

## Study Guide and Commentary ACIM® Text, Chapter 14, Section IV

As you read through this section, try to make a short list of the various ways the section describes (or implies) what your function in the Atonement is. This will be used in the final question.

### Paragraph 1

#### • Study Question •

1. *In the first six sentences, what idea is repeated in different forms several times?*

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Accept your brother's guiltlessness, believe in it, and you will see the Atonement in him (1:1,3,5). It is through proclaiming the innocence of your brother that you find your own innocence (1:2). To receive it, though, you must first give it, just as God gave truth first to His Son (1:6). This is the principle we have seen over and over again in the Text: we accept Atonement for ourselves *by* giving it away; these are not two things, but one (1:4).

The last two sentences (1:7–8) may be more closely linked to paragraph 2 than to paragraph 1. They seem to be a sudden detour into high metaphysics or theology, but notice the ideas that God is One, and that there is “no other,” “no second or third,” (which would imply the existence of beings less than Him and unlike Him in some way). These concepts provide a background to what is being said about us in paragraphs 1 and 2: that nothing unlike God exists, and therefore we cannot be guilty because we cannot be unlike God.

### Paragraph 2

#### • Study Question •

2. *Why is removing our guilt so important?*

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Because we are like God and part of God, we are “more than merely guiltless” (2:1). To be without guilt is a negative description; it tells what we are not, but says nothing about what we *are*. It signifies only the removal of the illusion of sin (2:2); it is not a complete picture of what we are, but merely the removal of a false picture. If we can speak of “attaining” anything spiritually, the only attainment expected of us is this removal of illusion, and God helps us even with that (2:3). We do not contribute anything to our holiness; we do not establish the reality of our being. God has done that. There is more to us than mere guiltlessness, but attaining it is not our responsibility; it is the gift of

God.

Yet, as long as we see guilt in ourselves we cannot enjoy God's gift. If we are guilty we must be different from God. If we are different we must be distinct from Him and separate (2:4). We may feel close to God, but not joined with Him as one (2:5). Oneness can only be experienced, not learned; it dawns on us of itself (2:6–7) when guilt is gone. We *can*, however, learn to be without guilt.

I want us to stop a moment to think about that: *we can be entirely free from guilt*. Think about all the little ways in which guilt permeates your life and your thinking, both guilt in yourself and guilt seen in others, and then imagine what life would be if you saw no guilt anywhere! That, says the Course, is the precondition for knowing oneness with God. The big question is, how can we become free from guilt?

### Paragraph 3

#### • Study Question •

3. *Accepting the Atonement for myself might seem to be a process of learning to be forgiven. But that has already been accomplished, according to this paragraph (3:4). How, then, can what has “obscured the truth” in our minds be undone (3:1), and “what always was” be restored to them (3:5)? In other words, what makes the Atonement real to us? (Choose one answer.)*
- A. *Fulfilling our function by using the Atonement to forgive others.*
  - B. *Facing our own guilt.*
  - C. *Spending time in quiet contemplation of the Christ in us.*

Our job is acceding to the removal of the barriers against God that we have erected in our minds. God is always giving Himself to us (3:1). We don't know it because we have blocked Him out. Accepting the Atonement means allowing the Holy Spirit to remove those blocks. As soon as we do so, the never-ending flow of God's grace will once again enter our minds. God is a Giver; that's all He knows (3:2). Therefore, giving is all that truly exists, because “what He knows not cannot be” nor “be given” (3:3). In other words, the outflow of God's Love is all that is real, and nothing else can be real.

Therefore, sin cannot be real, and we have already been forgiven; there is no point in asking God for forgiveness (3:4). Because we still feel guilty, we may think that the way to be free from guilt is to ask for forgiveness, but what we have to realize is that the guilt is an illusion; we are not really guilty, we only *feel* guilty. In order to free ourselves from this illusion of guilt, what we truly need is not to *be forgiven*, but to *learn to forgive* (3:5).

Here is a line worth memorizing: “Atonement becomes real and visible to those who use it” (3:6). *Using* the Atonement is our only function! (3:7). It's all we need to do to accept it for ourselves. Earlier the Course told us that our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves (T-2.V.5:1); here, it says that our only function is to use it. As I said a moment ago, these are not two different things. Accepting the Atonement and

using it are the same thing, because we accept it *by* using it. That is the whole point of this passage.

