

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 30

The New Beginning

Section VII

Forgiveness Is Always Justified

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition.

Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview of Section VII

You will recall that the previous section declared that in the real world, the only purpose of the world is seen to be forgiveness (T-30.V.1:1). In *this* world, by contrast, we think attack is the means for gaining understanding; in the real world, we recognize that attack leads nowhere. It then proceeded to paint a beautiful picture of the real world, free of fear, in which we see the face of Christ in one another. Now, in this section, the Course proceeds to show that attack, the foundation of the ego's world, is never justified, while forgiveness, the foundation of the real world, is *always* justified. We need to proceed carefully here and to make sure we understand just what "justified" means.

Paragraph 1

Anger is *never* justified. ²Attack has *no* foundation. ³It is here escape from fear begins, and will be made complete. ⁴Here is the real world given in exchange for dreams of terror, for it is on this forgiveness rests and is but natural. ⁵You are not asked to offer pardon where attack is due and would be justified. ⁶For this would mean that you forgive a sin by overlooking what is really there. ⁷*This is not pardon*, for it would assume that, by responding in a way which is not justified, your pardon will become the answer to attack which has been made. ⁸Thus is pardon made inappropriate, by being granted where it is not due.

• Study Questions •

1. (1:1-2). The four words in the first sentence are probably some of the most frequently quoted words in the Course, since they are such a clear

statement of the extreme position the Course takes about anger. Before you read the commentary below, think about what these first two sentences do and do not say.

- Do they say it is a sin to get angry?
 - Do they say you should feel guilty if you attack someone?
 - Do they recommend suppressing your anger or denying it?
 - What do they say?
 - What does the word, “justified,” mean?
2. *Where, quite recently, has the “real world” been mentioned?*

•

As I say in Question #1 above, Course students often quote the first four words of this section. Often, they misunderstand the meaning. They believe it is saying, “You should never get angry,” with the implied meaning that if you are feeling angry, you are somehow a bad person, or at the very least, a bad student of the Course. However, anger is not a sin. The Course teaches, “There is no sin” (T-26.VII.10:5 (FIP), T-26.VII.10:5 (CE); W-pI.101.5:4 and throughout that lesson). Anger is just a mistake and not a cause for guilt. The Course would never advise us to deny that we are angry or attempt to suppress our anger. Instead, it would have us look our anger in the face and acknowledge its presence, but then remind ourselves that anger cannot be justified no matter what we may think.

To say anger is never justified means that there is no *reason* for anger when we share perception with the Holy Spirit. It “has no foundation” (1:2); that is, we never have *grounds* for anger.

Jesus makes this a vital and crucial point in our understanding of Course-based forgiveness. He says that “escape from fear” begins and ends with this realization. He adds that this realization brings us “the real world...in exchange for dreams of terror.” Finally, he tells us that “forgiveness rests” on this assertion (1:3–4). He brings up everything that has come before in this chapter: crossing the border into the real world and escaping from dreams of fear into happy dreams of forgiveness. This one four-word statement, “Anger is never justified,” taken in and accepted, contains the whole package! If you really get this, you’ve got it all.

Let’s try to understand just why that is true.

“Anger is *never* justified” (1:1). Try to absorb that. No matter what may have happened or not happened, no matter what anyone said or did, or did not do, anger is *never* justified. The idea may seem unacceptable or impossible at first, but allow yourself to consider that it *may be right*. What if it were true? Could this be the mental vehicle to transport you into the real world?

How could the perception of anger as groundless bring escape from fear? To fully understand this, we need to probe a little deeper into *why* anger is groundless. Anger is without foundation because *no harm has been done*. “Nothing real can be threatened” (T-In.2:2) is a fundamental assertion of the Course. If nothing real can be threatened, it follows that nothing real can be harmed, and any appearance of harm has to be an

illusion. And if no harm has occurred, what cause is there for anger? Furthermore, if nothing real can be harmed, what cause is there for fear? Therefore, recognizing that anger has no foundation brings freedom from fear because we understand that our reality is invulnerable.

How could the perception of anger as unjustifiable transport us into the real world? Well, “The real world is the state of mind in which the only purpose of the world is seen to be forgiveness” (T-30.V.1:1 (FIP), T-30.VI.1:1 (CE)). When anger is gone, nothing is left but forgiveness. Idols, which we made either to protect us from punishment or to absorb our guilt, no longer hold any attraction.

How could the realization that anger is never justified be the foundation for forgiveness? That, at least, seems obvious: When we cannot justify anger towards a person, we already *have* forgiven them because we have recognized that there is nothing to forgive. At this point, “forgiveness... is but natural” (1:4).

