

Commentary

ACIM[®] Text (CE)

The Real Meaning of the Last Judgment (T-2.XIII)

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

This section discusses the concept of the Last Judgment and emphasizes that judgment is not an essential attribute of God but was brought into being because of the separation. It highlights that the Last Judgment is a process of right evaluation where all minds must come to understand what is worthy and what is not. It focuses on the restoration of right-mindedness rather than punishment and the importance of freeing oneself from fear to bring peace to the minds of others. The term “Last Judgment” is reframed as a doorway to life rather than an association with death. It emphasizes the idea of retaining in one's real memory only what is good and lovable, leading to the absence of fear.

Paragraph 1

We have said that whatever you make or create is real in your own eyes, but not necessarily in the sight of God.¹ ²This basic distinction leads us directly into the real meaning of the Last Judgment.

Building on the idea presented earlier, that everything we make or create is real in our own eyes but only our *creations* are also real to God, Jesus declares that this “leads us directly into the real meaning of the Last Judgment” (1:1–2). Of course, what we *make* or *miscreate* is not real at all; we only think it is and believe it is. At the risk of giving away what's coming in this section: That's the whole point of the Last Judgment—letting go of all our illusions and recognizing that only what God creates or what we create *with God* is real.

¹ See T-2.XI.22:5.

Paragraph 2

² The Final Judgment is one of the greatest threat concepts in humanity's perception. ²This is only because you do not understand it. ³Judgment is not an essential attribute of God. ⁴You brought judgment into being only because of the separation. ⁵God Himself is still the God of mercy. ⁶After the separation, however, there was a place for justice in the schema, because it was one of the many learning devices which had to be built into the overall plan.

The traditional understanding of the Last Judgment is terrifying (2:1). It is understood to mean that God is going to judge the world, each of us individually, admitting only the pure and holy into Heaven and banishing the bulk of humanity into the eternal fires of Hell. In some views, individuals are admitted to Heaven or sent to Hell as soon as they die. In others, we all “fall asleep: when we die, only to be resurrected at the end of time and then judged. Many people who believe in life after physical death live in fear of hell.

The notion of the Last Judgment is terrifying only because we don't understand it (2:2). Contrary to popular belief, “judgment is not an essential attribute of God” (2:3). God does not judge, because judgment always involves both acceptance and rejection, and God accepts His Son completely. The only reason judgment exists for us as a sorting out of good from bad is because we believe in the separation (2:4). If there is nothing to separate from there is no judgment possible. God is and always will be the God of mercy.

Because of our belief in separation, however, judgment has a place in God's plan of salvation. It is a learning device, and a temporary one at that. There will be a *last* judgment, which will be our last rejection of any ego thought.

Paragraph 3

³ Just as the separation occurred over many millions of years, the Last Judgment will extend over a similarly long period, and perhaps even longer. ²Its length depends, however, on the effectiveness of the present speed-up.² ³We have frequently noted that the miracle is a device for shortening but not abolishing time.³ ⁴If a sufficient number of people become truly miracle-minded quickly, the shortening process can be almost immeasurable. ⁵But it is essential that these individuals free themselves from fear sooner than would ordinarily be the case, because they must emerge from the basic conflict if they are to bring peace to the minds of others.

² This is another reference to the “celestial speed-up” (see T-1.48.6:1-2), in which certain people are being called into physical incarnation to help counteract the world going backward spiritually.

³ T-1.47.4:1-4: “We said before that the miracle abolishes time. It does this by a process of collapsing it. It thus abolishes certain intervals within it. It does this, however, *within* the larger temporal sequence.” See also T-1.48.6:2 and T-2.V.7:1.

It's necessary for us to realize that the separation has been going on for millions of years, and that judgment, as the process of sorting out the true from the false, will consume an equal amount of time "and perhaps even longer" (3:1). As I've said before, we need not allow this to discourage us. We can shorten the time if we dedicate ourselves to miracle-working (3:2), offering love in every situation we can. We need to remember that time is under Jesus's control, and that every miracle can shorten the time of recovery immeasurably (3:3). The only reasonable reaction to learning of the immense span of time it takes to restore the Sonship is to become the channels for as many miracles as we can. The more of us who become "truly miracle-minded quickly," the less time it will take (3:4).

