

Commentary

ACIM® Manual for Teachers

20. *What Is the Peace of God?*

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 does more than give a simple definition of peace. The section tells us how to recognize it, how to find it, and how to keep it. It also ties it in with several other key concepts of the Course, such as forgiveness, the will of God, and our connection with that will.

Paragraph 1

1 It has been said that there is a kind of peace that is not of this world.¹ ²How is it recognized? ³How is it found? ⁴And being found, how can it be retained? ⁵Let us consider each of these questions separately, for each reflects a different step along the way.

“It has been said that there is a kind of peace that is not of this world” (1:1). Where? I think Jesus here refers to his own words in the Gospel of John:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27, NRSV)

It could also be a reference to this:

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7 **ESV**)

In 1:2–4, he poses three questions about such peace, which he then proceeds to answer in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4:

1. How is peace recognized?
2. How can we find peace?
3. How can we retain it, once found?

He indicates that we will consider each question separately because each question represents a different step along the path to God. I'll identify each step as we go.

1. John 16:33 (RSV): “I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Philippians 4:7 (KJV): “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Paragraph 2

² First, how can the peace of God be recognized? ²God's peace is recognized at first by just one thing: in every way it is totally unlike all previous experiences. ³It calls to mind nothing that went before. ⁴It brings with it no past associations. ⁵It is a new thing entirely. ⁶There is a contrast, yes, between this thing and all the past. ⁷But, strangely, it is not a contrast of true differences. ⁸The past just slips away, and in its place is everlasting quiet. ⁹Only that. ¹⁰The contrast first perceived has merely gone. ¹¹Quiet has reached to cover everything.

The peace the Course points us towards is not merely an absence of stress and conflict. Nearly everyone has experienced at least moments like that, if not hours or days, yet for most of us there is always a low rumble of disquiet lying beneath the surface of our thinking, much like the shark lurking deep in the ocean or the invisible monster under the bed. God's peace is unlike anything we ever experienced before (2:2). When we experience it, we will be unable to find anything we can compare it with (2:3). The sentence that begins, "God's peace is like..." cannot be completed! "It is a new thing entirely"(2:5).

Although nothing is comparable with this peace, it is certainly *unlike* anything in our past (2:6). Even so, peace is not exactly *different from* anything in the past. Not unlike, and not different. Instead, the past just "slips away," and is replaced by "everlasting quiet" (2:8). Bear in mind this initial contrast that disappears as one side of the contrast, the past in this case, just slips away. The same idea crops up again in the next paragraph. "Everlasting quiet" and "only that," nothing but quiet (2:9). Even any contrast you may at first have perceived is gone (2:10). Your mind is completely covered with quiet (2:11).

So how is God's peace recognized? Clearly, one way peace can be recognized is in the fact that we have never experienced anything like it. If you can find something to compare with what you experience, it isn't this peace. To sum up: Peace is unlike anything you ever experienced. All awareness of the past is gone, and there is nothing but quiet. I think we could say that, for the first time, you are experiencing *nothingness*.

Peace is the stillness of mind that is found in deep, skillful meditation; the state of Oneness that can spontaneously overtake us by surprise sometimes, but seems mostly to come only after years of practice, according to what I've read. What the Course calls "the peace of God," is something that is "totally unlike all previous experiences.," an experience of "everlasting quiet" and "only that" (2:2, 2:8-9). In that stillness *nothing is happening*. The following quotation from Otto Scharmer in discussion with Francisco Varela, a famous cognitive scientist, sheds some light on what peace is. Varela speaks of it as the first step in becoming aware:

Varela asked, "Can people cultivate the core process of becoming aware as an ability?" That core process, according to Varela, is composed of "three gestures of becoming aware: suspension, redirection, and letting go." We walked together through the three gestures. Varela explained. "By suspension I mean the suspension of habitual patterns. In Buddhist meditation, you put your butt on the cushion and move one level above your habitual engagement and see from a more aerial perspective." We went on to discuss how many people sitting in meditation claim that nothing happens. Why? "Because the whole point is that after suspension you have to tolerate that nothing is happening," he said (**my italics**). "Suspension is a very funny procedure. Staying with that is the key." Then he explained the second and third gestures. Redirection is about redirecting your attention from the "exterior" to the "interior" by turning the attention toward the source of the mental process rather than the object. Letting go has to be done with a light touch, he cautioned.

