

Class #113

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 13, Section XI

This section is perhaps the strongest statement of reassurance in the Course; it can be characterized by the statement, “There is no chance that Heaven will not be yours” (8:9). After the long look at our fear of redemption, our dark belief in the blackness of our own hearts, the insidious way that guilt has wormed its way into the very core of our beliefs about ourselves, and after the lengthy picture of our journey out of fear, to true perception, which still lies short of knowledge and of Heaven, Jesus seems to recognize that we need some strong words of encouragement telling us that, however great the obstacles may seem, we can be *certain* of reaching the goal.

Paragraphs 1 & 2

• Study Question •

1. *We experience ourselves “in conflict and ravaged by a cruel war” (1:2), with our peace of mind relentlessly attacked by guilt. What realization will enable us to see our freedom (see also T-14.III.13:4, 5)?*

The ego deals with a threat to peace of mind with escape (1:1). It tries to run from it. We’re all too familiar with this pattern. We escape into movies, novels, TV, work, drugs, extreme sports, and sex. These things, licit or illicit, serve to dull and mask the mental pain of guilt. Some escape into unconsciousness; a few even think suicide will bring them relief. We have invented a myriad of ways to avoid guilt, none of which work. Much of our lives is spent trying, in one way or another, to free ourselves from our struggle with guilt.

When paragraph 1 speaks about our belief that we are at war, we have to ask ourselves: Who are we at war with? One opponent in this war is real, but one is not (1:4). We may suppose that God is the real power, and we are the unreal one, but a more careful look (with a peek at the next paragraph, particularly 2:1) will help us to realize that it is the Son of God who is real, and an imaginary vengeful God who is unreal. Guilt is terrifying because we imagine that God is angry and wants to punish us (see also WpI.170.10; WpI.196.5:1–5,10:5; and M-17.5:7–9). We think we are at war with God, but God isn’t interested in battle (2:1). “The war is gone” (2:3). As the Apostle Paul once wrote, “Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?” (Romans 8:33–34, NASB). “God is not angry” (T16.V.12:7). Instead, He is the one who is on our side, and “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). How can we possibly lose sleep over a non-existent battle with a

God Who loves us with an endless love? (2:2). All it takes to free ourselves from the battle is the realization that God does not condemn us (1:4).

We cannot possibly free ourselves from guilt, but the good news is that we don't have to because God already did it (2:4–5). He did it by never condemning us in the first place. God did not start a war, and we *cannot* start one (2:6). If what God creates is eternal, then it cannot be destroyed. Hell is therefore impossible. Sentence 7 echoes the Text Introduction (T-In.2:2); the fundamental indestructibility of creation is the foundation of our freedom. Because of it, there is no war, no guilt, and no past, and there never has been (2:8).

• **Study Question** •

2. *What two things does paragraph 2 say we did not make?*

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Paragraphs 3 & 4

• **Study Question** •

3. *This paragraph makes a dramatic contrast between “here” and “Heaven.” List a few of the characteristics of Heaven that are completely unlike this world.*

4. *In what does the Holy Spirit have perfect faith, and why?*

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These two paragraphs speak of our shared identity, which we will know “when we are all united in Heaven” (3:1; 4:1–2). There is clearly some sense in which the individual self with which each of us identifies will cease to be a factor in Heaven. Lesson 93 in the Workbook tells us that the self we believe we are simply does not exist (WpI.93.5:1–5). Our reality is a shared reality. As we read in the previous section, individual salvation does not exist: “It is not shared, and so it is not real” (T13.X.2:10). As of now, our entire outlook on life, the world, and God is based on our individuality. We relate to all else as something outside of our self. That separateness and isolation isn't real, according to the Course.

We simply cannot begin to imagine what the peace of Heaven is like (3:13), because all of our imagining is done from the perspective of the separate self. We have no concept of what it will mean to be identified with a shared Self; while we are in this world we never will know that. Imagine for a moment, as best you can, what it would be like to know the reality of our shared Self. In this world we tend to value things that benefit our individual self in some way; in Heaven, such things will hold no value for us at all (3:1).

