

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 25

The Holy Spirit's Justice

Section VI

The Special Function

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary.

Overview of Section VI

The overall message of this section is nothing short of mind-boggling. By now, if you have read the Text this far, you are quite familiar with the Course's strongly negative views about *specialness*. For instance:

You who prefer specialness to sanity could not obtain it in your right mind. You were at peace until you asked for special favor. And God did not give it, for the request was alien to Him, and you could not ask this of a Father Who truly loved His Son. (T-13.III.11:1-3 (CE), (FIP))

To believe that special relationships, with special love, can offer you salvation is the belief that separation is salvation. (T-15.V.3:5 (CE)) (T-15.V.3:3 (FIP))

It is in the special relationship, born of the hidden wish for special love from God, that the ego's hatred triumphs. For the special relationship is the renunciation of the love of God, and the attempt to secure for the self the specialness that He denied. And it is essential to the preservation of the ego that you believe this specialness is not hell but Heaven. (T-16.V.5:1-3 (CE), T-16.V.4:1-3 (FIP)).

In this section, Jesus declares that even our specialness can be transformed by the Holy Spirit into something not only holy but divine. There is absolutely nothing that our egos can do that cannot be redeemed by God for a holy purpose!

Paragraph 1

The grace of God rests gently on forgiving eyes, and everything they look on speaks of Him to the beholder. ²He can see no evil, nothing in the world to fear, and no one who is different from himself. ³And as he loves them, so he looks upon himself with love and gentleness. ⁴He would no more condemn himself for his mistakes than damn another. ⁵He is not an arbiter of vengeance, nor a punisher of sin. ⁶The kindness of his sight rests on himself with all the tenderness it offers others. ⁷For he would *only* heal and *only* bless. ⁸And being in accord with what God wills, he *has* the power to heal and bless all those he looks on with the grace of God upon his sight.

• Study Question •

1. *Recall a situation in which you gave in to the desire to attack or condemn. Now, take phrases from this paragraph such as, “he would only heal and only bless,” or even single words, like “tenderness,” and imagine how you might have reacted differently if you had chosen to identify with this different way of perception. Choose now to see the situation that way, and allow the Holy Spirit to undo all the consequences of your wrong decision in the past.*

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This section follows on from the preceding one, that ended by pointing out, “Your brother...is the way to Heaven or to hell, as *you* perceive him” (6:5). It advised us to look on one another with forgiving eyes, and not to trust the body’s eyes that cannot see past the body and the ego. Forgiving eyes, which refers to that inner, spiritual vision that sees the sinless Son of God beyond the ego, are blessed by the grace of God to view everything in a way that speaks of God (1:1). As one of the Workbook lessons says, “God is in everything I see, because God is in my mind” (Lesson 29).

When I look upon the world with forgiving eyes, there is no evil, nothing to fear in all the world, and no one who is different from me (1:2). Think about that! “No evil.” Everything is seen in a way that justifies forgiveness. There are no attacks, only calls for love. This can be hard to believe sometimes, but the notion comes up several times in the Course. Everything is either love or a call for love. “In His [the Holy Spirit’s] perception of the world, nothing is seen but justifies forgiveness and the sight of perfect sinlessness. (T-25.III.5:1 (CE), T-25.III.5:2 (FIP)). And we are expected to share the perception of the Holy Spirit.

And nothing to fear! Ken Wilber has some interesting observations about that. He points out that when a person has dis-identified with all lesser identities such as the body and the ego, and has become fully aware that he or she is literally one with everything, fear becomes impossible, because there is nothing outside of your Self to be afraid of. It’s all part of you. What you are is eternal spirit, the formless awareness in which all things are arising, so the death of the body cannot cause fear because even if the body is destroyed *you* continue.

And finally, no one who is different from you. Again, the notion of perfect Oneness does a lot to explain the lack of difference. If we are all parts of the One, our sameness trumps any apparent differences. I don't think this means we are alike as peas in a pod, or that we no longer are aware of the talents and gifts other people have that we are not manifesting, but we do not see those other people as separate from us. Rather, their talents *are ours*, everyone's gifts are *our* gifts.

