

Commentary

ACIM® Clarification of Terms

4. *Jesus — 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

This chapter discusses Jesus speaking in the third person, similar to Chapter 23 in the Manual. It is likely that he does this to avoid sounding egotistical with too many “I” statements. As in Chapter 23, he presents himself as a helper, highlighting his nature as a man who became identified with Christ, which we all must do. Jesus led the way for us and completed the journey home, existing now to guide us on our own journey.

Paragraph 1

There is no need for help to enter Heaven, for you never left. ²But there is need of help beyond yourself as you are circumscribed by false beliefs of your identity, which God alone established in reality. ³Helpers are given you in many forms, although upon the altar they are one. ⁴Behind each one there is a thought of God, and this will never change. ⁵But they have names which differ for a time, for time needs symbols, being itself unreal. ⁶These names are legion,¹ but we will not go beyond the names the course itself employs. ⁷God does not help, because He knows no need. ⁸But He creates all helpers of His Son while he believes his fantasies are true. ⁹Thank God for them, for they will lead you home.

We do not need help to enter Heaven because we are already there. We never left **(1:1)**. “You are at home in God, dreaming of exile, but perfectly capable of awakening to reality.” **(T-10.I.6:3 (CE), T-10.I.2:1 (FIP))** And yet, we *do* need help. We do need something beyond the false self we have made by false beliefs about our God-given identity **(1:2)**. Notice that this help does not come from outside our true Self; it comes from outside the little selves we've imagined to be all of us. We still must awaken to

¹Luke 8:30 (RSV): “Jesus then asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him.” Whereas in the Bible verse, the name “Legion” refers to the many demons possessing the man, in the above reference, it refers to the names of all the helpers that God has given us.

reality and are fully capable of doing so, but we need assistance. So God provides many different helpers, helpers who are one “upon the altar” **(1:3)**.

Helpers appear in many different forms. These can be spiritual teachers, books, friends and family members, life events, or the world around us. Some of them will not seem helpful at first! Some of them may be quite trying. But the Course teaches that:

“Trials are but lessons which you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you. In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity you face, Christ calls to you and gently says, “My brother, choose again.”” **(T-31.IX.3:1-2 (FIP), T-31.VIII.3:1-2 (CE))**.

Whatever form they take, the helpers are one. ”All things are lessons God would have me learn“ **(W-193 title)**, so in a sense, we can say that even things that seem like terrible trials are given to us by God to help us let go of our egos and their false perceptions: ” Behind each one there is a thought of God, and this will never change“ **(1:4)**.

Regarding human teachers, which seems to be what is foremost in Jesus's mind in this passage, the helpers have many different names, but God's thought, which created them all, is one. All we need is that one Thought. In time, however, we need symbols of truth because time itself is unreal. In time, symbols are the closest we can get to absolute truth **(1:5)**. We could speak of all the different names of these helpers, such as Krishna, Buddha, Gangaji, the Dalai Lama, and so on², but for those of us who have made the Course our path at this time, the name of Jesus is enough **(1:6)**.

There is a striking phrase in **(1:7)**: ”God...knows no need.“ (This phrase may be the basis for Ken Wapnick's frequent assertion that ”God doesn't even know we're here.“) That God knows no need is the reason that ”God does not help“ **(1:7)**. The simple idea behind this is that everything that God knows is true. If He knew we were here in need, we would *really* be here in need, rather than home in God, dreaming of exile. And yet, knowing no need, God ”creates all helpers of His Son while he believes his fantasies are true“ **(1:8)**. We can tie ourselves in knots trying to explain why God creates helpers when He knows no need for them, so I think we must let that remain inexplicable. The nearest I can come to understanding this puzzle is to think of a mother whispering to her child, half awake from a nightmare, ”Shhh. It's OK. There are no monsters. It was just a dream.“

That's the nature of all helpers given to us: people who can reassure us that it's only a nightmare and everything is still OK. Thank God they can help us and lead us home **(1:9)**.