The last half of the paragraph describes forgiveness as most of the world understands it and then directly refutes it. In effect, it says, “That ain’t it!” (“*This is not pardon*” (1:7).) In the view of the world, the wrong we perceive in a brother is quite real, his attack on us “*has been made*” (1:7), and attacking him for it is right and justifiable (1:5). Forgiveness, however (in the world’s view), asks us to overlook this “real” attack (1:6) and to abstain from attacking or punishing the person, which would be an entirely inappropriate and *unjustifiable* response—if his attack were real (1:7–8)!

That is *not* what the Course is teaching. It teaches (as the next paragraph says) that “Pardon is *always* justified” (2:1). The world says that attack is justified while forgiveness is not justified, but is a magnanimous gesture on the part of the forgiver. The Course says that attack is never justified, while forgiveness always is. The world says forgiveness has no foundation; the Course says *attack* has no foundation. They are diametrically opposed.

Practice Suggestion: *Think of a situation in which you recently felt angry or one in which you are currently feeling angry, and say to yourself, “My anger in this situation is not justified. There is no cause for anger here.” Pause for a few seconds to let your feelings arise in response, and then repeat the statements. Do this over and over for several minutes. You may find the exercise to be annoying. Do it anyway. Do not expect your anger to vanish immediately, and do not feel guilty if it does not. Just remind yourself that your anger is not justified.*

Paragraph 2

2 Pardon is *always* justified, and has a sure foundation. 3You do not forgive the unforgivable, nor overlook a real attack that calls for punishment. 3Salvation does not lie in being asked to make unnatural responses which are inappropriate to what is real. 4Instead, it merely asks that you respond appropriately to what is *not* real by not perceiving what has not occurred. 5If pardon were unjustified, you *would* be asked to sacrifice your rights when you return forgiveness for attack. 6But you are merely asked to see forgiveness as the natural reaction to distress which rests on error, and thus calls for help.¹ 7Forgiveness is the only sane response. 8It *keeps* your rights from being sacrificed.

• Study Question •

3. (2:4). Sort out the triple negative, and turn this as best you can into a positive statement.

•

Notice the apparent contrast of 2:1 with 1:1–2. Can you see that if one set of statements is true, the other must be true as well? If anger is never justified, then pardon must *always* be justified. If there is no foundation or grounds for attack, there must always be grounds for forgiveness.

Practice Suggestion: *Think of the same situation you used in the previous practice, but this time, say to yourself, “My forgiveness in this situation is completely justified. I have grounds for forgiveness.”*

By contrast with the typical view of forgiveness, “you do not forgive the unforgivable”; you do not “overlook a *real* attack that calls for punishment” (2:2). This is true because, of course, there *are* no such things as “the unforgivable” or “a real attack.”

I love the third sentence! When someone suggests forgiveness in some situation, haven’t you often felt that it would be an inappropriate and unnatural response to a heinous and inexcusable action? “How could I ever in good conscience forgive her for doing *that*?” Well, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that Jesus is *not* asking you to close your eyes to evil and let the wicked go unpunished. The bad news is that there *is* no evil and there *are* no wicked people—but that can hardly be *bad* news!

What salvation “merely asks” is that you stop basing your response on something that never happened (2:4). I admire the legitimate use of what may be a triple negative! We are to respond to “what is *not* real by *not* perceiving what has *not* occurred”! (I’ve added the emphasis on the 2nd and 3rd nots.) We respond by not perceiving mere illusions.

¹ The “distress which rests on error” is your brother’s distress (really, his guilt) over his error of attacking you.

That this distress “calls for help” means that it asks for your help to relieve it; it asks for your forgiveness to dispel it. The sentence, then, means this: Forgiveness is the natural reaction to the distress your brother feels about attacking you, distress which calls for your help to relieve it, which you do through your forgiveness.

What you see is not real: Respond appropriately! You are not sacrificing your rights when you forgive, as you *would* be doing if attack were real (2:5). But what you have seen is not attack; it is “distress that rests on error, and thus calls for help” (2:6). Isn’t that a great phrase? “*Distress that rests on error.*” When your co-worker stabs you in the back and lies to get the promotion that should have been yours: Is that attack or distress that rests on error? When the store you bought your appliances from refuses to honor their warranty: Attack? Or distress that rests on error? When the mugger accosts you, takes your money and valuables, and then beats you up: Attack? Or distress that rests on error? According to the Course, it is *all* “distress that rests on error, and thus calls for help.”²

This is similar to the discussion of the judgment of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 12:

There is but one interpretation of all motivation that makes any sense, and because it is the Holy Spirit’s judgment, it requires no effort at all on your part. Every loving thought is true. Everything else is an appeal for healing and help. That is what it is, regardless of the form it takes. Can anyone be justified in responding with anger to a plea for help? No response can be appropriate except the willingness to give it to him, for this and only this is what he is asking for. (T-12.1.3:1–6)

Jesus tells us that, “Forgiveness is the *only* sane response” (2:7). That little word “sane” adds another dimension to the discussion. It implies that responding with anger is *insane*. Even more, the word “only” makes it clear that any response *besides* forgiveness is insane! Of course, it is. To invert our triple-negative: If we respond with anything but forgiveness, we are responding *inappropriately* to what is not real by *perceiving* what has not occurred! Seeing things that are not there is just nuts.

Finally, Jesus points out that forgiveness “*keeps* [our] rights from being sacrificed” (2:8). This contrasts with his previous statement that we would be sacrificing our rights if

² 3 The major difficulty that you find in genuine forgiveness on your part is that you still believe you must forgive the truth and not illusions. You conceive of pardon as a vain attempt to look past what is there; to overlook the truth in an unfounded effort to deceive yourself by making an illusion true. This twisted viewpoint but reflects the hold that the idea of sin retains as yet upon your mind as you regard yourself.

4 Because you think your sins are real, you look on pardon as deception. For it is impossible to think of sin as true and not believe forgiveness is a lie. Thus is forgiveness really but a sin, like all the rest. It says the truth is false, and smiles on the corrupt as if they were as blameless as the grass, as white as snow. It is delusional in what it thinks it can accomplish. It would see as right the plainly wrong, the loathsome as the good.

5 Pardon is no escape in such a view. It merely is a further sign that sin is unforgivable—at best to be concealed, denied, or called another name, for pardon is a treachery to truth. Guilt cannot be forgiven. If you sin, your guilt is everlasting. Those who are forgiven from the view their sins are real are pitifully mocked and twice condemned: first by themselves for what they think they did, and once again by those who pardon them.

6 It is sin’s unreality which makes forgiveness natural and kind and sane; a deep relief to those who offer it; a quiet blessing where it is received. It does not countenance illusions, but collects them lightly, with a little laugh, and gently lays them at the feet of truth. And there they disappear entirely. (W-134.2:3-6:3 (CE)) (W-134.2:3-6:3 (CE))

we offered someone *unjustified* forgiveness (thus giving up our right to be angry and to punish the wrong-doer). How does forgiveness preserve our rights? In the fourth paragraph, we will see these words: “If you can see your brother *merits* pardon, you have learned forgiveness is *your* right as much as his” (4:7). I think that is the idea here. When we realize that our brother has a right to be forgiven, we are simultaneously recognizing and protecting *our* right to be forgiven.

Paragraph 3

3 This understanding is the only change that lets the real world rise to take the place of dreams of terror. ²Fear cannot arise unless attack is justified, and if it *had* a real foundation, pardon could have none. ³The real world is achieved when you perceive the basis of forgiveness is quite real and fully justified. ⁴While you regard it as a gift unwarranted, it must uphold the guilt you would “forgive.” ⁵Unjustified forgiveness is attack, and this is all the world can ever give. ⁶It pardons “sinners” sometimes, but remains aware that they have sinned, and so they do not merit the forgiveness that it gives.

• Study Question •

4. (3:1–3). We often ask, “How do I know when I have really forgiven someone?” What is one answer we might offer, based on these sentences?

•

(3:1–3). I anticipated a lot of what Jesus is saying here in my discussion of the first paragraph, where we looked at how “this understanding” (that anger is *never* justified) could allow us to escape from dreams of fear and transport us into the real world. We saw how the two pairs of statements are diametrically opposed so that if one pair is true, the other must be false: if attack had a real foundation, forgiveness would have none (3:2). Perceiving that forgiveness is always justified is the passport into the real world (3:3).

As long as we view forgiveness as an unwarranted gift offered to a sinner, our thinking *upholds* the concept of guilt (3:4). The next statement is startling: “Unjustified forgiveness *is* attack” (3:5). Unjustified forgiveness is false forgiveness. When we practice “unjustified forgiveness,” we are *reinforcing* a person’s guilt rather than relieving it. The *Song of Prayer* pamphlet calls this “forgiveness-to-destroy.” It says:

“Forgiveness-to-destroy has many forms, being a weapon of the world of form. Not all of them are obvious, and some are carefully concealed beneath what seems like charity. Yet all the forms that it may seem to take have but this single goal; their purpose is to separate and make what God created equal, different.” (S-2.II.1:1-3)