What does it take to become truly miracle-minded? It takes each of us freeing ourselves from fear "sooner than would be ordinarily the case" (3:5). In other words, we must "emerge from the basic conflict" (the conflict between fear and love that has been the topic of the preceding several sections), which will bring peace to *our* minds, and that, in turn, will enable us "to bring peace to the minds of others" (3:5).

I believe that Jesus addresses the topic of the Last Judgment and demonstrates its connection to the preceding discussion to emphasize the significance of actively and consistently monitoring our thoughts and distinguishing between truth and falsehood. It not only brings peace to us, it also enables us to bring peace to other minds, thus contributing to "the celestial speed-up" the Course was intended to instigate.

Paragraph 4

4 The Last Judgment is generally thought of as a procedure undertaken by God. ²Actually, it will be undertaken solely by the Sonship with my help. ³It is a final healing rather than a meting out of punishment, however much you may think punishment is deserved. ⁴Punishment as a concept is in total opposition to right-mindedness. ⁵The aim of the Final Judgment is to restore right-mindedness to you.

We can see now that the Last judgment is not something *God* does; it is something *we* do with the help of Jesus (4:1–2). Rather than meting out punishment, the Last Judgment is a final healing process. We may think that we, and perhaps others more than ourselves, *deserve* punishment, but that in itself is one of the fundamental thoughts that need healing! "Punishment as a concept is in total opposition to right-mindedness" (4:3–4). In order to restore us to right-mindedness, the Last Judgment must purge thoughts of punishment from our minds (4:5).

Paragraph 5

5 The Final Judgment might be called a process of right evaluation. ²It simply means that finally all minds must come to understand what is worthy and what is not. ³After this, their ability to choose can be reasonably directed. ⁴Unless this distinction has been made, the vacillations between free and imprisoned will cannot but continue.

In this final judgment, what's going on is learning to evaluate correctly (5:1). We are learning not to value what is valueless, as Workbook Lesson 133 attempts to teach us⁴ (5:2). Notice how clear guidance about our choices depends on *first* coming to understand what's worthy and what isn't (5:3). Perhaps some of the difficulty we have in "hearing" guidance about our choices is due to the fact that our minds have not yet been sufficiently cleansed of valuing the valueless! We need to "clear the field," so to speak, of valueless things so that we can be "reasonably directed" to make the appropriate choice. If we have not yet made a clear distinction between valuable and valueless options, "the vacillations between free and imprisoned will cannot but continue" (5:4).

Wow! This mental sorting out process is sounding more and more important!

Paragraph 6

6 The first step toward freedom, then, must entail a sorting out of the false from the true. ²This is a process of division only in the constructive sense, and reflects the true meaning of the Apocalypse.⁵ ³Everyone will ultimately look upon what he has made and will to preserve only what is good, just as God Himself once looked upon what He had created and knew that it *was* good.⁶ ⁴At this point, the mind will begin to look with love on what it has made, because of its great worthiness. ⁵The mind will inevitably disown its miscreations, and having withdrawn belief from them, they will no longer exist.

It seems, then, that this mental sorting out is "the first step toward freedom" (6:1). In all that discussion about resolving the basic conflict between love and fear, the primacy of such sorting out wasn't quite so clear. Now that I realize this has to be the first step toward freedom, it makes me want to go back and read over those preceding sections.

Yes, we are talking about a kind of division here that may seem like an aspect of separation, but it is division "only in a constructive sense" (6:2). I'm not sure I wholly agree with Robert's footnote about "the Apocalypse." That term is really a generic one; there are multiple early Christian documents titled "Apocalypse." The Apocalypse of John is only one among many. I do agree that the biblical Revelation's picture of God's evaluation of people can be interpreted as symbolic of us evaluating our thoughts and acts, discarding the false and preserving only the good, but I think the meaning here is using the term "Apocalypse" as a shorthand for "Last Judgment." The real meaning of

⁴ I suggest reading over Lesson 133 and even taking a day or more to practice with its instructions in order to gain a clearer notion of what "right evaluation" looks like.

