

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 11, Section VII & VIII.1–5

The Condition of Reality & The Problem and the Answer

Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)
bold blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext
red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext
light blue text = editorial comments
~~strikethrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Section VII

Overview

This section, “The Condition of Reality,” is one of the shortest in the whole Text: only four paragraphs. It seems to be more of a bridge between Sections VI and VIII than an independent section. (Remember that the Text was not originally broken into sections, but came to Helen as a continuous dictation.)

In Section VI, Jesus explained that our beliefs and experiences form our perceptions. Therefore, if we believe in attack we will see a world of attack; we will see our brothers and ourselves as crucified, guilty and suffering as a result of our guilt. The perception of the Holy Spirit (or of Christ) sees the world quite differently, through the eyes of forgiveness. Jesus wants to give us new experiences that will foster such transformed perception. He seeks to bring about our transition from perceiving illusions to perceiving reality.

Section VII tells us that we must meet certain conditions in order to perceive reality, or in other words, to see the real world. It tells us that we must come to see *only* the real world. It then advances from telling us *what must happen* to appealing to us to *do what is necessary* to bring about that altered perception.

Section VIII goes on to speak of the root problem that blocks our perception of the real world, and confronts us with the essential choice we must make if we want to see the real world

When the process is complete and we have accepted our function of bringing salvation to everyone, we will perceive, or be in, the *real world*. We will no longer see the dreams. Or if we do, we will see them only as shadowy outlines around the reality (T-31.VII.3:3). We will see only the truth as real, and will no longer be deceived by any illusion to the contrary. “The condition of reality” is a condition where only love exists, and only goodness is perceived.

We will still see bodies and personalities, but we will no longer think for a moment that they are what is real. “Reality is only what is true” (VII.4:9), and “only reality is

true” (VIII.1:2). That is the simple lesson of the Course (T-11.VIII.1:2; W-pI.152.3:1). When we finally do see the real world, as it says in the next section (VIII.1:4), we will realize that before that moment we did not believe that simple lesson. Before that vision of the real world comes to us, we do not believe that only reality is true; there are many unreal things that we believe are real. It is these unreal things that block our awareness of reality.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹The world as **you** perceive it cannot have been created by the Father, for the world is **not** as you see it. ²God created **only** the eternal, and everything **you** see is perishable. ³Therefore, there must be another world that you do **not** see. ⁴The Bible speaks of a **new** Heaven and a **new** earth,¹ yet this cannot be literally true, for the eternal are not **re-created**. ⁵To **perceive** anew is merely to perceive again, implying that before, ~~or in the interval between,~~ you were not perceiving at all. ⁶What, then, is the world that awaits your perception **when you see it**?

• Study Question •

1. *The world we see seems quite convincingly real to us. What line of reasoning does the Course use to convince us that what we see cannot be the ultimate reality?*



Since our illusions are what hold us back, the path to seeing the real world begins by being willing to let go of our illusions, or our false perception of the world. Several examples are given.

The Course very clearly teaches that God did not create a perishable world (1:2):

"God is as incapable of creating the perishable as the ego is of making the eternal" (T-4.I.11:7).

"But what God creates is eternal" (T-5.I.5:6).

"God's creations have always been, because He has always been" (T-7.I.3:7).

"Creation is eternal and unalterable" (W-pI.93.7:4).

Yet everything we see in this world comes to an end (1:2). Not only our possessions and our individual lives, but nations, buildings, forests, mountains—even the sun and stars—will end one day. Nothing in the physical universe is eternal; everything has a beginning and an end. Therefore, Jesus says, God did not create any of this. *If it isn't eternal, God didn't create it.* Since we know God *did* create *something*, there must be another world that we don't see as yet (1:3).

