (4:1) of a *will* within us that somehow cannot be accessed may seem a bit strange. It is a core idea of the Course, however. It may help to recall that the scribes, Helen and Bill, were both trained psychological workers. The Urtext says we have imprisoned our will *in our unconscious*. Psychology is full of things like unconscious motivation. Isn't "unconscious motivation" just another way of describing a "will" we are not aware of? Most of the time unconscious motivation is something dark and twisted that we have deliberately blocked out of our awareness because it is too ugly to own up to. The imprisoned will the Course is talking about here is on the other side of the spectrum. It is our *holy* will, so bright and pure that the ego cannot bear to look at it.

Our holy will remains with us, and yet it is out of our reach because we have repressed it and have shut our conscious minds to it. So, although it is still there within us, it cannot help us (4:1). We need the help of the Holy Spirit. *We* may be blocked from looking at our holy will, but *He* is not blocked. He can be, and is, aware of the truth within us (4:2), and his function is to make *us* aware of it again.

It's easy to overlook the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit. Some who study the Course have questioned whether the Holy Spirit is really necessary. "After all," they reason, "if the truth is within us all, and we already have everything (as the Course teaches), why do we need something else, something apparently outside of ourselves, to help us find the way?" They even raise the bugaboo of "duality." Aren't we missing the point of the Course about unity if we interpose the Holy Spirit between God and us?

The Course is telling us in these paragraphs that, although we have a pure will within us, it is imprisoned. We *cannot* be aware of it without help. Yes, it is part of us in truth, but we have sectioned off our minds so that, in the part that we know and think of as all there is, *there is no such will*. Therefore, if we try to do this on our own, by looking within for this holy will that is in union with God, we simply won't find it!

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<sup>2</sup> "We said before that the Holy Spirit is evaluative, and must be. He sorts out the true from the false in your mind, and teaches you to judge every thought you allow to enter it in the light of what God put there" (T-6.V.1:1-2).



Yes, as the argument goes, it *should* not be necessary to seek outside of ourselves. When we turn for help to the Holy Spirit, seemingly seeking outside *ourselves* for assistance, what we are actually doing is seeking *outside the ego* for assistance. We are not really seeking outside of our reality because “He [the Holy Spirit] *is* your reality” (4:3). The lesson being taught here is much the same lesson as is taught by Twelve-Step programs. The first three steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, for instance, are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

It is crucial that we recognize how powerless we are and that we turn to “a Power greater than ourselves.” The core the ego problem is our stubborn refusal to recognize any power *outside of our own ego*. Opening ourselves to the help of the Holy Spirit is a vital step in transcending the ego’s imaginary limits.

What keeps us from opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit is the fear of what we imagine we will lose (4:5). I think the single word *autonomy* best sums up what we are afraid of losing; at least it does for me. Because, from the ego perspective, the Holy Spirit seems like a Being outside of myself, opening to Him seems like being taken over by a foreign power. It seems like enslavement and disenfranchisement.

On a more mundane level, we often think we will lose the various things the ego has waved in front of us as enticements, things we might call, in a phrase, *the things of this world*. We are held back because we think we might lose material things, physical pleasures, wealth, or all the forms of earthly satisfaction. None of these things last, of course. None of them really satisfies us. Still, they are all we have! To be asked to set them all aside in favor of some invisible, non-material, formless essence can seem to be the height of insanity. In reality, that invisible essence is the *only* thing we can truly ever possess (4:6). We need to overcome these fears and open ourselves to the process by which the Holy Spirit sorts our minds, discarding the false and keeping only the true. This is a process we can accelerate through meditational practice, but which can and should take place in our minds all day long, and indeed, all night long as well.

## Paragraph 5

5. <sup>1</sup>I have emphasized many times that the Holy Spirit will never call upon you to sacrifice anything. <sup>2</sup>But if you ask the sacrifice of reality of yourself [*of yourselves*], the Holy Spirit **must** remind you that this is not God’s Will **because** it is not yours. <sup>3</sup>There is **no difference** between your will and God’s. <sup>4</sup>If you did not have a split mind [*divided wills*], you would recognize that willing is salvation because it **is** communication.