⁵ This refers to the book of Revelation, also called the Apocalypse of John. In other words, its process of *God* evaluating *people*, throwing those who don't measure up into the lake of fire and preserving only the elect (Revelation 20:12-15), is really one of *us* evaluating our *thoughts* and *acts*, throwing our miscreations away and preserving only the good.

⁶ Genesis 1:31 (RSV): "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

the whole concept of a last judgment is an internal sorting out of the false from the true. Each of us will ultimately look on all our thoughts and acts and *will* to retain only the good (6:3). Once we've done that, our minds "will begin to look with love on what [they have] made, because of its great worthiness" (6:4). We will have forgiven ourselves for all our mistakes, and will lovingly embrace all our acts of love. We will disown all of our miscreations and cease believing in them, with the result that they will no longer exist (6:5). This is the purpose of this sorting out.

Paragraph 7

7 The term "Last Judgment" is frightening, not only because it has been falsely projected onto God, but also because of the association of "Last" with death. ²This is an outstanding example of upside-down perception. ³Actually, if the Last Judgment is examined objectively, it is quite apparent that it is really the doorway to life. ⁴No one who lives in fear is really alive.

One other fearful aspect of the phrase "Last Judgment," besides our belief that it means God will punish us, is the very word "last." We associate that word with death, and think of this as something that occurs at or after death (7:1). We can understand now that, rather than being about death, this kind of judgment is "the doorway to life." By freeing us from fear, this sorting out process enables us to be *truly* alive (7:2–4)!

Paragraph 8

8 Your own final judgment cannot be directed toward yourself, because you are not your own creation. ²You can apply it meaningfully and at any time, however, to everything you have ever made, and retain in your real memory only what is good. ³This is what your own right-mindedness cannot but dictate. ⁴The purpose of time is solely to "give you time" to achieve this judgment. ⁵It is your own perfect judgment of what you have made. ⁶When everything that you retain is lovable, there is no reason for any fear to remain in you. ⁷This is your part in the Atonement.

A creator is qualified to judge only their own creations. Accordingly, we cannot judge *ourselves*, because God is our Creator (8:1). At any time, however, we *can* meaningfully judge everything we have created or made. We can choose to "retrain in [our] real memory only what is good" (8:2). Don't move too quickly by that last phrase! Let me isolate the thought that strikes me here: *We have the ability to retain only our loving works in our real memory.* We are able to *forget* any of our miscreations. Any lingering memory of our misdeeds will be a *false* memory, not a *real* memory.

The incredible power of God's forgiveness to wash away all memory of "sin" arises in the Bible late in the Hebrew Scriptures, with powerful imagery:

"As far as east is from west, so far from us has he put away our offenses."

(Psalm 103:12 REB)

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

(Isaiah 43:25 NIV11)

“Once more you will show us compassion and wash away our guilt, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

(Micah 7:19 REB)

Imagine what it would be like to have a mind completely cleaned of every thought of guilt, and retaining only memories of your every loving thought or action. It gives new meaning to the idea of perfect peace, doesn't it? Well, “This is what your own right-mindedness cannot but dictate” (8:3). This is where the truth of our nature will lead us, every one of us. Why does time seem to linger so long? Only to give us time to achieve this mental judgment (8:5)!

When your mind is filled only with memories of loving thoughts and actions, fear will have no foothold in you (8:6). Doing the work that we must do to achieve such a state is the part we play in implementing the Atonement (8:7). The more your mind is free of guilt and fear, the more impact it will have on the world around you. Your mind will communicate its joy and peace to the minds of everyone you meet or even think of, and to whatever degree they are open to it, they will echo and return the message. This is what the Course means when it tells us we are among the ministers of God (see Lesson 154).

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 Foundation for Inner Peace (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. 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 Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* 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. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate FIP reference if it differs from the CE 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 Text 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.