Some interpreters believe the Bible teaches that the Kingdom of God will exist in physical form on earth for one thousand years, the so-called Millennial Age, with Jesus returning in the body to earth to rule the world—a “new earth” ruled by a new Heaven (1:4). The Course offers a drastically different picture, and says the Bible's picture is not meant literally. If God created Heaven, then it is eternal; it cannot be *re-created*. Nor can the real world. Instead, the Course interprets a “new earth” as meaning a world seen

¹ “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” (Revelation 21:1 NRSV)

anew, or seen *again*, following a period in which it was *not* seen (1:5). The idea is that we do not see the real world now, but we will. When we do see it, we will see it anew, as if it were new, although it has existed all along.

In the next paragraphs, the Course proceeds to answer the natural question: what does it mean by “the real world”? (1:6)

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Every loving thought that the Son of God ever had is eternal. ²The loving thoughts his mind perceives [**Those which his mind perceived**] in this world are the world's only reality. ³They are still perceptions, because he still believes that he is separate. ⁴Yet they are eternal because they are loving. ⁵And **being** loving they are like the Father, and therefore cannot die. ⁶The real world can **actually be perceived**. ⁷All that is necessary is a willingness to perceive nothing **else**. ⁸For if you perceive both good **and** evil, you are accepting both the false **and** the true **and making no distinction between them**.

• Study Question •

2. *What is the only thing necessary to see the real world? (To answer the question, determine what “nothing else” refers to.)*

The grand metaphysical teaching of the Course is that God did not create the physical world, and therefore the physical world is not real. Reality exists completely beyond the realm of perception. If you have a hard time accepting that God did not create the physical world, you don't have to take the teaching to that level to begin with. You can start with simply recognizing that love and loving thoughts are the world's only reality because they are like God (2:5); anything you perceive that appears to give reality to something besides love is bearing false witness. You can start with realizing that your perceptions of sin in others and yourself are not coming from God. They are an interpretation and not a fact. You will see the truth of this if you are simply willing to do so (2:1–2,6–7).

Starting with acknowledging the loving thoughts we see in the world as the world's only eternal reality (2:2), the rest—the deeper metaphysical aspects—will follow automatically. I don't believe that anyone should *struggle* to believe that their body, or the bodies of their loved ones, or the physical world, is not real. In Workbook lesson 132, the Course recognizes that not everyone can accept this idea. It says we each go as far as we can, and that's far enough. If necessary, the Course—in one of its rare affirmations of the idea of reincarnation—asserts we “will return and go still farther.”

"There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach. Not everyone is ready to accept it, and each one must go as far as he can let himself be led along the road to truth. He will return and go still farther, or perhaps step back a while and then return again" (W-pI.132.6:2-5).

Jesus already said earlier in the Course that denying the body's existence is “almost impossible...in this world” (T-2.IV.3:10). Instead of striving *not* to believe in something that you obviously *do* believe in, put your energy into affirming the reality of loving thoughts, both in yourself and in others. Loving thoughts are the eternal things you can

see and acknowledge in this world (2:1). Focus on them, and focus less on any form of the physical, whether it be appearance or behavior.

Trying *not* to believe in bodies is nearly impossible, like trying not to think of pink elephants. Concentrating on *not* thinking about them *is* thinking about them. Rather, when we are tempted to believe in the reality of something unloving, turn away from that thought, and choose to see only the loving thoughts.

“All that is necessary is a willingness to perceive nothing else” (2.7). Make a decision to look for loving thoughts and only loving thoughts; refuse to see anything else. The Course quite clearly asks us *not* to see dualistically: good and evil, black and white. If we see loving thoughts mixed with unloving thoughts in someone (including in ourselves), we are not seeing the truth. The loving thoughts are real; the unloving ones are illusions. If we see both we are making both real, and therefore confusing the false with the true (2:8). As we will see quite clearly early in Chapter 12, Jesus instructs us to see *nothing but love* wherever we look, or, as he puts it in T-14.X.7:1–2, either love or a call for love. What looks like love is more likely than not, really love. What looks like something else is either love in disguise or an appeal for healing and help, a call for love.