² I think of the song by Danial Nahmod, *One Power*: ”Call it God, call it Spirit, Call it Jesus, call it Lord , Call it Buddha, Bahá'u'lláh, Angel's Wings or Heaven's Door. But whatever name you give it , It's all One Power, can't you see? It's the power of the love in you and me.“

Paragraph 2

2 The name of *Jesus* is the name of one who was a man, but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God.³ ²So he became identified with *Christ*, a man no longer, but at one with God.⁴ ³The man was an illusion, for he seemed to be a separate being, walking by himself, within a body that appeared to hold his self from Self, as all illusions do. ⁴Yet who can save unless he sees illusions and then identifies them as what they are? ⁵Jesus remains a savior because he saw the false without accepting it as true. ⁶And Christ needed his form that He might appear to men and save them from their own illusions.

Who or what was Jesus in this world? “One who was a man, but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God” (2:1). We should be aware of how this differs from the view of Jesus among traditional Christians. The creeds make him into something quite different. They declare he is God's *only* Son, “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God.”⁵ The Course declares he was a man who saw Christ in all his brothers and remembered God. He “became identified with Christ,” leaving his humanity behind to take up his true nature, “at one with God” (2:2). He was one of us. What he was, we are. What he became, we can become. What he did, we can do. He is the great Example, not the great Exception (to quote Eric Butterworth).

His humanity was only an illusion. So is ours, for that matter. Jesus *appeared* to be a separate being, walking by himself, within a body“ (2:3), a body that seemed to separate ”his self from Self,“ which is just what illusions do. God did not somehow become a man. Rather, a man recognized his union with God. In order to save people from their illusions it took someone who saw the illusions we all see and then *identified them all as illusions* (2:4). ”He saw the false without accepting it as true“ (2:5). He did it and now he can show us all how to do it. We can know it is possible because he did it. Christ, our true Self, one with God, *needed* the form of Jesus the man so that he could appear to us in a form we could see and thus save us from our own illusions (2:6).

³ In this section, Jesus speaks about himself in the third person, just as he does in Section 23 of the Manual (“Does Jesus Have a Special Place in Healing?”), presumably to avoid the impression that the emphasis he places on himself in this section (which is unusual in the Course) is egotistical.

⁴ Jesus was “a man no longer” because he had “remembered God,” which is what happens in the final step when God lifts us out of time and space. As the next section implies (C-5.1:1), the final step for Jesus was what is traditionally called “the Ascension.”

⁵ The Nicene Creed declares about Jesus that he is “one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all Worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made.” (Quoted from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, 1892).

Paragraph 3

3 In his complete identification with the Christ—the perfect Son of God, His one creation and His happiness, forever like Himself and one with Him—Jesus became what all of you must be. ²He led the way for you to follow him. ³He leads you back to God, because he saw the road before him and he followed it. ⁴He made a clean distinction, still obscure to you, between the false and true. ⁵He offered you all a final demonstration that it is impossible to kill God's Son, nor can his life in any way be changed by sin and evil, malice, fear, or death.⁶ ⁶And therefore all your sins have been forgiven you because they carried no effects at all, and so they were but dreams.⁷ ⁷Arise with him who showed you this, because you owe him this who shared your dreams that they might be dispelled—and shares them still, to be at one with you.

(3:1) summarizes the message very well. Christ is "the perfect Son of God, His one creation and His happiness, forever like Himself and one with Him." Jesus the man completely identified with the Christ, and so "became what all of you must be" **(3:1)**. He led the way and now we can follow him **(3:2)**.

In what follows, the Course describes in more detail how and why Jesus can save us from illusions. He saw the road to God before him and *he followed it*, and now he leads us back to God along that same road **(3:3)**. He made a clear distinction between what is false and what is true, a distinction still unclear to us all. Now he can help us make that same distinction **(3:4)**. In his death on the cross and the resurrection that followed he demonstrated that "it is impossible to kill God's Son" **(3:5)**. His continued life demonstrates that life cannot "in any way be changed by sin and evil, malice, fear, or death" **(3:5)**. (You may wish to read Cameo 33, pages 1882–1890 in the CE, for more insight on the powerful demonstration of the resurrection.)