Another way to look at this is: All your guilt comes from not fulfilling your function in Heaven (3:9). You undo guilt by filling your function here of extending the Atonement. It's common sense. It's like pollution in our rivers. Pollution comes from dumping bad stuff into the river. As long as we keep on dumping it, the pollution will continue; only when we stop the cause will the problem of pollution go away. Likewise, if our failure to give our ourselves as God gives of Himself is the cause of our guilt, guilt won't end until we once again embrace the extension of love and forgiveness as the function of our lives.

## Paragraph 4

### • Study Question •

#### 4. *How does fulfilling our function bring blessing to us?*

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We need not understand our heavenly function to make way for it; through the practice of forgiveness and the restoration of our guiltlessness we can prepare for union with God without fully understanding the exact nature of it (4:1). This paragraph seems to be calling us to do what we would do if we are what God says we are, and by doing it, to learn that it is true.

There really are no barriers between God and us, and therefore no barriers for God to break. They exist only in our own sick imagination, and it is up to us to let go of them (4:2–3).

God says we are innocent; we are the ones claiming guilt. We need to make the logical decision of who is most likely to be right about us: God, or us? (4:5). God created us as extensions of His own Being. As the end of paragraph 1 pointed out, God is all there is, so no one can exist who is not holy and worthy of God's Love (4:6–9).

The way to undo the darkness, lies, and lovelessness of the world is to become the conduit of love within it (4:10). We are called upon to express our “appreciation for His Love” (4:12) by recognizing the perfect innocence in all of God's creation—including your crabby next-door neighbor, your angry boss, and your difficult parent or child (4:11). That recognition of innocence is our entire reason for existence in this world; it is all we are here to learn. There is a higher and greater purpose in Heaven, yes, but while we are here, this is our calling. When Jesus appeals to us to “fail not,” he is not talking about our failing God; he's speaking of failing *ourselves* (4:11), because when we give our appreciation to God—when we embrace the radical innocence of all creation including ourselves—God's gift of our immaculate being, imbued with His Holiness as an extension of His very Mind and Heart—will reveal itself to us because we have removed the guilt that was blocking it from our awareness (4:12).

## Paragraph 5

### • Study Question •

5. *How does this paragraph tie together the various themes we have been reading about: deciding with the Holy Spirit; fulfilling our function; and choosing guiltlessness instead of guilt?*

If we were faced with choosing a person to take charge of a business for us, or even to house sit, we would be careful to choose someone with a history of making good decisions. We would want some reassurance that, when decisions are called for, this person will make good ones. We'd examine their track record.

If we will examine our own track record at decision-making, we will realize that it's not good. After all, we chose to turn down God's job offer as co-creator with Him! Jesus advises us to take that into account "before you make any decisions for yourself" (5:1). It should give us a strong motive to find Someone wiser and more responsible to take charge of our lives.

In fact, our track record is so bad, and marred with such egregious mistakes, that the only reasonable decision that we can leave in our own hands is "to decide against deciding what [we] want" (14:2). In other words, the only decision we are fit to make is the decision not to decide anything else! Given that we do not know what we want, we cannot possibly decide what to do (5:2-3). It only makes sense to hand things over to the Holy Spirit, since He knows the plan of God and the part we have to play in it (5:4).

As we have seen numerous times already in the Text, it is the purpose of the Holy Spirit to remove every last vestige of guilt from our minds. He does so by leading us through acts of forgiveness, mercy, and kindness towards others. That is, He guides us to remove our own guilt through removing the guilt of the people around us (5:5). Our devotion to finding guilt in our brothers and sisters is what "cheats [us] of the joy of living with [our] God" (5:6). As we saw in paragraph 2, guiltlessness is the precondition for knowing our oneness with God. Jesus refers to guilt as a burden we lay upon ourselves (5:5). The only way we can gain freedom from that burden is by lifting it from the shoulders of others, practicing our function of using the Atonement. When liberating people from their guilt has become the central function of our lives, we will finally know our own freedom.

If the question comes to mind, "*How do I use the Atonement to lift the burden of guilt from others?*" the answer seems, to me, to be obvious. I let go of grievances. I choose not to condemn. Whenever I have the opportunity to bless, to affirm a person's worth before God, to extend love, to forgive offenses, to show kindness, or simply to be polite, I do so. Whenever my mind throws up a temptation to belittle someone, to ignore them, to laugh at someone in a demeaning way, to judge or to condemn them, I turn that temptation over to the Holy Spirit asking His help to choose against it. I attempt to leave no encounter with another human being without, in some way, offering blessing to them. I make living

this way my main goal every day of my life, with everything else taking second place to it.