Are you willing to see nothing but loving thoughts? Are you willing to allow the Holy Spirit to reinterpret everything that seems to you like something other than love, so that you see it as He does? That is the only requirement for seeing the real world.

When you think you perceive an unloving thought in a brother or sister, or in yourself, are you willing to deny its reality? If you are willing to see only love, that is what you will see. It all depends on your willingness, that is, on what you *choose* to see. “When you want only love, you will see nothing else” (T-12.VII.8:1). Conversely, if you *do* see something else, it must be because you are choosing to see it.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹The ego may see [sees] **some** good, but never **only** good. ²That is **why** its perceptions are so variable. ³It does not reject goodness entirely, for that you could not accept. ⁴But it always **adds** something that is **not** real to the real, thus **confusing illusion and reality**. ⁵For perceptions cannot be partly true. ⁶If you believe in truth **and** illusion, you **cannot tell which is true**. ⁷To establish your **personal** autonomy you tried to create **unlike** your Father, **believing** that what you made is [*believing what you made to be*] capable of **being** unlike Him. ⁸Yet everything true [*Yet everything in what you have made that is true,*] *is* like Him. ⁹[*Only this is the real world, and*] Perceiving **only** the real world [*perceiving only this*] will lead you to the real Heaven, because **it will make you capable of understanding it**.

• Study Question •

3. *The ego's perception is mixed: some good, some evil; some love, and some things unlike love. Where did the things unlike love come from (see also T-11.V.4:4–5)?*

•

The ego nearly always lets us see *some* good in people, but always mixed with bad (3:1). The ego isn't stupid; it knows that if we saw *only* evil everywhere we could not stand it (3:3). Pure evil seems quite unlikely to us. So the ego keeps things mixed. It sees people as a mass of contradictions, and its perception of any given person may vary from

day to day: today—rather nice; tomorrow—a monster. We may see aspects of a person that are real; the ego may allow us to perceive someone's loving thoughts briefly. But it always will superimpose some illusion of selfishness, or some phantom of attack (3:4).

Thus, we learn not to completely trust *anything*. But the Holy Spirit teaches us to see *only* the loving thoughts and nothing else. (The opening section of the next chapter, on "The Judgment of the Holy Spirit," is all about this topic.)

The ego's way of looking at things had its origins in the original separation thought. The ego needed us to do something that was not like God in order to prove that we were independent of Him (3:7). We thought that we could create something real that was not like God. Fortunately, nothing unlike God can be made real, because God *defines* reality. By definition, if it isn't loving, God didn't create it, and if God didn't create it, it isn't real.

Why does my ego *want* to find sin and guilt in the world? Because it sees sin and guilt as proof that something unlike God exists, and that is the proof that *the ego* exists. It is the ego's insane goal—personal autonomy—that is behind our desire to find fault with each other. If nothing unlike God exists then the ego has never happened; it is only an illusion.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The perception of goodness is not knowledge, but the denial of the **opposite** of goodness enables you to recognize [*perceive*] a condition in which opposites do not exist. ²And this *is* the condition of knowledge. ³**Without** this awareness you have **not** met its conditions, and until you do you will not know it is yours already. ⁴You have made many ideas that you have placed between yourself [*yourselves*] and your Creator, and these beliefs are the world as **you** perceive it. ⁵Truth is not absent here, but it **is** obscure. ⁶You do not know the difference between what you have made and what God created, and so you do not know the difference between what you have made and what *you* have created. ⁷To believe that you can perceive the real world is to believe that you can know yourself. ⁸You **can** know God because it is His Will to **be** known. ⁹The real world is all that the Holy Spirit has saved for you out of what you have made, and to perceive only this is salvation, because it is the recognition that reality is **only what is true**.