This is how and why our sins have been forgiven: they were only dreams with no effects at all **(3:6)**. Sins are not forgiven because God punished Jesus in our place by crucifying him; they are forgiven because the resurrection showed that we, and all our supposed sins, cannot harm the Son of God, the Son who is the true Identity of us all. It is the resurrection that saves us. (See T-3.III, which opens with the lines, "There is one more point which must be perfectly clear before any residual fear which you may still associate with miracles becomes entirely groundless. The crucifixion did *not* establish the Atonement; the *resurrection* did.")

The Course appeals to us to "arise with him," which the context defines as seeing illusions, identifying them as false, seeing the face of Christ in everyone, and remember-

⁶ See Cameo 33: "Was There a Physical Resurrection?"

⁷ Luke 5:23 (RSV): "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?'" Traditionally, our sins are forgiven because Jesus died for them in the crucifixion. Here, they are forgiven because Jesus in the *resurrection* showed that we cannot harm the Son of God (which includes everyone), which proves that our sins had no effect and so must have been illusions.

ing God and our oneness with Him (3:7). Jesus showed us this meaning. He demonstrated it, and now we owe it to him to arise *with* him. We owe it because of what he did and now does: He shared our dreams in order to dispel them, and even now he chooses to continue sharing our dreams in order to be one with us in our journey home.

Paragraph 4

4 Is he the Christ? ²Oh yes, along with you. ³His little life on earth was not enough to teach the mighty lesson that he learned for all of you. ⁴He will remain with you to lead you from the hell you made to God. ⁵And when you join your will with his, your sight will be his vision, for the eyes of Christ are shared. ⁶Walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is.⁸ ⁷Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world.⁹ ⁸Forgive him your illusions, and behold how dear a brother he would be to you. ⁹For he will set your mind at rest at last and carry it with you unto your God.

So the question that comes to many people as they read the Course is, "Is Jesus the Christ, as the Bible says?" The Course answers clearly in the affirmative, but with a twist: "Oh yes, *along with you*" (4:1–2 **my emphasis**). That's a huge difference from traditional Christianity. Jesus is the Christ, but so are we all. Christ is our shared Identity, as it says in "What Is the Christ?", WI-6: "Christ is God's Son as He created Him. He is the Self we share, uniting us with one another, and with God as well" (WI-6.1:1-2), and in several other places, for instance:

Then I lose myself in my identity, and recognize that Christ is but my Self. (CE W-353.1:5)

In this equality is Christ restored as one identity, in which the Sons of God acknowledge that they all are one. (CE W-WI.9.4:3)

The short life of Jesus on earth wasn't sufficient to teach us all the truth of that shared Identity (4:3), and so Jesus remains with us, still in some way sharing our dreams with us, one with us in our journey home (3:7), leading us out of the hell we made, back to God (4:4). We can share the vision that Jesus had and still has when we choose to join our will with his, because "the eyes of Christ are shared" (4:5).

Perhaps you think that sharing your life with Jesus is unnatural, a far-out, fringe and maybe "woo woo" notion. It's not. In fact it is as natural as walking with a brother that you've known since the day you were born. That's what Jesus is! In your heart of hearts

⁸. To say "such [a brother] indeed he is" means Jesus is a brother whom we have known since we were born *in God*—since we were created by God.

⁹. The word "bitter" here is used in the sense of distressing (like *a bitter sorrow*) or sharply unpleasant (like *a bitter wind*). The statement that "some bitter idols" have been made of Jesus refers to images of Jesus such as that of sacrificial victim or wrathful judge. These images are "idols" in that they are false gods we worship as substitutes for the real God. And they are "bitter" in that they are distressing and unpleasant.

you *have* known him since the day you were born (4:6). Jesus is brother to the whole world. We've projected terrible things onto him, replacing his reality with "bitter idols" (4:7). Some interpreters of the Bible see Jesus coming back to earth some day breathing angry fire and violent punishment, wiping out all the "sinners." And I call to mind a statue of Jesus, nailed to the cross, bearing the inscription, "This is what I did for you. What have you done for me?" Jesus is seen banishing people into eternal punishment. Eternal punishment! Such ugly images have been ascribed to Jesus that many people react with revulsion when his name is mentioned. The Course calls on us to "forgive him your illusions." Put aside those terrible accusations, those awful associations you have with his name, and "behold how dear a brother he would be to you" (4:8).

