

# Commentary

## ACIM® Clarification of Terms

### 2. *Forgiveness—the Face of Christ*

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

If you are using the FIP edition of the Course, please be aware that the chapter numbering and some paragraphing has changed in the CE edition. Chapter 2 has been moved to the end, becoming Chapter 6. Chapters 3 to 6 in FIP have become Chapters 2 to 5 in the CE.

In CE Chapter 2, the breaks between paragraphs 4 to 8 (in FIP) have been altered in the CE, which has reformed them into three paragraphs numbered 4 to 6. There is little change in the actual words, however.

You may have noticed that five of the six chapters in the *Clarification of Terms* deal with not one but two terms. This should be a clue that Jesus sees these two terms as somehow related. As we saw in the previous section, the terms “mind” and “spirit” are both covered and shown to be related. Mind is what we are: “What has been given you? The knowledge that you are a mind, in Mind and purely mind, sinless forever, wholly unafraid, because you were created out of love” (W-158.1:1), Although we believe our minds are split between ego and spirit, but spirit is the only part that is real: “Your reality is *only* your spirit” (T-1.35.9:7)(CE).

The relationship this section sees in its two terms is: Both are aspects of perception. In seeing the face of Christ, we perceive our own forgiveness and that of the whole world. In a sense, they are almost the same thing. But, although he does *clarify* these two terms, he does not actually *define* them.

#### Paragraph 1

*Forgiveness* is for God and toward God, but not of Him. <sup>2</sup>It is impossible to think of anything He created that could need forgiveness. <sup>3</sup>Forgiveness, then, is an illusion, but because of its purpose, which is the Holy Spirit's, it has one difference: Unlike all other illusions, it leads away from error and not toward it.

The first sentence tells us three things about forgiveness (1:1):

1. It is for God.
2. It is toward God.
3. It is not of God.

The first thing means that we must forgive God for the illusions we have about Him, illusions such as our belief He is angry with us, that He has rejected us because of our sins, and that He will send us to hell unless we “receive Jesus as our Savior.” Remember that forgiveness is *always* about overlooking illusions and never about anything real. When we forgive a brother or sister, we are not withholding anger or judgment for a real attack but for our mistaken interpretation of their call for love as an attack. Therefore, our forgiveness is for God as well as for people.

The second thing is that forgiveness is “toward God.” That means it is a move we make in God's direction. Forgiveness moves us closer to Him. God is the goal of forgiveness.

The third thing means that God never forgives and does not need to because He never suffers from the misperceptions we suffer from. He never sees sin in us at all, so there is nothing for God to forgive! As **(1:2)** says: “It is impossible to think of anything He created that could need forgiveness.”

Forgiveness is an illusion **(1:3)**. Unlike other illusions, which the ego generates to deceive us, the Holy Spirit's purpose for the illusion of forgiveness is to lead us away from error and toward the truth, toward God **(1:3)**. Forgiveness seems to us as if it were a real thing, but when we accept it fully, we will realize there was never anything to forgive. Donna Cary wrote a beautiful line in one of her Course songs: “You don't have to forgive when you see the innocence of it all.”

## Paragraph 2

<sup>2</sup> Forgiveness might be called a kind of happy fiction; a way in which the unknowing can bridge the gap between their perception and the truth. <sup>2</sup>They cannot go directly from perception to knowledge, because they do not think it is their will to do so. <sup>3</sup>This makes God appear to be an enemy instead of what He really is. <sup>4</sup>And it is just this insane perception that makes them unwilling merely to rise up and to return to Him in peace.

Thinking of forgiveness as an illusion may seem strange. Perhaps another way to say the same thing is that it is “a kind of happy fiction.” It provides us with a bridge between our perception and the truth **(2:1)**. When we live in the land of illusion, we can't just leap over the gap into the knowledge of the truth. As long as we believe that what we perceive is real, we don't *want* to let go of our illusions in favor of truth. **(2:2)**. For instance, we continue choosing to see guilt everywhere—in others and even in God—and to blame them for our upset and pain. There seems to be an advantage to putting the cause of pain *outside* of us. We want to believe that our pain and anger are caused by forces outside of ourselves rather than realizing “I am responsible for what I see” **(T-21.II.2:3)**. That does not mean we are responsible for what happens to us; we are responsible for *our perception* of it.