• Study Question •

4. *Based on this section, how would you define the "real world?"*

When I see sin in someone (as I will do as long as I continue to believe in my ego) I am not seeing something real. I am hallucinating. I am seeing a false world. To correct this false vision, the Course proposes a process that begins with "the denial of the opposite of goodness" (4:1). When I see sin, I remind myself, "I am hallucinating. What I see is not real. I see it only because my mind is *choosing* to see it, and I could choose differently." I do not start by *trying* to see goodness; I start by *denying its opposite*. This leads inevitably to the recognition of a condition where only goodness exists, and *that* is "the condition of reality" mentioned in the title to this section.

In sentences 1 and 2, there is a play of words with the word *condition*. Condition means two things: one meaning is, "the state of being of a thing; what it is." The second

meaning is, “a prerequisite in order for something to happen.” We have to be brought to the awareness that only Love is real, that “the condition of reality” is love, with no opposites. And that awareness is the *condition* (in the second sense of the word) for entering into knowledge or Heaven (4:3). As we were told earlier, we must have our perceptions cleared up before we can obtain knowledge (T-3.III.1:2).

The whole process of learning taught by the Course is really *unlearning* all the ideas we have made and placed between ourselves and God (4:4). Those ideas, which take form in the world as we perceive it, are obscuring the Truth from us (4:4–5). As the aphorism of the famous TV series, The X-Files, states, “The truth is out there,” but we cannot see it because our projections get in the way. We believe in the reality of sin and evil, and we therefore perceive sin and evil in the world around us, even though they do not exist. Our perceptions of sin and evil prevent us from seeing the reality of all the loving thoughts that *even now* surround us.

Some words were inadvertently omitted from sentence 6 in the first edition. Take a look at that sentence. In the first edition, the first seventeen words were left out, so that it read: “You do not know the difference between what you have made and what *you* have created.” The complete sentence is: “You do not know the difference between what you have made and what God created, and so you do not know the difference between what you have made and what *you* have created.” The omission lost a key idea, which is that the *reason* that we cannot tell our loving thoughts (which are real) apart from our sins (which are illusions) is that we cannot distinguish between our projections and the creations of God Himself.

We have confused what we *made* with what God *created*. We think the world with all its sin, fear, suffering, and death, is a creation of God! We have to be trained to understand that all of it is something *we* made, not something God created. Until that confusion is cleared up we won't be able to distinguish between all that we *make* (our illusions) and what we truly *create* (the extension of love through us).

When this purification process, this “disillusioning,” is complete, we will see the *real world*. What is more, we will see *ourselves* as we really are (4:7), because the real world is composed of real people.

What is the real world? Sentence 9 answers that it consists of our true creations, rescued by the Holy Spirit from the illusions we have made. Reality, of course, is our loving thoughts. Do you remember what the Course taught about the Last Judgment back in Chapter 2? It was defined as the process of evaluating our thoughts and retaining only the loving ones as true, and recognizing everything else as false. When we perceive only what is real, and let go of all our unreal projections of things that are unlike God, we will have seen the real world. And that is salvation, because it saves us from illusions.

To recognize “that only reality is true” may seem to be a tautology, yet Jesus says it is salvation. It seems self-evident, and yet, when we realize that “only reality is true” means “only loving thoughts exist,” it becomes a challenging concept. This short section thus ends with a thought that bridges directly into the next section (see T-11.VIII.1:2).

Section VIII. The Problem and the Answer

Overview

The message of this closing section, “The Problem and the Answer,” is another appeal to our *choice*. Our perceptions of guilt are the problem, which *we made*. If we

cling to our perceptions and insist they are correct, if we continue to believe in the reality of the unloving thoughts we see in others and in ourselves, we are choosing the problem and not the Answer. “*Do I want the problem or do I want the answer?*” (4:6). This is the one question we should ask ourselves all the time.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹This is a very simple course. ²Perhaps you do not feel you need a course which, in the end, teaches that only reality is true [feel that a course which, in the end, teaches nothing more than that only reality is true is necessary]. **3But do you believe it?** ⁴When you perceive [have perceived] the real world, you will recognize that you did **not** believe it. ⁵Yet the swiftness with which your new and **only** real perception will be translated into knowledge will leave you but an instant to realize that this alone [that this judgment] is true. ⁶And then everything you made will be forgotten; the good and the bad, the false and the true. ⁷For as Heaven and earth become one, even the real world will vanish from your sight. ⁸The end of the world is not its destruction, but its **translation** into Heaven. ⁹The **reinterpretation** of the world is the transfer of **all** perception to knowledge.