## Paragraph 6

### • Study Question •

6. *We have something to look forward to: effortless decision-making (6:1). What makes decision-making with the Holy Spirit so effortless? (Choose one.)*
  - A. *There is no guilt involved in the choices.*
  - B. *The Holy Spirit not only tells us what to do, He does it for us.*
  - C. *Our own will power will not be involved.*
  - D. *All of the above.*

Letting God decide makes all decisions effortless (6:1). Do you find breathing to be unnatural? And do you, as a normal, healthy human being, find breathing to be difficult or stressful? Of course not! Yet the Course says that once we have learned to let God decide, that is how easy decision-making becomes. I love the imagery that the Course uses here (6:2); the word “carried” clearly conveys that we are being propelled by a power not our own, while the picture of “a quiet path” imparts a tone of relaxation and even beauty to the whole process. A Unity minister of my acquaintance, Max Lafser, when leading a guided meditation, often implored us to “let yourself fall back into the arms of God, and rest on Him.” Every time he spoke of “falling back” into God’s arms, it brought me a deep sense of total trust and utter relinquishment of tension. The Bible says, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Exodus 33:27, KJV). That is the feeling I get from this passage as well. When I meditate on this, it becomes clear to me that I have much to learn in this area. For me, making decisions is often quite stressful. Evidently I am still depending too much on my own wisdom, still holding on to “[my] own volition” (6:3), and have not yet learned sufficiently to “let go and let God,” as the saying goes.

Notice that the Course promises us swift answers that contain not only instructions about what to do, but the actual power to do it (6:4–6). When Jesus says the Holy Spirit will “do it for you” (6:6) I think we can infer that he means the Holy Spirit will do it *through* us, by His power. Elsewhere, the Course talks about the Holy Spirit teaching His message through us (T-8.VIII.9:1), speaking through us (T-9.V.8:8), comforting people through us (T-10.III.2:1), and using His power to work through us (T-11.VI.9:3). That is, it will be our hands and feet that move and minister to people, it will be our mouths giving voice to the words, but the motivation, direction, and understanding will be His. This kind of activity does not consume our energy; it actually *rests* us better than sleeping (6:7).

The reason for this superior rest is intriguing (6:8). Clearly, what tires us isn’t our activities or the decisions that must be made, what tires us is our guilt! The interweaving

of the various themes, particularly the themes of guidance and guiltlessness (in both its aspects of being given and being received), is fascinating. Who among us would have ever tied them as closely together as Jesus does? Yet, when he says that there is no way we could experience such guidance while still holding on to guilt (whether in ourselves or in another), it just makes sense, and even seems self-evident. How could a mind still holding on to guilt hear His Voice, when His Voice speaks only of guiltlessness?

Notice, too, that sleep may be less than restful because we can bring guilt into it. I certainly know that is true! Many times I have been wakened from sleep by some guilty dream, some sudden pang of fear over something I have neglected to do, or something I did that I wish I had not done. Here is yet another benefit of forgiveness: more restful sleep!

## Paragraph 7

### • Study Question •

7. *How does this paragraph connect the idea that guilt is a denial of God's true nature to the need for us to forgive others?*

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Here again the unreserved importance of guiltlessness is underscored: without it you cannot know God (7:1). How foreboding that sounds! It might at first seem to place knowing God well out of reach. After all, how many of us could claim to be guiltless? Our experience certainly seems to demonstrate the opposite. Yet, the Course turns this foreboding idea on its head. It points out that God wills us to know Him (7:1). Since whatever God wills is so by definition, *we must know God*. And if that is true, since only the guiltless know God, we must also be guiltless! (7:2).

So, if we are guiltless and know God, how come we feel guilty and out of touch with God? The answer is that we refuse to accept our innocence and the innocence of the entire Sonship (7:3). We make a choice, the ego choice for independence from God and specialness that separates us from our brothers, which engenders guilt and blocks any awareness of God from our minds (7:5). As long as we condemn any part of God's Son—which means we are choosing not to know the truth of the Son's innocence—we cannot know the Father. Accepting the Son's guiltlessness is the condition for knowing God (7:4). If we accept even the smallest degree of guilt in anyone, anywhere, we are making a choice that blinds us to God's omnipresence. To deny the Son is to deny the Father Who created him; it is to slander God.