So, in our awareness of Oneness, in our perception of the Son of God in everything and everyone, we are filled with love for them all. And because the All also includes us, we love ourselves as well (1:3). Incapable of damning *anyone* for their mistakes, we cannot condemn *ourselves* for our mistakes (1:4). Instead of acting like an "arbiter of vengeance" (determining who needs to be attacked) or "a punisher of sin" (carrying out the vengeance in person), we are filled with tenderness and kindness towards everything; our only desire is to heal and to bless (1:5–7).

That's worth thinking about for a moment. Have you ever felt like it was up to you to exact vengeance for something? Have you ever felt as though you needed to punish someone for their "sin"? I know I have. It doesn't need to be a big thing. It can be no more than wanting to be sure someone feels bad about what they said or did that hurt your feelings or let you down. When you look with eyes of forgiveness, such feelings just aren't possible; all you want is to heal and bless the other person.

The greatest blessing of all, though, is that when you look with the grace of God blessing your vision, *you have the power* to heal and to bless because you are aligned with the Will of God (1:8).

Paragraph 2

² Eyes become used to darkness, and the light of brilliant day seems painful to the eyes grown long accustomed to the dim effects perceived at twilight. ²And they turn away from sunlight and the clarity it brings to what they look upon. ³Dimness seems better; easier to see and better recognized. ⁴Somehow, the vague and more obscure seems easier to look upon; less painful to the eyes than what is wholly clear and unambiguous.¹ ⁵Yet this is not what eyes are *for*. ⁶And who can say that he prefers the darkness and maintain he *wants* to see?

¹. This may be a reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Though the imagery is not identical, there are many parallels. In that famous allegory, prisoners are chained in a cave where they can see only dim shadows by firelight. Then one of the prisoners is freed and brought out into the sunlight where he can see the real world. However, the sunlight hurts his eyes, so he desires to return back to the cave because the shadow world is easier on his eyes. The meaning of this allegory is similar to the meaning of the Course passage here: We are so used to seeing the darkness of unreality that the light of reality is initially painful to us, so we are tempted to rush back to the darkness.

• **Study Question** •

2. *In what ways have you experienced something like leaving a dark place and entering a brightly lit one, and recoiling from the light, in relation to seeing your brother as sinless?*
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After presenting us with such a positive view of what having forgiving eyes can bring to us, Jesus pauses to address a question that may arise in our minds: Why, if forgiveness offers so much, do we resist embracing it?

He begins by comparing our spiritual vision to something very familiar to us about vision (2:1). Our eyes get used to darkness; they adjust. We've all experienced at some time stepping out of a very dark place into bright light, or sitting in a dark room and having someone turn on a light. It hurts our eyes, and we shield them from the light or even close them.

When we first have the brilliance of forgiveness shine into our minds, it seems to cause mental pain, and we may put up a mental shield to block it out, or try to shut down our budding spiritual perception. We're used to our spiritual darkness, and spiritual light seems painful and threatening (2:2). Thoughts arise such as, "Forgive that SOB? You've got to be kidding" or "I could never forgive something like that." Such thoughts are the shield you are putting up to block the light of forgiveness. The dark thoughts of anger, judgment and attack seem more comfortable and familiar than the radical notion of forgiveness (2:3–4).

But just as our physical eyes are not made to remain in darkness, and soon adjust to light, our spiritual perception is designed to perceive sinlessness, to be "forgiving eyes" (2:5). Anyone who says he wants to see clearly will have to seek the clarity of light. If you maintain that you cannot tolerate the idea of forgiveness, it can only mean that you do not want spiritual sight (2:6).