• Study Question •

5. “*Only reality is true.*”
- What phrase from the Introduction to the Text expresses this same simple lesson?
 - Why is such a simple message necessary?

“This Course is perfectly clear” (T-11.VI.3:1), we were told recently. Now Jesus says, “This is a very simple Course” (1:1). In both passages, Jesus is making the point that what makes the Course seem hard to understand, difficult, or complex, is not the actual subject matter of the Course. That is extremely simple: the truth is true and nothing else is true. Seeing with spiritual vision is *easy* because it is *natural*, it is our *nature* to see in this way.

The previous section ended with telling us that “salvation...is the recognition that reality is only what is true” (T-11.VII.4:9). Now, on the face of it, that is self-evident. “What is real is what is true.” That’s like saying, “Water is wet” or “Hard means not soft.” Nobody would question that only what is real is true!

So we might ask ourselves, “Why do I need a course that *teaches* me that only reality is true? I already know that; I already believe it.” This section opens by continuing to discuss this very simple premise, showing that we *do* need to be taught this lesson, even though we think we already know it. “But do you believe it?” (1:3).

That is the question! *Do we really believe that only reality is true?* The next sentence clearly implies that we do not: “When you perceive the real world, you will recognize that you did not believe it” (T-11.VII.1:4). This whole chapter has been showing us that we *don’t* believe it; we believe in the reality of a lot of things that are *false*. Our belief in unloving thoughts in ourselves and other people, for instance, is a belief that something that is unreal is actually true. The process of the Course is to examine our thoughts and to begin to identify the areas in which we believe that something false is real, and then to deny those beliefs, to reverse them, to undo them.

I have said before that becoming aware of the ego is like the experience we have when a steady noise, which we have learned to ignore (like the hum of an air conditioner) suddenly stops. Before the noise stops, we may have thought it was quiet; now, when the noise stops, we suddenly realize it was not quiet at all. When the misperceptions of the ego cease, we will suddenly become aware of how much they were dominating our mind without our even knowing it.

But—to continue the analogy—once the noise ceases, the period of time in which you are “aware” of the absence of noise is small; you quickly go on to simply enjoy the stillness. Likewise, when the real world dawns on our mind, there will be “but an instant” in which we realize we have believed in unreality (1:5). We will quickly shift from true perception (the real world) into direct knowledge (Heaven).

Jesus says that once we perceive the real world we will look back and realize that now (*before* seeing the real world) we do not believe in it (1:4). Of course that implies we do not see the real world now, which naturally makes it difficult for us to understand what he is talking about. It also implies that seeing and believing is simultaneous. When we believe in it, we see it; when we see it, we believe in it. Part of us knows there must be another, invisible world. Another part of us does not believe it exists, and holds on to the visible world with desperate tenacity.

The shift in our perception is sudden, and its effects are permanent. The perception of the real world, which is the only real perception we have ever had, will endure just for a moment before being swallowed up in the certainty of knowledge (1:5). The world, also, will be subsumed in Heaven.

As we saw above, the Course does not accept the eschatology of fundamentalism, that is, its picture of the end of time. The Course foresees the disappearance of the physical world the moment our minds have accepted our oneness (1:7–9). There will be no more perception, only knowledge (1:9). Since the knowledge to which the Course refers is non-dual knowledge—a knowledge that comes directly from union with something, unmediated by the senses—perception no longer will serve any purpose.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹The Bible tells you to become as little children.² ²Little children recognize that they do not understand what they perceive, and so they **ask what it means**.³ Do not make the mistake of believing that **you** understand what **you** perceive, for its meaning **is** lost to you. ⁴Yet the Holy Spirit has saved its meaning **for** you, and if you will **let** Him interpret it [*for you*], He will restore to you what you have thrown away. ⁵Yet while [*As long as*] you **think you know** its meaning, you will see no need to ask it **of** Him.