As long as we continue wanting to hold on to our grievances while God is telling us to let them go, we will see God as our enemy “instead of what He really is” (2:3), To “submit” to the will of God feels as if we are losing something vital. All we are losing is fear and pain! Seeing ourselves in opposition to God, however, is what prevents us from rising up and returning to Him in peace (2:4).

When we can “see the innocence of it all,” we can say, “I gladly make the 'sacrifice' of fear” (W-323). If you read that short lesson now, I think it will help you make sense of the concept of forgiveness the Course presents here. So here it is:

*I gladly make the “sacrifice” of fear.*

*Here is the only “sacrifice” You ask of Your beloved Son; You ask him to give up all suffering, all sense of loss and sadness, all anxiety and doubt, and freely let Your Love come streaming in to his awareness, healing him of pain, and giving him Your Own eternal joy. Such is the “sacrifice” You ask of me, and one I gladly make; the only “cost” of restoration of Your memory to me, for the salvation of the world.*

*And as we pay the debt we owe to truth, - a debt that merely is the letting go of self-deceptions and of images we worshipped falsely - truth returns to us in wholeness and in joy. We are deceived no longer. Love has now returned to our awareness. And we are at peace again, for fear has gone and only love remains“ (W-323).*

### Paragraph 3

3 And so they need an illusion of help because they are helpless; a thought of peace because they are in conflict. <sup>2</sup>God knows what His Son needs before he asks.<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>He is not at all concerned with form, but having given the content, it is His will that it be understood. <sup>4</sup>And that suffices. <sup>5</sup>The form adapts itself to need; the content is unchanging, as eternal as its Creator.

Caught as we are in our preference for our illusions, unable to rise up and return to God, we are helpless—in ourselves. We need something like the Holy Spirit, “an illusion of help.” We need the gift of a thought of peace because we can't get beyond the illusion of conflict (3:1). What we need is always ready for us when we are willing to accept it; God knows we need it before we do (3:2)! What we need is always the same, although it can take many forms. “The form adapts itself to need; the content is unchanging, as eternal as its Creator” (3:5). All God wants is that we understand what we've received; God isn't concerned about whatever form our illusions give to His content (3:3–4). He is

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:8 (RSV): “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” In the Bible, this means that God knows about the earthly needs we ask for in prayer. Here, it means that God knows that His Son needs “an illusion of help” to help him out of his illusion of conflict.

even willing for the Truth to appear to us in an illusory form: forgiveness. He knows that our perception of the form will ultimately give way to knowledge of the Truth.

As I understand this, God's content, the help He gives to take us beyond our illusions, is the Truth, which lies beyond all perception. But to get us there, across the gap of our illusions, God uses a holy illusion as a bridge: the perception of the *face of Christ*.

## Paragraph 4

**4** *The face of Christ* has to be seen before the memory of God can return. <sup>2</sup>The reason is obvious. <sup>3</sup>Seeing the face of Christ is perceptual. <sup>4</sup>No one can look on knowledge, but the face of Christ is the great symbol of forgiveness. <sup>5</sup>It is salvation. <sup>6</sup>It is the symbol of the real world. <sup>7</sup>Whoever looks on this no longer sees the world. <sup>8</sup>He is as near to Heaven as is possible outside the gate. <sup>9</sup>Yet from this gate it is no more than just a step inside. <sup>10</sup>It is the final one. <sup>11</sup>And this we leave to God. <sup>12</sup>It is a symbol too, but as the symbol of His will alone, it cannot be divided. <sup>2</sup> <sup>13</sup>And so the unity that it reflects becomes His will. <sup>14</sup>It is the only thing still in the world in part and yet the bridge to Heaven.

To see the Face of Christ is a perception, not yet the Truth. The Face of Christ is what we see with the vision of Christ. It consists of seeing Christ in whatever we are looking at and seeing Christ as the one reality behind every image we perceive. When the Face of Christ is all we see, it is the final perception “before the memory of God can return” (4:1). Seeing the Face of Christ is a perception (4:2–3); the memory of God is something beyond perception. It is direct knowledge of the Infinite, which cannot be looked upon (4:4).

Seeing the face of Christ means we have *perceived* “the great symbol of forgiveness” (4:4). The face of Christ is similar in meaning to forgiveness, salvation, and the real world (4:4–6)<sup>3</sup>. Each term refers to perfected perception, seeing the innocence and loveliness in all persons and things. As a perception, the sight of the Face of Christ can be partial, temporary, and incomplete before it becomes perfect and permanent. When we see only the Face of Christ, we no longer see the world (4:7). I don't believe this means that our physical vision will stop working or that we will disappear from the

<sup>2</sup> “It” refers to God’s final step, whereby He lifts us out of time and into eternity. According to paragraphs 3 and 4 in this section, His final step, being the bridge between earth and Heaven, has an earthly aspect that is symbolic rather than ultimately real, thus making this step “part unreal” (5:7).