Scharmer, Otto. *The Essentials of Theory U* (p. 40). Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Kindle Edition.

The goal of meditation, if you can call it a goal, is to still the mind so completely that "nothing is happening," and then learning to "tolerate that nothing is happening." Varela adds that "Staying with that is the key." A line from the Workbook sums up how we must approach this stillness: "Peace to my mind. Let all my thoughts be still" (**W-221**). This is what Varela calls *suspension*. The lesson says that only by becoming still can we turn our attention away from the exterior world to what is within, and begin to hear the Voice for God directing us (**similar to what Varela calls redirection**).

Paragraph 3

3 How is this quiet found? 2No one can fail to find it who but seeks out its conditions. 3God's peace can never come where anger is, for anger must deny that peace exists. 4Who sees anger as justified in any way or any circumstance proclaims that peace is meaningless, and must believe that it cannot exist. 5In this condition peace cannot be found. 6Therefore, forgiveness is the necessary condition for finding the peace of God. 7More than this, given forgiveness, there *must* be peace. 8For what except attack will lead to war? 9And what but peace is opposite to war? 10Here the initial contrast stands out clear and apparent. 11Yet when peace is found, the war is meaningless, and it is conflict now that is perceived as nonexistent and unreal.

Next, we move on to the question of how we can find such everlasting quiet (**3:1**). Jesus says that the path he sets out is infallible; "no one can fail" if we seek out the conditions of peace (**3:2**). The first condition is to put an end to all anger, because anger is by its very nature the denial of peace (**3:3**). That should be evident if you think about any anger you've ever felt. It is not a peaceful feeling! It calls for attack and rejection. If, in any situation, you see your anger as justified you must believe that peace is impossible. Notice the words "in any way or any circumstance." There is no room for exceptions.

This rejection of anger has to be total. You may think that if someone murders your child or threatens the safety of the entire country that anger is justified. If so, you will not find the peace of God (3:5). Anger and peace are mutually exclusive.

What this means is that “forgiveness is the necessary condition for finding the peace of God” (3:6). This is the condition which, if you set out to seek it, guarantees that you will find God’s peace (3:2, 3:7). You will experience that everlasting quiet of mind and heart. Peace is the opposite to war, and war is the result of attack, which is what anger is calling for (3:8–9). Give up anger and you give up attack; peace *has to* follow.

Sentence 10 calls our attention to the notion of “contrast” again (see 2:6–7). It speaks of “the initial contrast.” This refers to the way that peace and war seem *at first* to be opposites. He then goes on to say, “Yet when peace is found, the war is meaningless” (3:11). When peace is found, the “conflict... is perceived as nonexistent and unreal,” just as the contrast between peace and the past “is not a contrast of differences,” and “the past just slips away” (2:8). There is nothing left for peace to contrast *with*.

Key thought: The condition for the experience of peace is erasing anger through forgiveness.

Paragraph 4

4 How is the peace of God retained, once it is found? ²Returning anger,² in whatever form, will drop the heavy curtain once again, and the belief that peace cannot exist will certainly return. ³War is again accepted as the one reality. ⁴Now must you once again lay down your sword, although you will not realize that you have picked it up again. ⁵But you will learn, as you remember even faintly now what happiness was yours without it, that you must have taken it again as your defense. ⁶Stop for a moment now and think of this: Is conflict what you want, or is God’s peace the better choice? ⁷Which gives you more? ⁸A tranquil mind is not a little gift. ⁹Would you not rather live than choose to die?

The final question is how to retain the peace of God once we find it (4:1). Retention is simply the continuation of the condition for finding peace: continuing forgiveness. If we allow anger back in, we have once again accepted the necessity for war and attack, thus ruling out the possibility of peace (4:2–3). The only recourse is to repeat what we did to find peace in the first place: lay down your sword (4:4). Let go of your anger, choose not to perceive sin but see innocence instead.