• Study Question •

6. *Jesus returns to the topic of little children. Besides this paragraph, he addresses us as children in 7:1 and 8:1, and spends two more paragraphs talking about them (13, 14). What quality of little children is held up for admiration?*



² “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3 NRSV)

Notice that once again Jesus quotes the Bible approvingly, citing it as an authority (2:1, a reference to the words of Jesus in the Gospels, “Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3 NRSV). Clearly, he intends us to have a great deal of respect for the Bible, even though in some places he does not hesitate to correct its mistakes.

What does it mean to become as little children? Sometimes we think that means we should emulate their innocence, or their playfulness, or their unquestioning trust. That, however, is not the quality of children that Jesus holds up for our emulation. Instead, he points out the fact that children are unashamed of their ignorance, recognize it willingly, and ask what things mean (2:2).

We start this process of translating our perceptions right where we are, and the proper attitude for us is that of little children who do not understand what they perceive. Our biggest problem is that we think we *do* understand what we perceive; we think we know what things mean and therefore we do not *ask* what they mean. We must begin with doubting our perceptions, being willing to recognize that any perception of guilt is false, and to ask the Holy Spirit to re-interpret it for us (2:3–5).

This may remind us of Section I of this chapter, where we were told:

You must ask what God's Will is in everything, because it is yours. You do not know what it is, but the Holy Spirit remembers it for you. (T-11.I.8.5–6)

We have “thrown away” the knowledge given us in creation, which included an understanding of the meaning of everything, but the Holy Spirit has preserved it and will teach it to us again *if we ask* (2:4). The danger of believing that we already know is that we will not ask (2:5), and therefore, we will operate with a false understanding of what things mean. That false understanding will consist of the ego's interpretation of things.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹You do not know the meaning of **anything** you perceive. ²**Not one thought you hold is wholly true.** ³The recognition of this is your firm beginning. ⁴You are not misguided; you have accepted no guide at all. ⁵Instruction in perception is your great need, **for you understand nothing.** ⁶**Recognize** this but do not accept it, for understanding is your inheritance. ⁷Perceptions are learned, and you are not without a Teacher. ⁸Yet your willingness to learn of Him depends on your willingness to question **everything** you learned **of yourself**, for you who **[have]** learned amiss should not be your own teacher **[teachers]**.

Paragraph 3 continues the same message: Our ignorance is monumental and almost complete, and we need to acknowledge that fact:

You do not know the meaning of anything you perceive. Not one thought you hold is wholly true. The recognition of this is your firm beginning. (3.1–3)

Or as Jesus says in Chapter 14:

Yet the essential thing is learning that *you do not know*. (T-14.XI.1:1)

“I don't know” is my firm beginning, because thinking that I *do* know blocks true perception. We are seeing guilt, sickness, lack, and loss because our ego *wants* to see those things and we are listening to it. We see someone's offensive behavior and we believe we know what it means. We believe we can analyze that person and understand them. Jesus earnestly attempts to persuade us that we are mistaken—profoundly,

drastically mistaken. He insists that every thought we have is at least partly contaminated by the ego's lies (3:2). We have not even begun our spiritual journey until we have recognized the extent of our ignorance (3:3), and have begun to deny the validity of our perceptions.

To deny our false perceptions does not mean that we pretend we don't have them—that is denial in the negative sense, trying to conceal something we don't like. To deny our false perceptions in the positive sense—what the course calls “true denial” (T-2.II.2:1)—is to recognize that we are not seeing facts; rather, we are seeing only our interpretation of the facts, based on how our ego wants to see them. It is to say to myself, “Yes, I see this situation in this manner, but what I see is not true. *I don't know* what this means. I think I do but I don't. Holy Spirit, help me to see this truly.”