It goes on to point out several forms: self-righteous *noblesse oblige* in which the supposedly better, spiritual person deigns to sacrifice his right to be angry; the “I’m a sinner just like you” kind of forgiveness; and the silent suffering of the “noble martyr.” In every one of these, the presumed sinner’s sin is left intact, and the anger of the one

forgiving remains justifiable if it ever resurfaces. All forms of false forgiveness aim to kill, not to heal:

“All forms forgiveness takes that do not lead away from anger, condemnation and comparisons of every kind are death. For that is what their purposes have set.” (S-2.II.8:1–2)

Think about times when you were “forgiven” by someone in a way such as this. Didn’t it leave you feeling guilty, nonetheless? Didn’t you feel somehow judged and condemned, somehow viewed as less than the person or persons who were “forgiving” you? This kind of “forgiveness” is the best the world can do (3:5). Even though an accuser lets you off the hook as far as punishment goes, you know you are still viewed as a guilty sinner, and you know that in their eyes, you don’t deserve the forgiveness (3:6). Sometimes, the ones forgiving you make sure you know very clearly that you don’t deserve it! The phrase seems quite common in my memory: “You don’t deserve this, but I’m going to let it go this time. But don’t do it again!” Can you see how this kind of forgiveness is still a veiled attack?

Paragraph 4

4 This is the false forgiveness which the world employs to keep the sense of sin alive. ²And recognizing God is just, it seems impossible His pardon could be real. ³Thus is the fear of God the sure result of seeing pardon as unmerited. ⁴No one who sees himself as guilty can avoid the fear of God. ⁵But he is saved from this dilemma if he can forgive. ⁶The mind must think of its Creator as it looks upon itself. ⁷If you can see your brother merits pardon, you have learned forgiveness is your right as much as his. ⁸Nor will you think that God intends for you a fearful judgment which your brother does not merit, for it is the truth that you can merit neither more nor less than he.

• Study Question •

5. *Ask yourself honestly how your relationship with God is affected when you hold on to a grievance against someone, Can you feel close to God while you are locked into judging a brother?*

•

The word “this” (4:1) refers, of course, to “unjustified forgiveness” from the previous section. The world’s purpose in employing this kind of forgiveness is “to *keep* the sense of sin alive” (4:1). And it sure does *that*, doesn’t it? With our sense of sin very much alive, we can’t begin to imagine that God could somehow forgive us. Most of us are sure that if God is “just,” He *has to* punish sin. And so we inevitably end up being afraid of God, consciously or unconsciously (4:2–4).

This tendency to fear God is a “dilemma” (4:5) that even the Apostle Paul recognized when he wrote in the Epistle to the Romans that God is “both just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26, KJV). Paul found his solution to the dilemma by

viewing the death of Jesus as a sacrifice. Paul believed that in his crucifixion, Jesus took the punishment for sin in our place. Thus God was somehow “just” because He punished our sin, and at the same time, was able to “justify” us (that is, to show us as just or innocent). It was an awkward solution, to say the least. For many people, accepting this theology of atonement by substitution left them feeling guiltier than ever because God punished the innocent Jesus in their place. Songs and hymns were written about the feeling of guilt, for instance: “Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, should’st die for me?” (Charles Wesley). Or:

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesu, hath undone Thee;
’Twas I, Lord Jesu, I it was denied Thee:
I crucified Thee.” (Johann Heermann, 1585-1647)*

At the entrance to a Catholic monastery in the Eastern USA, there is a statue of Jesus on the cross. The legend on the statue reads something to this effect: “This is what I have done for you. What have you done for me?” How can anyone *not* continue to feel guilty, given input like that?

Even in the very next chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul makes it clear that God’s forgiveness is “unjustified forgiveness.” He says: “Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:4–5). In other words, we are still “the ungodly,” and being called righteous is not “what is due” to us; it is “a favor” granted by God. This view is still, in the eyes of the Course, false forgiveness.

I hasten to point out that many people who hold these beliefs *do* experience freedom from guilt, despite the odds against it. Somehow, they can believe that the death of Jesus has magically removed their guilt from them. And the real core of New Testament teaching remains the forgiveness of sins: “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38).

To me, the Course’s version of forgiveness, though, seems a much “cleaner” presentation of it. Instead of making sin real and then resorting to some miraculous, mysterious divine judicial transaction to resolve sin’s guilt, the Course simply proclaims that there *is* no sin. Therefore, “Guilt is always totally insane, and has no reason” (T-13.X.6:3 (FIP), T-13.XI.6:3 (CE)).