<sup>3</sup> See also these lines from the next chapter: “For true perception is a remedy with many names: forgiveness, salvation, Atonement, true perception—all are one. They are the one beginning, with the end to lead to oneness far beyond themselves. True perception is the means by which the world is saved from sin, for sin does not exist, and it is this that true perception sees.” (C-2.3:5–6 (CE))

physical world or appear to die. We simply will *see* differently. Only in God's final step do bodies and the world itself disappear.

The following may help us understand what's being said. This passage discusses the real world but applies equally well to the Face of Christ:

“The real world can actually be perceived. All that is necessary is a willingness to perceive nothing else. For if you perceive both good and evil, you are accepting both the false and the true and making no distinction between them. The ego sees some good, but never only good. That is why its perception is so variable. It does not reject goodness entirely, for this you could not accept, but it always adds something that is not real to the real, thus confusing illusion and reality. For perceptions cannot be partly true. If you believe in truth and illusion, you cannot tell which is true” (T-11.VIII.3:1–8 (CE)).

Perception normally sees a mix of good and evil, and that isn't Reality. When we come to see *only* good we are seeing the real world; we are seeing the Face of Christ.

There are a couple of places where the Course indicates the experience of someone who sees the Face of Christ and has completely forgiven the world.

“By focusing upon the good in him [your brother], the body grows decreasingly persistent in your sight, and will at length be seen as little more than just a shadow circling round the good” (T-31.VII.3:6 (CE)).

“The real world is not like this.

It has no buildings, and there are no streets where people walk alone and separately.

There are no stores where people buy an endless list of things they do not need.

It is not lit with artificial light, and night comes not upon it.

There is no day that brightens and grows dim.

There is no loss.

Nothing is there but shines, and shines forever.”

(T-13.VII.1:2–8 (CE), 1:1–7 (FIP))

To better understand this experience, let's turn in our books to T-17.II, “The Beauty of the Real World.” (Discussion of this section to follow in class.)

It seems that once anyone has achieved this vision of the real world and the Face of Christ as all they see, they are not long for this world. We read about that earlier in the Manual and Chapter 17 of the Text:

“Sometimes a teacher of God may have a brief experience of a direct union with God. In this world it is almost impossible that this endure. It can perhaps be won after much devotion and dedication, and then be maintained for most of the time on earth, but this is so rare that it cannot be considered a realistic goal. If it happens, so be it. If it does not happen, so be it as well. All worldly states must be illusory. If God were reached directly in sustained awareness, the body would not be long maintained.” (T-31.IX.3:1–8 (CE))

“The perception of the real world will be so short that you will barely have time to thank God for it. For God will take the last step swiftly when you have reached the real world and have been made ready for Him.” (T-17.II.4:4–5 (CE))

And the current paragraph we are studying echoes the thought: We are as near to Heaven as is possible without being *in* Heaven; just one more step and we'll be inside (4:8–9).

So, what does it mean that when we see the Face of Christ, we will no longer see the world (4:7)? I think it refers to the final vision, the complete forgiveness of everything, not to brief experiences of that vision. Still, that doesn't really answer the questions that come to most people: Will I just zap out of existence in the world, leaving everyone else behind? What would be the effect on everyone who knows me? Will I be just wiped out of their memories, since I wasn't ever in the world, just shared the illusion that I was?

Can you see ego at work in such questions as: What happens to our bodies when we become enlightened? What will it matter? What does it matter *now*? We'll know and understand when it happens, and that's all that matters. We can leave that “final step” to God (4:10–11). “The last step,” like forgiveness and the Face of Christ, is just a symbol, but because it symbolizes God's undivided will, this symbol cannot be divided. My best guess at what he means by “cannot be divided” is that forgiveness and seeing the Face of Christ both symbolize something that occurs between two *apparently* separate beings. God's last step belongs only to God's will, which has never changed. We call it a step, but nothing really changes. We “become” what we have been since the instant of creation. The last step symbolizes the unity of all things with God. It is God's will. It is the bridge to Heaven, a state which we have never left (4:13–14).

The next paragraph will explain this a bit more completely.