### • Study Question •

5. Until you give yourself over completely to the Holy Spirit, you are choosing to sacrifice reality. Sometimes the Holy Spirit tells you that

something you think you want is not God's Will. How do you usually react to that, and what is really going on?

The ego knows that if we accept our reality, we will lose our illusions—including the ego itself. The Holy Spirit is not asking us to sacrifice, but He is asking us to give up our illusions. When you give up an illusion, though, you are not losing anything real, and therefore you are not losing anything at all.

In the Manual for Teachers, the Course talks about how the teacher of God must learn to give up judgment. It ends up saying that the teacher is not really giving up anything: “He gives up an illusion; or better, he has an illusion of giving up” (M-10.2:3). The same is true of all the ego's illusions. A bit later, the *Manual* says, “What you give up is merely the illusion of protecting illusions” (M-16.6:7).

Sometimes, as a parent, I had the experience of telling my child, “You don't really want that.” “That” might have been some cheap toy being advertised on television. The child was fooled by the flashy advertisement, but as an adult, I knew that the toy would not perform as wonderfully as the ad implied. Do you suppose my child believed me? No; he cried.

That's the problem the Holy Spirit has with us, He is trying to teach us that our will and God's are identical (5:3). He is saying, of the “toys” being offered by the ego, “You really don't want that; you want this instead.” And we don't believe Him. We cry.

The final sentence about communication can best be understood in the context of the next paragraph.

## Paragraph 6

6. <sup>1</sup>It is impossible to communicate in alien tongues. <sup>2</sup>You and your Creator can communicate through creation, because that, and only that is your joint Will. <sup>3</sup>A divided mind cannot communicate, because it speaks [Divided wills do not communicate because they speak] for different things to the same mind. <sup>4</sup>This loses the ability to communicate simply because confused communication does not mean anything. <sup>5</sup>A message cannot be [said to be] communicated unless it makes sense. <sup>6</sup>How sensible can your messages be, when you ask for what you do not want? <sup>7</sup>Yet as long as you are afraid of your will, that is precisely what you are asking for [what you will ask for].

Uniting our will with God's and joining our mind with His in creation is how we communicate with God and He with us (6:2). “Willing...is communication” (5:4). If our mind is out of harmony with God's mind, we cannot communicate with Him (6:1, 6:3). Being in harmony is what enables communication. Therefore, what saves us—what restores us to union with God—is accepting that we share God's Will with Him. In practice, that shows up like love. We accept our function as extenders of the Love of God, and in so doing we remember the truth of our own reality.

Sometimes it seems that we can “prove” that our will is different from God's. For instance, sometimes we pray for something and we don't get it. That *seems* to demonstrate that our will and God's are different. But Jesus says that we are deceiving ourselves, because we “do not ask only for what [we] want” (5:6, 7:2). We are asking for things that are illusions and impossibilities, such as individual, separated self-gratification, which is out of accord with our own true nature. If we *really* asked for what we *really* want, we would receive it. There is a deep part of us that, even as we ask for

these illusions, *knows* they are not what we truly want. Therefore, our minds are dividing in the asking, and we often don't receive what we ask for.