The “dilemma” referred to in 4:5 is: How can God be both loving and just? If I have sinned, I have to be punished. To refrain from punishment would not be just. If I can *truly* forgive my brother, recognizing that he is *not* guilty, and has done nothing to merit punishment, *then* I can understand how God can forgive *me* (4:5). “If you can see your brother *merits* pardon, you have learned forgiveness is *your* right as much as his” (4:7). The transfer from ourselves to God is automatic; that is how the mind *must* work (4:6). As long as I remain incapable of forgiving my brother, I will believe God is incapable of

forgiving *me*. Once I allow God's forgiving Love to flow through me to my brother, I will realize that I deserve forgiveness just as much as he does (4:8–9).

Paragraph 5

5 Forgiveness recognized as merited will heal. ²It gives the miracle its strength to overlook illusions. ³This is how you learn that you must be forgiven too. ⁴There can be no appearance that *cannot* be overlooked. ⁵For if there were, it would be necessary first there be some sin which stands beyond forgiveness. ⁶There would be an error that is *more* than a mistake; a special form of error which remains unchangeable, eternal, and beyond correction or escape. ⁷There would be one mistake which had the power to undo creation, and to make a world which could replace it and destroy the will of God. ⁸Only if this were possible could there be some appearances which could withstand the miracle and not be healed by it.

• Study Question •

6. (5:5-8). *Jesus ties our ability to overlook appearances to our willingness to forgive. How does he make that connection?*

•

Forgiveness now leads to *healing*; but only if it is *merited* forgiveness (5:1). Seeing someone as innocent, as guiltless, enables us to bring healing to them. The healing may be of physical disease, emotional disorder, or material lack—indeed, any “illusion” or “appearance” of imperfection. Forgiveness empowers the miracle to overlook illusions (5:2). After all, when we forgive, we *are* overlooking the illusion of someone's sin and guilt.

I think it is important here to distinguish between two possible meanings of the word “overlook,” and identify which meaning I think the Course attaches to it. The typical definition of *overlook* is “to fail or pretend not to notice something.” When the Course speaks of overlooking illusions, it surely cannot be using the word with that meaning! It isn't asking us *to pretend* to overlook our brother's sins or *fail to notice* that he is sick. The Course's sense of overlooking is not a failure or a pretense; it is something quite deliberate.

Furthermore, as it does here, the Course almost always uses the term to refer to overlooking or ignoring something *unreal*: an appearance, an illusion, an error, a mistake. It talks about overlooking “nothingness” (T-10.IV.2:4 (FIP), T-10.IV.1:5 (CE)) and “what is not there” (T-26.VII.10:1). We are looking *past* the nothingness. That is precisely what *forgiveness* does regarding sin and guilt. It *ignores the appearance* of guilt and recognizes that the guilt is not real. We can then use the same mental ability to overlook the appearance of sickness or poverty, thus bringing healing to those around us. In forgiving, we have learned how to overlook this way, to recognize what we *seem* to see as unreal, and now we can apply this skill in a more general way.

The two acts of overlooking are tied even more closely together. For an appearance that cannot be overlooked to exist, Jesus says, there must be an error that cannot be forgiven (5:4–5). What kind of error would that be? It would have to be a *real* error with real effects, something that could, in actual fact, oppose the Will of God and win (5:6–7). Once again, the Introduction to the Text can sum it up: “Nothing unreal exists” (T-In.2:3). Only what God creates is real, and God does not create sickness and lack. If we see the appearance of sickness and lack, it *cannot* be real, and therefore *must* be subject to being overlooked and healed. *No appearance* can withstand a miracle (5:8)!

Paragraph 6

6 There is no surer proof idolatry is what you wish than a belief there are some forms of sickness and of joylessness forgiveness cannot cure. ²This means that you prefer to keep some idols, and are not prepared as yet to let all idols go. ³And thus you think that some appearances are real, and not appearances at all. ⁴Be not deceived about the meaning of a fixed belief that some appearances are harder to look past than others are. ⁵It always means you think forgiveness must be limited, and you have set a goal of partial pardon and a limited escape from guilt for you. ⁶What can this be except a false forgiveness of yourself, and everyone who seems apart from you?

• Study Question •

7. *If you think your happiness is tied to a form (an idol), how will you react to someone who threatens that form in some way? Will you find his or her action forgivable? If you were willing to let go of all idols, how would that change your belief about what forms can or cannot be forgiven and healed?*

•

As we have seen previously, an idol is some form you believe will bring you happiness (T-30.III.1:4–5). Jesus has talked about how we pass from dreams of idols to dreams of forgiveness (T-30.III); here, he clarifies the connection between belief in idols and unforgiveness. He begins by underlining that the connection between the two is tight. He says that our belief that “there are some forms of sickness and joylessness forgiveness *cannot* heal” *proves* that we want idols (6:1). A belief that *some* things are unforgivable proves that we want “to keep *some* idols” (6:2). The connection seems relatively straightforward: If we hold on to a particular idol, believing that it is essential to our happiness, then anything that threatens that idol would seem to us to be an unforgivable sin.