Paragraph 3

3 The wish to see calls down the grace of God upon your eyes, and brings the gift of light that makes sight possible. ²Would you behold your brother? ³God is glad to have you look on him. ⁴He does not will your savior be unrecognized by you. ⁵Nor does He will that he remain without the function that He gave to him. ⁶Let him no more be lonely,² for the lonely ones are those who see no function in the world for them to fill, no place where they are needed, and no aim which only they can undertake and perfectly fulfill.

². You let your brother "no more be lonely" by seeing him with "the grace of God upon your eyes" (3:1). This sets him free to fulfill his function, and it is through fulfilling his function that he overcomes loneliness.

• **Study Question** •

3. *Seeing Christ in our brother, or seeing him as our savior, may seem difficult, but in fact God's grace and the gift of light with which to see is freely given. What is the only requirement for receiving these gifts?*
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When you truly want to see with spiritual sight, your wish “calls down the grace of God upon your eyes” and grants “the gift of light that makes sight possible” (3:1). The real question is: Do you truly want to see you brother? Do you want to see your brother *truly* (3:2)? God’s all for it! (3:3). God *wants* you to see him as he is: God’s sinless Son. He wants you to end this extended period of refusal to recognize the Christ in one another (3:4). And just as God wants you to fulfill your function, He wants the same for your brother (3:5). And that requires that *you* forgive him.

The appeal to each of us, then, is to allow our brother or sister to fulfill their function (forgiving us) by extending full forgiveness to them; to recognize and affirm our oneness with them, thus refusing to allow anyone to be lonely. Individuals who are separate from others, who do not feel *needed* by anyone, see no purpose to their lives. It is our inter-connectedness and inter-dependence that gives meaning to our lives. Each of us has an aim that only we can fulfill, and finding our aim is intimately tied with sharing that realization with another (3:6).

Paragraph 4

4 Such is the Holy Spirit’s kind perception of specialness; His use of what you made, to heal instead of harm: To each He gives a special function in salvation he alone can fill, a part for only him.³ Nor is the plan complete until he finds his special function and fulfills the part assigned to him, to make himself complete within a world where incompleteness rules. Here, where the laws of God do not prevail in perfect form, can he yet do *one* perfect thing and make *one* perfect choice. And by this act of special faithfulness to one perceived as other than himself, he learns the gift was given to himself, and so they must be one.

³. The “special function” is the unique contribution to the salvation of the world that each person is called to make. The essence of each special function is the giving of forgiveness to others, to heal them and set them free to fulfill their own special function. So in that sense, each special function is the same. What makes each special function different is the particular individuals that one is meant to save, and also the particular strengths that one will employ in the process, along with how and where they can be best used (see W-154.2:2). This section focuses on us forgiving and saving our holy relationship partner. Earlier (see T-20.IV.6-7), the special function is framed as beginning with forgiving our holy relationship partner, at which point the two of us enter the “ark of peace” (T-20.IV.7:3), where we discover our joint special function in the world’s salvation: “Each holy relationship must enter here, to learn its special function in the Holy Spirit’s plan” (T-20.IV.7:4).

• **Study Question** •

4. (4:1–2). *Make this personal by substituting “me” for “each” and “I” for “he.” Try reading it that way to yourself, and let yourself absorb its meaning, and the importance of your part in His plan of salvation. (Just what your special function is is made clear in the next paragraph.)*

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The fourth paragraph begins with the word “such.” “Such is the Holy Spirit’s kind perception of specialness” (4:1). What does “such” refer to? Clearly, to the final sentence of the preceding paragraph. So the Holy Spirit’s “perception of specialness” is, for each of us, a function in the world for us to fill, a place where we are needed, and an aim that *only we* can perfectly fulfill (4:1 expanded by 3:6). Being a savior is our special function, the Holy Spirit’s “use of what you made [specialness] to heal instead of harm” (4:1). It is ours to practice and to grant to our brother/sister, allowing him or her to be *our* savior.