Likewise we may think we want the Will of God. We may believe that we truly want enlightenment—and we probably do. The problem is that we don't want *only* enlightenment. Our mind is divided in the asking, and we don't receive what we ask for. Our asking isn't whole-hearted because we still harbor a deep fear of what we are asking for! (6:7)

## Paragraph 7

7. <sup>1</sup>You may insist that the Holy Spirit does not answer you, but it might be wiser to consider the kind of questioner [asker] you are. **2You do not ask only for what you want.** <sup>3</sup>This is [*solely*] because you are afraid you might receive it, **and you would.** <sup>4</sup>That is [*This is really*] why you persist in asking the teacher who could not possibly give you what you want [*teach you your will*]. <sup>5</sup>Of him you can never learn what it is, and this gives you the illusion of safety. <sup>6</sup>Yet you cannot be safe *from* truth, but only *in* truth. <sup>7</sup>Reality is the **only** safety. <sup>8</sup>Your will is your salvation **because it is the same as God's.** <sup>9</sup>The separation is nothing more than the belief that it is **different.**

### • Study Question •

6. This paragraph gives three reasons why it seems that our prayers are unanswered. Complete the following three statements:
  - a. Our prayers are not answered because we are not asking for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Our prayers are not answered because we are asking \_\_\_\_\_ (who?) for what we want.
  - c. Our prayers are not answered because we are afraid that the Holy Spirit will \_\_\_\_\_.

The problem of unanswered prayer is a big one in spiritual circles. If God loves us, why does He not give us what we ask for? The problem lies, not with God, but with us (7:1).

First, we are not asking *only* for what we want; we persist in asking for what we *do not* want at the same time (things of this world, ego autonomy, etc.). As we've seen, when the mind is divided in asking we don't receive what we ask for. If we *did* ask with an undivided mind we would receive whatever we ask for.

Why is our mind so divided? This question leads to the second reason our prayers are seemingly unanswered: We are afraid that the Holy Spirit would give us what we ask for, if we asked with an undivided mind. *And He would* (7:3).

The third reason we don't receive what we ask for is that we ask the ego instead of the Holy Spirit! (7:4).

These three reasons really boil down to a single reason: We are afraid of what we seem to be asking for. We are afraid of our own will, our own reality. So we "protect" ourselves from the truth (7:5–6) by asking the wrong source (ego instead of Holy Spirit) with a split mind, asking for illusions along with the truth.

I think that asking the ego means, simply, that we try on our own to make ourselves happy. We try to solve all our own problems. We don't turn to that Higher Power.



If you are wondering why you don't bring everything to the Holy Spirit for healing, why you "forget" to ask His help, here is the answer. You're afraid that if you did, He'd answer! In your insanity you think this is keeping you "safe." The only real safety, however, is in the truth (7:6).

The reason that the Course defines salvation as recognizing that your will and God's Will are the same is because what you need to be saved *from* is the idea that your will is *separate* from and different than God's (7:9). Separation is the problem salvation is designed to cure.

We will continue with the rest of this section next time.

## Answer Key

1. You are afraid of:
  - a. God's Will
  - b. Your own will
  - c. Reality
  - d. What you are
2. It becomes almost impossible for you to learn, because the Course is trying to teach you what you are, and you are afraid of what it is teaching (2:3–4).
3. We can learn the truth about ourselves because we have a Guide Who knows our reality and Who works gently to remind us of what we really want: the Holy Spirit.
4. No one answer or set of answers will be correct for everyone. Some things that come to mind *for me* are:
  - a. I will lose control of my life and be controlled by God.
  - b. I won't be able to do some of the things I enjoy doing, and I will have to do things I don't enjoy doing.
  - c. I might be called to sacrifice, to put the welfare of others before my own.
  - d. I won't be "allowed" to pig out on cookies, or to drink too much wine, or to indulge in fantasies. (Whatever you are personally addicted to.)
  - e. I will have to be serious all the time; I won't have any more fun.
5. Most likely, you will react as though the Holy Spirit were asking you to sacrifice. In truth, He is asking you to *give up* your own sacrifice of reality. As we saw earlier, He isn't trying to take our will away from us; He is trying to *restore* our awareness of our true will.
6. Reasons our prayers are not answered:
  - a. Our prayers are not answered because we are not asking for *only what we do want*.
  - b. Our prayers are not answered because we are asking the ego (who?) for what we want.
  - c. Our prayers are not answered because we are afraid that the Holy Spirit will give it to us.