It may be challenging to uncover the exact connection between a particular form of “sickness” or “joylessness” that we believe cannot be healed by forgiveness and the idol we are clinging to that undergirds that belief. Understanding all the spiritual linkages seems to me a bit like thoroughly understanding a foreign language’s grammar. There are very clearly defined patterns and rules that govern language; likewise, there are very

definite laws that govern healing and forgiveness. Often, we have to take the existence of such governing rules on faith as we begin to recognize them. Jesus is telling us that there is a direct connection between “a fixed belief that *some* appearances are harder to look past than others are” (6:4) and a belief “that forgiveness must be limited” (6:5). One *always* implies the other. Sometimes we find ourselves doubting that some appearance of sickness or joylessness can be healed or overlooked (recognized as unreal). When that occurs, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us discern what idol we are holding on to and recognize how we are trying to limit forgiveness. What error do we think we cannot overlook?

Notice that the limitations you place on forgiveness always affect *you* and your experience of being forgiven (6:6–7 (FIP), 6:5–6 (CE)). Partial forgiveness is false forgiveness, and if you limit forgiveness anywhere, you limit your own forgiveness.

Practice Suggestion: (6:4-7). *Try to list a few things you believe are harder to look past than others. Think about what this tells you about the limits you are placing on forgiveness.*

Paragraph 7

7 It must be true the miracle can heal all forms of sickness, or it cannot heal. ²Its purpose cannot be to judge which forms are real and which appearances are true. ³If one appearance must remain apart from healing, one illusion must be part of truth. ⁴And you could not escape all guilt, but only some of it. ⁵You must forgive God’s Son entirely, or you will keep an image of yourself that is not whole, and will remain afraid to look within and find escape from every idol there. ⁶Salvation rests on faith there cannot be some forms of guilt which you cannot forgive, and so there cannot be appearances which have replaced the truth about God’s Son.

• Study Question •

8. (7:5). *Who is “God’s Son” that must be forgiven, and whose truth cannot be replaced by appearances?*

•

If some illusion is part of truth (some sickness is real and cannot be healed, or some loss is real and cannot be overlooked), it implies that some guilt must be real (7:3–4) and there must be some sin that cannot be forgiven. Either the miracle heals *everything* or it heals *nothing* (7:1). Either forgiveness is *total* or it is *nothing* (7:5). We cannot be expected to go around trying to figure out which appearances are real and which are not (7:2). *No* form is real; *no* appearance is real. *All of them* can be healed, forgiven, and overlooked.

Anything less, and you will never discover your True Identity. You will always hold on to a false image of yourself, a guilty self-image that keeps you afraid of looking within and discovering your true nature (7:5–6 (FIP), 7:5 (CE)). No guilt is beyond forgiveness;

no appearance can replace the truth about you. Faith in those facts is the entire basis of salvation as the Course defines it (7:7–8, 7:6 (CE)).

Practice Suggestion: *Do you believe there are some forms of guilt you cannot forgive? Ask yourself honestly. Look at any lingering judgments you may have about people you know, and realize that these pockets of unforgiveness are what are keeping you from looking within and finding your own completion.*

Paragraph 8

8 Look on your brother with the willingness to see him as he is. ²And do not keep a part of him outside your willingness that he be healed. ³To heal is to make whole, and what is whole can have no missing parts that have been kept outside. ⁴Forgiveness rests on recognizing this and being glad there cannot be some forms of sickness which the miracle must lack the power to heal. ⁵God's Son is perfect, or he cannot be God's Son. ⁶Nor will you know him if you think he does not merit the escape from guilt in *all* its forms and *all* its consequence. ⁷There is no way to think of him but this, if you would know the truth about yourself:

⁸*I thank you, Father, for your perfect Son,
and in his glory will I see my own.*³

• Study Question •

9. Find the other occurrence of the words, “forgiveness rests,” in this section. What does forgiveness rest on? (See also *W-pII.359.1:7.*)

•

Are you honestly willing to look at your brothers and sisters and to see them as they are? Elsewhere, the Course instructs us:

“Be willing, then, to see your brother sinless.” (T-20.VIII.3:3)

“Your question should not be, ‘How can I see my brother without the body?’
Ask only, ‘Do I really wish to see him sinless?’” (T-20.VII.9:1-2)