We made specialness with an intent to harm, to somehow raise ourselves above everyone else, often by cutting everyone else down. We wanted special grace, special favor, special love. Specialness is the reason the human race is so obsessed with special relationships, so determined to find just the right person who will somehow complete us. We are using special relationships to substitute for the special love that God refuses to give us:

“It is in the special relationship, born of the hidden wish for special love from God, that the ego’s hatred triumphs. For the special relationship is the renunciation of the love of God, and the attempt to secure for the self the specialness that He denied.” (T-16.V.5:1–2 (CE), T-16.V.4:1–2 (FIP)).

Instead of that harmful purpose, the Holy Spirit can actually *use specialness* for a healing purpose:

“In His function as interpreter of what you have made, the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences which point to truth. Under His teaching, every relationship becomes a lesson in love.” (T-15.V.4:5–6 (CE), T-15.V.4:5–6 (FIP)).

The overall plan of salvation cannot be completed until each of us does our part. We each must find our function and fulfill that function. Everyone in this world has been deceived, deceived by themselves, to believe that they are somehow incomplete. In some way our function involves sharing completion with others, helping them realize they are already complete, as God created them. It means overlooking “sin” and seeing Christ in others, and accepting others’ perception of us as already whole. Perceiving others as complete is the way we complete ourselves (4:2).

In 4:3, it’s important to recognize that the pronoun “he” does not refer to God, but to each one of us who is finding our special function in this world. Even in this world, where God’s laws function only imperfectly, in distorted forms,⁴ we can, nevertheless,

⁴ 1. God's laws are the laws of love. They do not demand; they give, guaranteeing freedom, happiness,

“do *one* perfect thing and make *one* perfect choice.” That *one* thing is our special function. The dual emphasis on the word “one” says to me that this is, literally, the *only* perfect thing we can do in this world. Everything else gets garbled and tainted with the impurity of the ego. This, however, is an egoless choice; it is the recognition and acknowledgement of God’s perfection in another human being. That is what we are all here to do, eventually. That becomes our way out of hell.

We meet another person and, at the onset, we see them as “*other* than” ourselves, just as we do with everyone we meet. But at some point we are inwardly impelled to an “act of special faithfulness” toward this seemingly-other person. We look past their body and their ego, and forgive them totally. We see Christ in them, shining brightly, and — as the Workbook says — we can scarcely refrain from falling down at their feet in adoration. But, instead, we take their hand:

This do the body’s eyes behold in one whom Heaven cherishes, the angels love, and God created perfect. This is his reality. And in Christ’s vision is his loveliness reflected in a form so holy and so beautiful that you could scarce refrain from kneeling at his feet. Yet you will take his hand instead, for you are like him in the sight which sees him thus. (W-161.9:1–4 (CE))

In recognizing Christ in *them* we recognize Him in ourselves as well. We “learn the gift was given to” ourselves, and so we and our brother or sister “*must* be one.” He or she is no longer perceived as “*other* than” ourselves; we *know* that we are one (4:4).

Paragraph 5

5 Forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time. ²It is the means the Holy Spirit uses to translate specialness from sin into salvation. ³Forgiveness is for all. ⁴But when it rests on all it is complete, and every function of this world completed with it. ⁵Then is time no more. ⁶But while in time there is still much to do, and each must do what is allotted him, for on his part does all the plan depend. ⁷He *has* a special part in time, for so he chose, and choosing, made it for himself. ⁸His wish was not denied but changed in form, to let it serve his brother *and* himself, and thus become a means to save instead of lose.

safety. They give everything to everyone. It is not a sin to disobey them; they cannot be disobeyed. The law mentioned most often is the law of extension, or cause and effect, in which thoughts extend outward, creating after their own nature. 2. This law of creation becomes translated in the dream (by the Holy Spirit) into the basic law of mind or perception: Our thoughts extend outward and determine how we perceive and what we experience (see projection makes perception).... 5. Extending healing to the minds of others is a reflection in this world of God's laws, translated by the Holy Spirit into a form we can understand. These miracles transcend the laws of this world, overturning all the physical laws of space, time, distance, mass and magnitude (see T-12.VII.3:2-3). — (<http://www.circleofa.org/glossary-of-terms/l-o/laws/>)