Our belief in the reality of our separate self is a primary cause of our anxiety in this world (4:1). The peace of Heaven is what it is because it is wholly shared, but everything in this world is fragmented into separated parts. If peace is what we are seeking, therefore, we cannot find it in the things of the world, which is why we need to learn to shift our sense of values from earth to Heaven (3:1–7).

Note the parallel in these two paragraphs between what is wholly shared and what is wholly valued. It seems to imply that if something cannot be completely shared, it has no value, which certainly agrees with the line from T-13.X that I quoted above. Something that is not real obviously has no value. Since sharing is what makes real things real, what cannot be shared has no value. If you think about it, nothing in this world can be perfectly shared, equally with everyone. Physical things simply cannot be shared in that way. The only realm where total sharing is possible is on the level of mind (T-6.V(A).3:2). One aspect of what the Course is doing is shifting our sense of value from the physical world to the invisible world of spirit (T-1.I.17,20,29).

The very nature of this world fosters a sense of ambivalence in us. We are in some kind of love/hate relationship with nearly everyone and everything when we relate from the perspective of the individual self. I may love my new car because of its sleek lines, the comfort of its seats, and the efficiency with which it transports me where I want to go. But if my car is too nice, some people will judge me for having it; some people will hate me for having it because I have it and they do not. The very things that give the car value, on the one hand, may be seen as embarrassing excess in another context. I love the house I live in for what it provides for me, but I hate it when I have to clean the gutters, or when it costs thousands of dollars to repaint, or when the heating bill goes through the roof.

As hard as it may be to comprehend, nothing in Heaven evokes such conflicted feelings (3:8–9). “Conflicted” is the key word. The ambivalence with which we respond to the world of separation keeps us in constant turmoil, pulled one way and pushed another. It is the total *absence* of such ambivalence in Heaven that establishes its unimaginable peace.

We are in the process of perfecting perception, which brings us gradually to a clear understanding of the contrast between what is shared and what is not shared (4:2,4). A retrained perception can facilitate our transition to the shared self, even while we still live in separate bodies (4:3). The Holy Spirit is guiding us to look past what is physically visible, including people’s appearance and their faults, to perceive what is physically invisible, but much more real: the divinely created Self we all share. That is the mission God gave to Him, and He does not doubt His eventual success (4:5–7), despite the seeming stubborn resistance we display to His teaching. Eventually our valuing of this world will die away, and our valuing of Heaven will increase and strengthen until it is unwavering. If God decreed that He do this job, there can be no doubt that He will do it.

The way the Holy Spirit relates to us can be our model in relating to each other. In His faith in us we can see the very overlooking of our faults and failings that we are being taught to manifest. Just as He trusts that we will inevitably choose truth over error, we need to develop that same faith in each person we relate with. Each one has the Holy Spirit in them. Therefore, He will make the choice for them just as He will make it for us. “To doubt this would be to doubt that His mission will be fulfilled” (4:6).

Paragraph 5

• Study Question •

5. (a) *What is the mission given to the Holy Spirit by God?*
(b) *Why can this mission not fail?*

The core argument of this section, in sentence 4:7 and in this paragraph, is that what God wills, and the tasks He assigns (whether to the Holy Spirit or to us), *must* be accomplished, simply because God is God. If God's Will cannot fail to be accomplished, then none of us can fail to awaken to full enlightenment—because that is His Will for us (5:1–3).

The injunction to each of us, when we suffer from “doubt and guilt” (5:1), is to remember that God wills our salvation and that His Will cannot fail. Our own weakness is a non-issue (W-pI.42.1:2–5; W-pI.47:5:3–6:2). If we are able to overlook our own apparent weakness and to rest our gaze on God's strength and fidelity, our doubts will be quashed. (Lesson 92 in the Workbook gives an extended discussion of what it means to look past our own weakness to the strength of God within us.)

So our screw-ups don't matter, no matter how overwhelming and unfixable they may seem to be. “God's Will *is* done” (5:4), not “will be” but “is.” I am so comforted by these words every time I read them! There are times when I have despaired of my own salvation. There are times when I have been quite sure of having heard the Holy Spirit telling me where to go, what to do, or what to say, and knowing that I deliberately chose to ignore Him; I preferred what my ego was saying. I gave in to the illusion of earthly satisfaction; I valued what I cannot keep instead of what I cannot lose. Or, I was afraid to do what He advised; I doubted His word; I didn't even think I could do it and so never even tried.