That is what seeing them as they really are means: seeing them as sinless. We may wonder *how* we can do this, but that isn't the issue. The Course just asks us to be *willing* to see them sinless (8:1). If we are willing, the Holy Spirit will help us to see them that way. And by the way: Sinless means one hundred percent without sin. You can't forgive them for everything except one thing that you consider unforgivable (8:2). If you are

³ Matthew 11:25 (RSV): “At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes.’” In this prayer in Matthew, God is thanked for revealing the punishment that will rain down on the cities who refused to repent despite witnessing Jesus' miracles. In the prayer above, God is thanked for revealing the perfect divinity that resides in a brother despite his apparent sins.

going to bring healing to your brother or sister, you will be making them whole, which means nothing can be left out (8:3–4 (FIP), 8:3 (CE)). That's what makes forgiveness *forgiveness*: If you don't forgive everything, you haven't truly forgiven (8:5 (FIP), 8:4 (CE)). You have to forgive everything and, what's more, you must be *glad* to include everything in that forgiveness! Think about it: If you forgive reluctantly, are you actually forgiving? Or are you practicing a form of false forgiveness, being a martyr, subconsciously thinking, "Okay, I'll let them off the hook, but I know that they are still guilty"?

If the miracle can't heal every sickness, then possibly I may never be healed; I may never be completely forgiven. If I cannot forgive my brother entirely, I cannot believe that God has entirely forgiven me.

I just love the logic of 8:5! How could God's Son *not* be perfect? So if I retain even one scrap of guilt in the picture I hold of my sister, I cannot truly *know* her (8:6). She is perfect, and if I see her any differently, I am not seeing her at all. She is not only free of all consequences of guilt, she *deserves* to be free of them! And as I said above, if I want to know the truth about myself, I must see her as meriting total freedom from all the forms and all the consequences of guilt. That is the truth about her *and about me*, but I won't know that if I continue to hold a grievance against her (8:7).

The statement in 8:8 is one we can, and should, personalize and repeat often about the various people in our lives. "I thank You, Father, for Your perfect Son, Scott, and in Scott's glory will I see my own." "I thank You, Father, for Your perfect daughter, Susan, and in Susan's glory will I see my own."

Practice Suggestion: (8:1-2). *Select some person you have some judgment about, or who seems, to you, to be beyond healing, and apply these two sentences. Make them into affirmations: "I look on [name] now with a willingness to see him [or her] as he [or she] is. I will keep no part of him [or her] outside my willingness that he [or she] be healed." Repeat this several times, pausing between repetitions to let it sink in and trying to mean every word.*

Paragraph 9

9 Here is the joyful statement that there are no forms of evil which can overcome the will of God; the glad acknowledgment that guilt has not succeeded, by your wish, to make illusions real. ²And what is this except a simple statement of the truth? ³Look on your brother with this hope in you, and you will understand he could not make an error that could change the truth in him. ⁴It is not difficult to overlook mistakes that have been given no effects. ⁵But what you see as having power to make an idol of the Son of God you will not pardon, for he has become to you a graven image⁴ and a sign of death. ⁶Is *this* your savior? ⁷Is his Father wrong about His Son? ⁸Or have you been deceived in him who has been given you to heal for your salvation and deliverance?⁵

• Study Question •

10. (9:1–2). Make a note (at least mental) of the significance attributed here to being willing to see your brother sinless. There are three meanings attached here to that willingness; list them.
11. What is meant by “this hope” in 10:1? It must refer to something in the preceding paragraph, but what?

•

When I see this and believe it, I will know with a deep conviction that “there are *no* forms of evil that can overcome the Will of God” and “guilt has *not* succeeded by [my] wish to make illusions real” (9:1). By contrast, if I continue to see my brother or sister as sinful and guilty, I am giving in to the belief that evil *can* overcome God’s Will and that my wish to make illusions real has succeeded in making guilt real. Instead of asserting this lie, let me assert the simple truth (9:2). If I am *willing* to see the people around me in this way, *I will* see them that way eventually. It may take many repetitions of these thoughts over a long period. After all, I have expended a lot of effort over many years in building my conviction about others’ guilt; it will take some time to undo all that. But if I am willing, it can be undone.

If this “simple statement of the truth” can be relied on (that no form of evil can overcome God’s Will), then it *must* be true that my brother cannot possibly “make an error that could change the truth in him” (9:3). It was a form of this simple logic that shifted my thinking from traditional Christian theology to seeing things as the Course

⁴ Exodus 20:4 (KJV): “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” In the above passage, your brother’s sins have apparently turned him into an idol, “a graven image and a sign of death.” However, as the paragraph goes on to explain, you have merely been deceived about the savior that God has sent you.