Later in the Text, we are given a specific practice about this recognition:

When your peace is threatened or disturbed in any way, say to yourself:

I do not know what anything, including this, means. And so I do not know how to respond to it. (T-14.XI.6:6-8)

Imagine how applying this practice might affect your reactions to the situations of your life. Some event occurs, and you are sure it is a disaster, so you panic. If you told yourself that you don't know what it means, you would have to ask the Holy Spirit for help to interpret it and instruction about how to respond to it. That is exactly what you should be doing all the time.

We need to be taught how to properly perceive things (3:5). Our great need is to realize that everything we seem so certain of is only a misunderstanding; we don't really understand anything. The whole Course is nothing but such “instruction in perception.” As we recognize our ignorance, Jesus does not want us to *settle* for ignorance (3:6). In other words, don't just say, “I understand nothing” and stop there. *Ask* for true understanding, because *you are meant to understand*. You are capable of learning to perceive correctly. You have a Teacher Who is willing to show you the truth (3:7).

The key that unlocks the door to true understanding, however, is our willingness to let go of the ego's propaganda (3:8). We have been brainwashed by our own egos, and to start our de-programming we need to acknowledge that fact. We have learned, for instance, that Sam (to pick a name) is untrustworthy, so we never grant him our trust no matter what he says or does. We need to question that assessment. When someone is rude to us we have learned that this means they are mean people; we have to question that, and open to the possibility that they are innocent children of God. We have to begin to ask the Holy Spirit how to respond, instead of thinking that we know, based on past experience.

Who taught us what we know? We taught ourselves! We know we have been wrong sometimes; often, in fact. We are not reliable teachers, but the Holy Spirit is. All of our perceptions must be called into question. Only if we are willing to question *our own perceptions* will we become willing to *open to the Holy Spirit's perceptions*.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹No one can withhold truth except from himself. ²Yet God will not refuse you the Answer He **gave [you]**. ³Ask, then, for what is yours, but which you did **not** make, and do not defend yourself **against** truth. ⁴**You** made the problem God **has** answered. ⁵Ask yourself [**yourselves**], therefore, but one simple question:

⁶Do I want the problem or do I want the answer?

⁷Decide for the answer and you **will** have it, for you will see it as it is, and it is yours already.

• Study Question •

7. *The title of the section is "The Problem and the Answer."*
- What is the problem?*
 - What is the answer?*

What we are looking at here is another example of the way in which we are the source of our dilemma. We made the problem (4:4). No one is doing it to us, we are doing it to ourselves. There is no one else to blame for our ignorance; it is self-imposed, and we are the ones who can end it by our choice (4:1–2). The Answer with a capital "A:" is the Holy Spirit, and He is available to all who ask. The Bible carries the same message: "If you then, with all your human frailty, know how to give your children gifts that are good for them, how much more certainly will your Father who is in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13, Weymouth).

When I hold onto my own perceptions, I am refusing the Answer and defending myself against the truth. All I need to do is to stop defending myself against the truth and ask for it (4:3). The one question, then, is: do I want the problem [the world shown me by my own perceptions] or do I want the answer [the real world shown by the Holy Spirit's perceptions]? (4:5–6). I will have whichever one I want.

Right now, you and I have the problem. We see the world of pain and suffering. We see it because that is what we want, consciously or subconsciously.

We could have the Answer. We "could see peace instead of this" (W-pl.34.Title). If we decide to have the Answer we *will* have it; that's all it takes (4:7). In reality we *already* have the Answer, we just are not seeing it.

Now, if that is all perfectly clear, you may still be feeling it is too general and too abstract. Many people complain that the Course does not give enough specific instructions, that it isn't very practical, it is all mental stuff, playing with ideas, and doesn't help with the day-to-day problems of life. That simply isn't true. Take a moment to read the next paragraph carefully!