Most the time we won’t even realize we have picked up our sword again. We won’t recognize anger. What can clue us in? The loss of our peace!

“I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace.” (T-5.X.9:2 (CE), T-5.VII.6:7 (FIP)).

We must monitor our peace, and if we are not at peace, there is anger lurking somewhere in our minds. The memory of peace may have faded, but that memory of peace and

² This refers to one’s anger coming back, not to returning someone *else’s* anger.

happiness will be enough to alert us to our defensiveness (4:5). When this occurs, ask yourself, "Is conflict what I want, or is God's peace the better choice? Which gives more?" (4:6-7).

Put 4:8 in bold caps on your mirror or fridge; it will help you remember. "**A TRANQUIL MIND IS NOT A LITTLE GIFT.**" The choice you are making is really between living and dying. (4:8)

Paragraph 5

5 Living is joy, but death can only weep. ²You see in death escape from what you made, but this you do not see: that you made death, and it is but an illusion of an end. ³Death cannot be escape, because it is not life in which the problem lies. ⁴Life has no opposite, for it is God. ⁵Life and death seem to be opposites because you have decided death ends life. ⁶Forgive the world, and you will understand that everything that God created cannot have an end, and nothing He did not create is real.³ ⁷In this one sentence is our course explained. ⁸In this one sentence is our practicing given its one direction.⁴ ⁹And in this the Holy Spirit's whole curriculum is specified exactly as it is.

If it seems unimaginable to you that you would choose death over life., pause and think about it a bit. Of course you aren't suicidal, not most of the time at least. But would you whole-heartedly, without reservation, agree that "living is joy" (5:1)? Surely, from time to time, you've had thoughts such as, "My life is a disaster!" or "I feel as if I'm on a treadmill." or at the least, "I'm not happy." For how many of us is life itself, just being alive, enough to evoke joy? Yet Jesus states it here like an unquestionable fact: "Living is joy." That just not the way we feel about life a lot of the time.

"Death," he asserts, "can only weep." Why, then, do tears and sorrow seem so often to be part of *living*? Something is amiss. We are all drawn to death, as little as we care to admit it. The sadness we feel so much of the time is proof. We tend to veer away from life and joy because we think we have messed it up royally. We choose death because it seems to offer us an escape from what we have made (5:2). The sadness we feel arises because we have chosen anger and attack, imagining that we need them. We are destroying our own peace of mind. To choose anger and attack *is* to choose death. We don't realize that we make death. Any hope we may have that it will end our suffering is an illusion (5:2).

The problem isn't with life. Death, whether that of others or our own, offers no escape (5:3). Yet that is what judgment and attack call for: death. How could there be any

3. We find a similar sentence in Workbook Lesson 342: "Let me forgive all things and let creation be as You would have it be, and as it is" (W-342.1:7). The above sentence is also reminiscent of these lines from the Course's Introduction: "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists" (In.2:2-3). These sentences and the above sentence are both billed as summaries of the Course and both present a stark contrast between the real, which cannot be threatened or brought to an end, and the unreal.

4. This means that all of our Workbook-style practice should have forgiveness and its results as its explicit or implicit content. This is similar to the Workbook's statement that all the lessons God would have us learn "are the same in fundamental content," that content being "Forgive, and you will see this differently" (W-193.5:5-6).

problem with life? Life is God, and there is no opposite to it (5:4). Wow! Let those three words sink in: "Life is God." Life and death only seem to be opposites because we have decided that life has an end, and have called it "death" (5:5). We have imagined an impossible problem and made up an impossible solution. Realizing this is what forgiveness is all about.

Then follows a statement that demands memorization. The Course says of this statement: "In this one sentence is our course explained" (5:7). This sentence is what sets the direction for all our spiritual practice (5:8). It gives a perfect description of the whole curriculum of the Holy Spirit (5:9). What is "this one sentence"?