⁵ Salvation and deliverance are sometimes paired in the biblical books of Psalms and Isaiah. See, for example, Isaiah 46:13 (RSV): “I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry.”

sees them. If God is *God*, nothing can overcome His Will. If there were a power greater than God's then *that power* would be God, by definition. So God's Will must be immutable and irresistible.

God created us; He willed us into being. Since His Will is immutable, it is simply not possible for you, or me, or anyone, to change the truth of what we are. We remain as God created us. If that is *not* so, then our power (or the devil's) must be greater than God's Will! Since that is impossible, changing ourselves from God's creation is impossible. And so it is with my brother.

Now, there is no question that your brother has made mistakes, as have you. But the mistakes have not changed him, and your mistakes have not changed you. The mistakes have, therefore, *had no effects!* Jesus points out that overlooking mistakes that have no effects "is *not* difficult" (9:4). To see that mistakes have no effects, it is crucial to understand that nothing we do can change what we are. If such change were possible, our mistakes would have real effects, and forgiveness would be impossible. If we see something our brother said or did as making him less than perfect (thus making an idol of the Son of God), we will *not* forgive him (9:5). That's what it means to make an idol of our brother. Attribute guilt to him, and you've made him "a graven image and a sign of death" (9:5). If you see him like that, he cannot be your savior (9:6). If he, or she, is a sinner, then God must be wrong about His Son (9:7). How likely is *that*?

Isn't it far more likely that *you* have "been deceived in him" (which I think, in this case, means "been deceived *about* him")? God has given us our brothers and sisters so that we may heal them, thereby bringing about our own salvation and deliverance (9:8). But as long as we continue to project guilt onto them, our salvation and deliverance are blocked.

Practice Suggestion: *Think of the troublesome people in your life, one by one, and tell yourself: "This is my brother [sister], given me to heal, for my salvation and deliverance."*

Answer Key

1. No, these lines do not say that anger is a sin or that you should feel guilty if you attack. They do not support denying or suppressing anger. They do not even imply, “Don’t get angry.” What they do say is that anger is not *justified*. “Justified” means merited by the circumstances, appropriate, or supported by reason.
2. In the previous section, T-30.V, the real world is mentioned in 1:1; 4:3; 5:1–2; 6:1; 7:1.
3. Salvation asks that you respond appropriately to illusions and dreams by being unaffected by them, seeing only that which is really there.
4. You know you have forgiven someone when you see that their forgiveness is merited and justified; when you believe they *deserve* to be forgiven.
5. Only you can answer this for yourself.
6. He says that in order for an appearance to exist that we cannot overlook (or something we cannot heal), there must be an error that cannot be forgiven, something that would actually overthrow the Will of God. If there is some *effect* that cannot be healed or some loss that cannot be undone, then there must be a very real *sin* that caused such loss. If there is no such thing as an unforgivable, uncorrectable sin, then there cannot be an appearance we cannot overlook.
7. You would be angry with someone who threatened the form you think is essential to your happiness. If he or she hurt that thing, such an action would seem unforgivable. If, on the other hand, you let go of all idols, nothing anyone did would seem unforgivable because you would not believe your happiness or salvation depended on it. You could let it go.
8. God’s Son is my brother or sister; how I see them is how I see myself.
9. T-30.VI.1:5. Forgiveness rests on recognizing or understanding that: 1) Anger is never justified and attack has no foundation; 2) nothing can be excluded from healing; and 3) sin is impossible. These are all really saying the same thing in different ways, that is, there is nothing that can separate us from God and His Love, nothing that merits separation and punishment.
10. My willingness to see my brother without any sin, perfect, is a statement that says: 1) no form of evil can overcome the Will of God; 2) guilt has not succeeded, by my wish, to make illusions real; and 3) to declare our perfection is a simple statement of the truth.
11. 9:5. “This hope” must refer to “the joyful statement that there are no forms of evil that can overcome the Will of God.”

Legend:

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

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

Effects of Switching Editions of the Course

The commentaries on Chapters 29, 30, and 31 were written prior to the publication of the Complete and Annotated Edition (CE) of the Course in 2017. Originally they were based on the edition published by the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP). The references to other parts of the Course were based on the FIP edition, and the comments themselves were based on the same edition. There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and these final chapters had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate CE reference if it differs from the FIP reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE restored the plural use of “you” where the FIP had substituted the phrase “you and your brother.” One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

FIP: Thus you and your brother but shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point you both agreed to keep intact.

CE: You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.