## Paragraph 5

5 God's will is all there is. <sup>2</sup>We can but go from nothingness to everything; from hell to Heaven. <sup>3</sup>Is this a journey? <sup>4</sup>No, not in truth, for truth goes nowhere. <sup>5</sup>But illusions shift from place to place; from time to time. <sup>6</sup>The final step is also but a shift. <sup>7</sup>As a perception it is part unreal. <sup>8</sup>And yet this part will vanish. <sup>9</sup>What remains is peace eternal and the will of God. <sup>10</sup>There are no wishes now, for wishes change. <sup>11</sup>Even the wished-for can become unwelcome. <sup>12</sup>That must be so, because the ego cannot be at peace. <sup>13</sup>But will is constant, as the gift of God, and what He gives is always like Himself.

We saw in Chapter 1 of the Clarification of terms that our mind, which is one unified whole, *seems* to us to be divided, split between ego and spirit. In this world, forgiveness is a symbol of exercising the power of our mind to choose between the two, to see the Face of Christ where once we saw ego and sin. But God's will can't be divided like that; it is all there is (5:1). The last step, the symbol of the Will of God, takes us “from nothingness to everything, from hell to Heaven” (5:2), and yet it isn't a real journey, “for truth goes nowhere” (5:4).



All illusions are changeable, unlike truth; they shift in both time and place (5:5). Truth does not do that. God's final step also seems to be a shift, from the world to Heaven, from the unreal to the real, but that isn't a shift in truth because nothing real changes. We are already at home in God, His perfect offspring. The last step is, in part, our perception of the final step of our journey, which is without distance. But that perception disappears when the truth dawns on us (5:6–8). As the illusion of separation vanishes, we realize we have never gone anywhere. “Heaven is here. There is nowhere else (T-31.IX.6:4–5(CE)). All that remains for us ”is peace eternal and the will of God ”(5:9).

Once God has taken the Last Step, we no longer wish for anything. Wishes change. What we once wished for may become unwelcome (5:9–11). We can all attest to this. Think of how many things you once wished to have in your life are now things you not only longer need but have become undesirable. So, in Heaven, we have no more wishes. All they ever did was to prevent the ego from being at peace (5:12). We no longer have wishes in Heaven, but *will*; God's will. God only gives gifts that are constant, unchanging, like Himself. Since the Last Step, the symbol of His will, is His gift, it too never fades (5:13).

## Paragraph 6

6 This is the purpose of the face of Christ. <sup>2</sup>It is the gift of God to save His Son. <sup>3</sup>But look on this<sup>4</sup> and you have been forgiven. <sup>4</sup>How lovely does the world become in just that single instant when you see the truth about yourself reflected there. <sup>5</sup>Now you are sinless and behold your sinlessness. <sup>6</sup>Now you are holy and perceive it so. <sup>7</sup>And now the mind returns to its Creator—the joining of the Father and the Son; the unity of unities that stands behind all joinings but beyond them all. <sup>8</sup>God is not seen but only understood. <sup>9</sup>His Son is not attacked but recognized.

The final paragraph sums things up. The Face of Christ is God's gift to us to call us back to Himself (6:2). That is its entire purpose (6:1). It is a perception of the truth about yourself (6:4), which is the truth about everyone: “You are sinless and behold your sinlessness” (6:5). When you perceive this, you are forgiven and know it (6:3). “Now you are holy and perceive it so” (6:6). To accept that is to know you are forgiven. All perception of sin in yourself and others has disappeared. When this occurs, your “mind returns to its Creator.” That return is “the joining of the Father and the Son.” It is “the unity of unities.” This “unity squared” is the truth that gives reality to every joining you have ever been part of, the truth that stands behind every blissful union you have known in this world, and yet is “beyond them all” (6:7). You have left separation forever behind.

You no longer “see” God, a wonderful, perfect Being, yet somehow other. Instead, you *understand* God (6:8). That internal knowing, apart from all perception, is what mystics have called a direct knowing, a *gnosis*, as the Greeks called it. You know God

<sup>4</sup>“But look on this” means “Merely look on this” or “Only look on this.”

directly because you have become aware of your part in the unity of unities. Such direct knowing is the promised goal of Christian Gnosticism.

You also recognize the Son of God, joined with you in that all-embracing unity. The distance between you, which has always seemed to be there, is utterly gone. All attack has become impossible for you, as it always was. You no longer need to *work* at maintaining your union. Now, it simply *is* **(6:9)**.



### 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.*