Paragraph 5

5. ¹You may complain [**You complain**] that this course is not sufficiently specific for you to understand and use [**to understand it and use it**]. ²Yet perhaps you have not done what it specifically advocates. [**Yet it has been very specific, and you have not done what it specifically advocates.**] ³This is not a course in the play of ideas, but in their **practical application**. ⁴Nothing could be more

specific than to be told [very clearly] that if you ask you **will** receive. ⁵The Holy Spirit will answer **every** specific problem as long as you believe that problems **are** specific. ⁶His answer is both many and one, as long as you believe that the One **is** many. ⁷You may be afraid of His specificity [Realize that you are afraid of His specificity], for fear of what you think it will **demand** of you. ⁸Yet only by asking will you learn that nothing [that is] of God demands **anything** of you. ⁹God **gives**; He does **not** take. ¹⁰When you refuse to ask, it is because [You are refusing to ask, because] you believe that asking is taking rather than [asking is taking, and you do not perceive it as] sharing.

• Study Question •

8. *What specific thing have we been asked to do, a thing that we are (perhaps) not doing as asked?*

The Course is telling us, in *every specific instance*, to question our own perception and to ask the Holy Spirit for His. What could be more specific than that? Yet how often do we do so? Most of the time we accept our own perceptions and go blithely on, blinded by our own ego. The point is that if we *do* what the Course specifically advocates, if we withdraw our belief in our own interpretations and specifically ask the Holy Spirit for His interpretation, we will get it! We will start to see things differently, and we will have experiences that are totally different from anything we ever had before. We will experience *miracles* in our lives, and those experiences will totally convince us that what the Course teaches is the truth.

“This is not a course in the play of ideas, but in their practical application” (5:3). You don’t “get” the Course by just reading the books, participating in study groups, or debating the meaning of the metaphysical concepts. You “get” the Course by *doing what it tells you to do*. That is, you “get” the Course as you begin to *apply* the ideas to one situation after another, questioning your interpretation of things and asking the Holy Spirit to show you His interpretation. We are supposed to ask. What could be more specific than that? (5:4).

The Holy Spirit is the communication link between Heaven and earth, between the formless and the world of form, between the Oneness and the separated many. As long as we believe we are separate, His answers will seem to come in forms that match our separateness (5:5). So we come to Him with one specific situation after another, asking His help, and He answers; He brings healing. One by one the specific problems are answered until we begin to discern that, no matter what the problem, the answer is always a form of the same thing: forgiveness. We begin to see that the many problems are really one, with one Answer (5:6).

We often fear that His answers will *demand something* of us (5:7). It may seem we have to give up something, maybe something specific, maybe something intangible like a loss of face. But “God gives; He does not take” (5:9). All we must give up are illusions! The only way we can discover that for ourselves, however, is to ask (5:8).

We often deny ourselves His help out of the mistaken belief that to receive His help would be stealing (5:10); we think we don’t deserve it. But we do deserve it! “The Holy Spirit will give you only what is yours...” (6.1)

[We will complete our study of this section in the next study guide.]

Answer Key

1. The Course argues that everything we see is perishable, and “God created only the eternal” (1:2); therefore, the creations of God must be part of another world, which we do not see (1:3).
2. To see the real world, all that is required is our willingness to perceive nothing else than the real world, nothing else than loving thoughts (2:7).
3. Things unlike love came about because we tried to create unlike the Father (3:7).
4. The real world is the loving thoughts we perceive here, because only these have true reality, being like God.
5. Two parts:
 - a. “Nothing unreal exists” (T-In.2:3).
 - b. Because we do not believe it; we believe that the unreal is also true.
6. The characteristic of little children that Jesus holds up for our emulation is that children recognize that they do not understand what they perceive, and so they ask what it means.
7. Regarding the section title and this paragraph:
 - a. The problem is our ignorance, our denial of truth, which brings false perception.
 - b. The Answer is the Holy Spirit, Who brings true perception.
8. The Course has asked us quite specifically to ask the Holy Spirit what things mean, and what we should do in response to them.