And yet, what we seem to be doing is simply not possible. We cannot truly drive the knowledge of God out of our minds (7:6); we can only manufacture an illusion of having done so. The knowledge persists despite all our efforts.

The last two sentences are saying that God isn't like anything we understand; if we understand it, it does not apply to God (7:8). Basically, I think this is telling us not to impute human characteristics to God, or not to imagine Him endowed with human

weaknesses. He does not get angry. He does not get jealous (the Bible notwithstanding). He does not create things that later get screwed up. As the bumper sticker you may have seen says, "God does not make junk." If we assert that the Son (in any of his billions of forms) is sinful, it is tantamount to saying that God blew it. God is responsible for this awful person. That's what we are saying, and we don't know what we are talking about.

## Paragraph 8

### • Study Question •

8. *What reasons are given for our failure to understand His love?*

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We do not have to make the reality of our innocence, our value to God, and our worth; He has already created those things as real. But we do need to *recognize* them. We have such a low opinion of ourselves that we cannot begin to imagine how much God loves us (8:1–4). When Jesus tells us God's Love for us has "no parallel in your experience of the world" (8:4), we need to stop and think what an astonishing assertion that is. Think of the most powerful love you have ever known or heard of. People do amazing things out of love. They step in front of bullets. They donate their organs. They work themselves to the bone for years to provide a better life for their children. The deepest love you have ever felt, or however exalted the example of love you might conceive of, it cannot compare to God's Love for us (8:5).

Contrast that vast Love with our contrived guilt. Guilt makes us think that we have to do something to merit God's Love. We don't! We already have it in measure so immense it overreaches our ability to comprehend it.

Jesus seems to be saying that it is foolish to even compare our love to God's. What we call love and what He calls Love are so different that speaking of them in the same breath shows ignorance. "You cannot even give a blessing in perfect gentleness" (8:6). When we are acting from our highest motivation, there is always an admixture of ego, a little sour taint to the milk of human kindness. Our gentleness is never *perfect*.

But God's Love *is* perfect. When He gives, that is *all* He is doing. There are no strings attached, no fishing for compliments or recognition or residual gain. We may give at times, but some simultaneous getting always muddies the giving. God isn't like that, and we simply do not understand that kind of pure giving. Notice, however, that the final sentence, a question, holds out the hope that we *can* know this God of pure giving if we want to (8:7).

## Paragraph 9

### • Study Question •

9. *What does the Atonement teach us?*

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When we accept the reality of complete guiltlessness we will “live in the light of the blessing” of God (9:1). That is, we will know the God of pure giving; we will have a direct apprehension of His Love “that surpasses mere knowledge without experience” (Ephesians 3:19, Amplified Bible). Remove the guilt and the awareness of that Love, which has never left us, will come flooding back into our minds. By choosing guilt we have denied Heaven to ourselves (9:2). The Atonement is God's provision to undo that mistake.

Traditional Christian theology teaches that sin and separation are real, and that some price must be paid to atone, or make up for, that sin. It teaches that Jesus paid that price by his death on the cross. In that thought system, Atonement means the payment made to reestablish our communion with God. In the Course's thought system sin and separation are figments of our imagination, and therefore nothing need be done to make up for it. There is no price to be paid. In this thought system, Atonement is simply the declaration of eternal innocence, and accepting the Atonement means recognizing the immaculate innocence of all of God's creation. Atonement is thus the way back to a place we never really left.

The distinction Jesus makes here is interesting. Atonement is a corrective device. It countermands our assertion of guilt, and declares our “true condition” (9:3), which is guiltless. It concerns our condition, not our nature or God's. We do not *need* to be taught about our true nature or the nature of God because we already *know* it, although that knowledge has been blocked (9:4). By teaching us to remove the blocks to knowledge, the Holy Spirit restores that knowledge to our awareness (9:5). But it isn't anything we have to learn; when guilt goes, the knowledge will simply be there (see 2:5–7). We won't learn it; we'll *remember* it.