• **Study Question** •

5. *What do you think is meant by “this act of special faithfulness to one perceived as other than himself”?*
6. *(5:3-8). In the light of these sentences, is it appropriate to focus special attention on one person? Why, or why not?*

This is forgiveness as the Course understands it. It far surpasses most ideas of what forgiveness is. It entails, not simply letting someone off the hook for what they said or did, but the realization that they are one with God, as we are, and therefore one with us. Jesus calls forgiveness “the *only* function meaningful in time” (5:1). It is quite literally the only meaningful thing we can ever do in this world. Everything else is contaminated by the ego.

Forgiveness is the means by which the Holy Spirit can “*translate* specialness from sin into salvation” (5:2). This is the philosopher’s stone that transmutes the lead of our special relationship into the gold of a holy relationship. It is the golden opportunity offered to us in every relationship we are part of: *this* relationship gives us the means of escape from separateness into union with God and all that is.

“Forgiveness is for all” (5:3) — Hallelujah! As the Course said earlier in the Text:

"Anger is never justified. ...Pardon is always justified" (T-30.VI.1:1, 2:1 (FIP), T-30.VII.1:1, 2:1 (CE)).

Everyone is entitled to forgiveness. When everyone has received and experienced forgiveness, that’s the end: the purpose of the world has been accomplished (5:4), and the world will be vanish⁵. When that happens, time will end (5:5), there being no further need of it.

But as long as we are in time “there is still much to do” (5:6). Forgiveness must be extended to and received by everyone. Each of us has our own particular part to play in that process, and the process cannot be complete unless *everyone* plays their part — “on *his* part does *all* the plan depend”(5:6).

You have chosen to have a special role in time and by your choice made it so (5:7). God did not deny your wish for specialness! He just *changed its form*, giving you a special function in the plan of forgiveness so that your specialness can serve both you and your brother, and result in both of you being saved instead of being lost in separateness (5:8).

To me, this is truly miraculous: That God can take our worst mistakes, even the very *root* of all of our mistakes, and turn them into blessings!

⁵ "When the thought of separation has been changed to one of true forgiveness, will the world be seen in quite another light; and one which leads to truth, where all the world must disappear and all its errors vanish. Now its source has gone, and its effects are gone as well" (W-pl.11.3.1:4-5 (FIP) and (CE)).

Paragraph 6

6 Salvation is no more than a reminder this world is not your home; its laws are not imposed on you, its values are not yours, and nothing that you think you see in it is really there at all. ²And this is seen and understood as each one takes his part in its *undoing*, as he did in *making* it. ³He has the means for either, as he always did. ⁴The specialness he chose to hurt himself did God appoint to be the means for his salvation, from the very instant that the choice was made. ⁵His special sin was made his special grace. ⁶His special hate became his special love.

• Study Question •

7. *How can you learn (see and understand) all that is said in the first sentence?*

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“Salvation is no more than...” (6:1). What follows is hardly a “no more than”! It’s huge! What does the Course mean by salvation? It means being “reminded” that “this world is *not* your home; its laws are *not* imposed on you, its values and *not* yours, and nothing that you *think* you see in it is *really* there at all” (6:1). That is a momentous shift of consciousness (especially that last one about learning that nothing we think we see in the world is really there) but it is what forgiveness does for us. As you and I take our respective parts in God’s plan of forgiveness, we *see and understand* all of that (6:2)! When we start with our ego’s view of one another as opponents, as attackers, as sinners, that’s what we think we see. And when forgiveness dawns on our minds, we realize that none of that was ever really there! We made it all up! We made the illusion. By taking our part in *undoing* the illusion, we learn its unreality.

We always have that power: to make illusions, and to unmake them (6:3). We made our specialness. At the very instant that we made it, God gave us the means to transmute that specialness into something holy (6:4) — through forgiveness of others. My “special sin” became my “special grace” (6:5). My “special hate” became my “special love,” special love in a *good* sense (6:6).