Imagine if for years you had believed some awful thing about your brother or sister, and had rejected overtures from them time and time again. Now, one day, you realize how wrong you were, how none of what you believed and held against them was true, and that, despite your rejection, they had never stopped loving you. Imagine the tearful reunion you would have with them, the joy of welcoming them back into your life.

Imagine, then...no, allow yourself to *experience* ...such a reunion with Jesus. Welcome him into your life! If you do, "he will set your mind at rest at last and carry it with you unto your God" (4:9).

Paragraph 5

5 Is he God's only helper? ²No indeed. ³For Christ takes many forms with different names until their oneness can be recognized. ⁴But Jesus is for you the bearer of Christ's single message of the love of God. ⁵You need no other. ⁶It is possible to read his words and benefit from them without accepting him into your life.¹⁰ ⁷Yet he would help you yet a little more if you would share your pains and joys with him, and leave them both to find the peace of God. ⁸Yet still it is his lesson most of all that he would have you learn, and it is this:

Jesus is not the only helper God has sent into the world to help us find home again. As 1:8 said, God has created all the many helpers who can lead us home (5:1-2). And all of them are the Christ, though in this world they do not bear that name, and take many forms (5:3). One day their oneness will finally be recognized, and even today we have begun to see and acknowledge that oneness. But for those of us who have responded to the Course and its message, Jesus is the bearer of that message. We do not *need* any of the other helpers, although there is nothing wrong with welcoming them into our lives. For us, however, Jesus is the best fit, so to speak, even if we have recoiled from previous

¹⁰ To "read his words" refers mainly to reading *A Course in Miracles*. It means, in essence, that you can profitably study this course without having a personal relationship with Jesus. However, "read his words" quite possibly also refers to reading the gospels. See M-23.7:1 ("his words have reached you in a language you can love and understand"), in which "his words" refers to his teachings in the New Testament.

encounters with who we thought he was (5:4). We really do not need any others (5:5). In this Course, given by Jesus, we have all that is necessary and nothing unnecessary:

...what you are studying is a unified thought system in which nothing is lacking that is needed, and nothing is included that is irrelevant or contradictory. (W-42.7:2)

We can learn so much by forgiving Jesus! Yes, it is *possible* to read the Course and gain benefit from doing so without accepting the person of Jesus into our lives (5:6). The benefit would be even greater if we were willing to share our pains and joys with him, and in doing so, leave them behind to find the peace of God (5:7). And really, that is the only important thing: learning the lesson he is trying to teach us (5:8).

That lesson is spelled out in the four sentences of the final paragraph. I'll break it down sentence by sentence.

Paragraph 6

6 "There is no death because the Son of God is like his Father.¹¹
²Nothing you can do can change eternal love. ³Forget your dreams of sin and guilt, and come with me instead to share the resurrection of God's Son.
⁴And bring with you all those whom He has sent to you to care for, as I care for you."

Your fear of death, physical or eternal, is groundless. You are God's Son forever, and, because God cannot die, neither can you (6:1). Nothing you have ever done or can do can change God's eternal love for you, even the worst thing you have done or can imagine (6:2).. So stop trying to punish yourself. Stop thinking that God should punish you; it's the furthest thing from His mind. Forget your dark dreams of sin, guilt and death. Come instead to share the resurrection of God's Son, seen first in Jesus, but the destiny of us all (6:3). Finally, echoing the message of the Manual for Teachers: Just as Jesus has always cared for you and cares for you now, care about everyone he has sent into your care; bring them with you as you walk to God (6:4).

Summing up the two terms he "defines" here: **Jesus** was a man like us who saw the face of Christ in all his brothers, woke up, and remembered God. In so doing he became totally identified with his true Identity, the Christ. **Christ** is God's Son as God created Him, the perfect expression of God which we all share as our Identity, one with all that is and with God¹². It is a shared Identity and must be shared to be fully known, so just as Jesus remains with us to share that Identity with us, we also must in turn share it with all our brothers and sisters.

¹¹ Proverbs 12:28 (KJV): "In the way of righteousness is life: and in the pathway thereof there is no death." In the above passage, the reason that there is no death is that we, being God's Son, are like our Father—*deathless*.

¹² I am one Self, completely whole, at one with all creation and with God (W-113.1:1).

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.