## Paragraph 10

### • Study Question •

*10. What two reasons are given why God can communicate only with the Holy Spirit, and vice versa?*

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This paragraph says that communication between us (while we are still identified with ego) and God can take place only through the Holy Spirit, and that everything else in our minds (any part of mind that is not the Holy Spirit) must be unreal because it is not in communication with God, and therefore has never existed (10:3–5).

When two beings are completely different from one another and yet “each perceives the other as like himself” (10:2), they cannot communicate. Imagine, if you will, a thief and a scrupulously honest man trying to talk. The thief imagines the honest man to be a thief; the honest man thinks the thief is honest. Everything that either one says will be misinterpreted and misunderstood because there is a fundamental misunderstanding of each other's nature. If the thief says, “I would like to have that car,” the honest man will

suppose he intends to buy it while the thief is figuring out how to steal it. If the honest man says, "I would like to have that car," the thief will be sure he means to steal it.

Jesus is saying that we are in a position like that vis-à-vis God. We think that God is like us, a mixture of good and evil; God *knows* that in reality we are like Him. So, just as God's unadulterated Love is inconceivable to us, our guilt is incomprehensible to Him. To reach our true Self God must speak through the Holy Spirit, Who remembers the truth about us and yet resides in our mind. And when we pray to God, our prayers go through the Holy Spirit for the same reason (10:3-4). I always think of the Holy Spirit as a kind of transformer, converting A/C to D/C and vice versa.

Thus, our minds communicate with God only through the part of mind indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Since "communication with God is life" (10:6), nothing else in your mind exists (10:5). Of course this includes what seems, to us, to be the mountain of guilt and self-doubt we have accumulated over our lifetime, and perhaps over many lifetimes. Thus, we are being told that guilt, and the part of our mind that believes in guilt, simply isn't real and cannot possibly exist. Although that is an amazing declaration and difficult to reconcile with what our experience seems to tell us, it does make sense. Life consists of a connection to God and an exchange of life force via that connection. Anything that does not have that connection is not alive, and therefore does not exist as a living being. That seems evident.

Guilt, however, presupposes a *separation* between God and us. No connection, no flow of life force. However, nothing could exist separate from God. Therefore, guilt simply isn't possible. As difficult as it may be for our minds to accept that, that is where we must begin. The impossibility of guilt needs to become a presupposition upon which we reconstruct our entire thought system; then, we will arrive at the truth.

• **Study Question** •

*11. List all the ways this section describes our function in the Atonement, and attempt to relate these different descriptions to a common meaning.*

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## Answer Key

1. 1. Seeing guiltlessness in others is how we see guiltlessness in ourselves.
2. 2. We cannot realize that we are still one with God until guilt goes.
3. 3. A
4. 4. When we forgive someone we are giving God our recognition of His guiltless Son. In exchange, we will experience God's forgiving us.
5. 5. Because we have decided to abandon our function in Heaven, all our decisions here, when made by ourselves, serve to reinforce guilt instead of affirming innocence. Our function here is to escape from guilt by helping others escape theirs. The Holy Spirit knows our function and how to fulfill it; if we give all our decisions to Him He will guide us in all things to release others from their guilt, and by so doing, to learn of our own innocence.
6. 6. D
7. 7. In order to know God, we must recognize the guiltlessness of the Son of God, which includes us all.
8. 8. We fail to understand God's Love because:
  9. a. God's Love has no parallel in the world.
  10. b. Nothing on earth can be compared to It.
  11. c. We have never felt any love that even resembles God's Love for us.
  12. d. Even when we are giving a blessing, our motives are always at least slightly impure.
  13. e. Our giving is always mixed with something else so we cannot understand unmixed Love.
14. 9. How to remove our blocks to knowledge. How to see past our denial of guiltlessness. The true condition of the Son of God (guiltless).
15. 10. The Holy Spirit is the only being that understands both God and us.
16. 11. Our function is:
  - To accept guiltlessness in others and in myself; to attain the state of guiltlessness.
  - To use the Atonement by learning to forgive.
  - Loving in a loveless world.
  - To decide against deciding what I want, in recognition that I do not know.

My function is to attain the state of guiltlessness. I can do this by forgiving others, by acknowledging the guiltlessness in them. In using the Atonement in forgiving others, I come to know it for myself. To forgive thus is the expression of love in this world. In order to fulfill this function, I must recognize that I do not know what I want, and give all my decisions over to the Holy Spirit, Who will always decide in accord with my function, or with what I am.