Paragraph 7

7 The Holy Spirit needs your special function, that *His* may be fulfilled. ²Think not that you lack special value here. ³You wanted it, and it is given you. ⁴All that you made can serve salvation easily and well. ⁵The Son of God can make no choice the Holy Spirit cannot employ on his behalf, and not against himself. ⁶Only in darkness does your specialness appear to be attack. ⁷In light you see it is your special function in the plan to save the Son of God from all attack and let him understand that he is safe, as he has always been and must remain in time and in eternity alike. ⁸This is the function given each of you for one another. ⁹Take it gently, then, from one another's hand, and let salvation be perfectly fulfilled in both of you. ¹⁰Do this *one* thing, that *everything* be given you.

• Study Question •

8. *The overall goal is to “save the Son of God.” Your part is carried out with (at least) one individual. List what is said here about your special function in regard to this one person, putting the sentence in the first person and inserting their name. Think about actually making this your conscious goal in your relationship with them.*

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Having provided the means, the Holy Spirit now needs our cooperation to *use* the means, to carry out our “special function” so that *His* function may be fulfilled (7:1). He needs us, you and me, to practice forgiveness, over and over, with one person after another, both in our minds and extending out in visible acts of forgiveness. Never doubt that *you* have special value to God (7:2). You asked for it, you got it (7:3)! Everything that you have made in ignorance and error “can serve salvation easily and well” (7:4); nothing is beyond redemption! Every relationship you’ve screwed up, every stupid choice you ever made, can be used by God to bring you and others closer to Home (7:5). In that sense (and I think *only* in that sense) there are no mistakes. We do make mistakes, plenty of them, but God is so amazingly clever and powerful that He can transmute them all into stepping stones to salvation.

Looking at things through the dark lens of the ego, my specialness seems to be an attack on others and on my own true Identity, and I risk wallowing in guilt (7:6). But in the light given to me by the Holy Spirit, my very specialness is revealed to be my “*special function* in the plan to save the Son of God,” reminding others and yourself that you have *always* been safe (not condemned as a sinner), now and for all eternity (7:7).

What good news! We don’t have to be guilty about being special!

Just as the Holy Spirit uses our bodies to teach us we are not bodies, He uses our relationships to teach us our oneness.

What are you here for? *This* (7:8). “Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world” (W-62). Take it from your relationship partners, and give it to them; let salvation be for both of you (7:9).

If you do “this *one* thing,” *everything* will be given to you (7:10)!

Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). The CE wording sometimes differs from that of the FIP version. Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the FIP edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. Passages that lie outside the current section will continue to have footnoted references. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

Answer Key

1. No reply expected.
2. Your own experiences are most important here; there are no “correct” answers. Some ways I have experienced this avoidance of the light, as examples, are: 1) When a picture of my brother as sinless tries to emerge, I shut it out, afraid it will hurt me. 2) The idea of seeing no guilt in my brother seems so strange; I am more familiar with the way I have taught myself to see him over the years. 3) Seeing my brother as guilty seems easier than seeing his innocence. 4) I find myself avoiding my responsibility for the way I perceive him.
3. The wish to see.
4. No reply expected
5. The act of forgiving my brother—a particular person—, seeing him as my sinless savior, and returning him to his true function. In particular, I believe, it is speaking about forgiving my holy relationship partner, and recognizing that he or she is not other than myself, but that we are one, sharing the same sinless Self.
6. Yes, it is appropriate to focus special attention on one person, if the goal is complete forgiveness of that person. Although forgiveness is for all, our part within time is to do what is allotted to us, to transform just one special relationship into a holy relationship through the perfect act of forgiveness.
7. By taking my part in its (the world's) undoing; that is, by carrying out my special forgiveness function.
8. My special function is to save [name] from all attack, and let him (her) understand that he (she) is safe, as he (she) has always been, and will remain in time and in eternity alike.