Forgive the world, and you will understand that everything that God created cannot have an end, and nothing He did not create is real (5:6).

This sentence is actually foreshadowed in the Introduction to the Text:

Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.

How could unforgiveness exist if we recognized this? Unforgiveness equates to anger and attack. What is it we think "causes" us to be angry? Something of value, something real, is or has been threatened. Something unreal, something God did not create, actually exists. These misperceptions are cured by forgiveness. If you ever want a one-word explanation of what *A Course in Miracles* is about, it's "forgiveness." If you want to know the key to peace of mind, it's forgiveness. Forgiveness opens our eyes to what alone is real and what is unreal because to forgive we must choose a new perception of the world. If, to us, real things are being lost, and what God didn't create really exists, we cannot forgive. Anger appears as justified; peace seems impossible.

This drastic, uncompromising perception of the world as innocent does not come without effort. It comes in small steps. We begin with forgiving "small" things, and gradually expand what we have learned, eventually generalizing the lesson to include *everything*. We "forgive the world."

Paragraph 6

6 What is the peace of God? ²No more than this: the simple understanding that His will is wholly without opposite. ³There is no thought that contradicts His will, yet can be true. ⁴The contrast between His will and yours but seems to be reality. ⁵In truth there is no conflict, for His will is yours. ⁶Now is the mighty will of God Himself His gift to you. ⁷He does not seek to keep it for Himself. ⁸Why would you seek to keep your tiny, frail imaginings apart from Him? ⁹The will of God is one, and all there is. ¹⁰This is your heritage. ¹¹The universe beyond the sun and stars and all the thoughts of which you can conceive belongs to you. ¹²God's peace is the condition for His will. ¹³Attain His peace, and you remember Him.

⁵ W-331.Heading: "There is no conflict, for my will is Yours."

Peace, Jesus tells us, is no more than the simple understanding that God's will is wholly without opposite **(6:1)**. Nothing exists except what God creates, and God is Love, not anger. Lesson 209 declares our identity with God's love:

"The Love of God is everything I am. The Love of God proclaimed me as His Son. The Love of God within me sets me free" **(W-209.1:3-5)**.

This applies to every one of us, and everyone we know or know about. We all are nothing but the Love of God in expression. Yes, that expression has been blocked and layered over with the ego's crud, but it is still there, and this is what forgiveness learns to see and affirm as the only reality. The crud isn't real; we can look past it, look through it, and see the truth of being in everyone. He created me as love, and "His will is wholly without opposite" **(6:2)**. Nothing that *seems* to contradict His will **(that we be extensions of His Love)** can be true **(6:3)**.

The contrast between God's will and ours only *seems* to be real **(6:4)**. Our will is one with God's and that's the truth **(6:5)**!

This seems to us to demand a degree of faith that is beyond us. It's not. It is within reach of every sentient being. God has gifted us with His will **(6:6)**. He has no desire to keep it back for Himself; He *wants* us to share it, and what He wants, *is*. **(6:7)**. God isn't the problem; we are. We try to hold on to our individual wills, our egos. What we are clinging to are nothing more than "tiny, frail imaginings" that we are trying to keep away from God **(6:8)**. It's so foolish! We are choosing to be tiny, separate beings instead of joining with the infinite creative power of God. In reality, we are clinging to *nothing*. There are no separate wills. The truth of our being is that we will with God, we will along with God in His endless explosion of creation. Only God's one will exists **(6:8)**, and wonder of wonders, *that will is our heritage*. It is the inheritance of every child of God **(6:10)**.

We are integral parts of God's creative process. We are so rich! All creation belongs to us: "The universe beyond the sun and stars and all the thoughts of which you can conceive belong to you" **(6:11)**. The world is agog at the pictures coming back from the new Webb telescope, which sees things millions of light-years away. Everything it sees is ours! The universe is unimaginably large, and it belongs to us!

We can enter into the stream of His will by accepting God's peace, which means forgiving the world. When we attain peace, we will remember God **(6:11)**!

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.