Have you had moments like that? If so, be comforted! Your unworthy “reactions to the Holy Spirit's Voice” have not nullified the Will of God. His Will was done before you reacted and His Will is done after you reacted. “He does not change His Mind” (5:5). Everything He chose to give you in creation still belongs to you, including the peace of God (5:6). We are being asked to remember the unvarying nature of what was given to us in creation, which is the basis of the true freedom from guilt that is celebrated throughout this chapter.

Paragraph 6

• Study Question •

6. *What is the purpose of contrast and differences in this world?*

The learning process we are presently engaged in and surrounded by is rife with choices between things of varying value, and the appearance and disappearance of transient things. Even people come and go. The variety of our experiences is meant to

teach us what is truly valuable to us and what is not (6:3). Once our lesson has been learned, however, we will no longer need these object lessons (6:2,4). In fact, we won't even remember them! (6:1). We will be so wrapped up in a direct experience of truth that nothing else will enter our minds.

In the meantime, however, we need to accept the constant barrage of choices between things that seem to be of varying value, in the interest of learning that nothing purely of this world really matters at all. What matters is our true nature. What matters is spirit. What matters is what God created, and nothing we have made is worth anything, to us or to anyone else. The vicissitudes of daily life are meant to teach us that lesson, and that is their only value.

When we have learned what we do not want, what we do want will make itself known to us (6:5). We won't need to seek truth; it will seek us. Truth is so supremely valuable that we will have no need to weigh its worth against the value of anything else. Once we connect to the truth we are hooked on it. We *will* reach a point at which we want nothing but the truth (6:7). If reaching that point is God's Will for us, and it surely is, then we will reach it (6:8-9).

Meanwhile, we can patiently go through our learning process, knowing that the outcome is foreordained (M-4.VIII.1:1). To me, the primary purpose of a section like this is to foster such a patient faith. Without that, the learning will be impeded. The more patient we are, the more quickly we will learn.

Paragraph 7

• Study Question •

7. (a) *What one thing are we asked to have faith in?*
- (b) *What is your personal response to this paragraph; what does it mean to you?*

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If we think of the final destination of faith as being in Heaven, then surely God must want that for us. Certainly He does not will for us to go to hell! During my days in traditional Christian churches, I often struggled with questions about this issue. How could a loving God send anyone to hell? If God wills for everyone to be with Him in Heaven, how could the will of an almighty God ever be thwarted by the devil? How could it be that only a small minority, a "remnant," would be saved? Eventually I came to what seems to be the only logical conclusions: A loving God would never send anyone to hell. His Will cannot be thwarted, and therefore there is no devil. Not just a remnant, but every last aspect of creation will be (and in fact already is) saved.

Sentence 1 tells us that faith in this truth is all we need. We may wonder, "All we need *for what?*" I believe Jesus means that this one confidence is all we need to be patient with the learning process, no matter how long it takes, no matter how huge the obstacles, no matter how great our resistance. As long as we remember that God's Will, which is immutable, is that we be in Heaven, nothing that seems to get in the way, nothing that threatens to keep us in darkness, and no perceived weakness in ourselves,

can keep us out! We *will* get there (7:2–3). No matter what, we *will* achieve enlightenment.

I think we all have had nightmares of self-doubt when it comes to the spiritual life. In our first exposure to spiritual ideas, it all seems so wonderful! But then, as we begin to recognize the depths to which the ego has sunk its roots, we start to despair: Will we ever make it? Will we ever transcend our ego? The Course offers wonderful assurance in response to such doubts. It tells us they “mean nothing” (7:2). If God wills to remove the barriers our egos have placed between Him and us, those barriers are *history* (7:4–6). It does not matter how imposing those barriers seem to be; our union with God exists now, has always existed, and will forever exist, and every one of us—including the person you are most dubious about, perhaps yourself—will enjoy the full awareness of that glorious communion and communication with God reported by the greatest saints and sages. Those saints and sages were simply among the first to rediscover the truth of what belongs to us all, an inheritance that is promised and underwritten by God Himself.

Paragraph 8

• Study Question •

8. *God is constantly radiating His peace to us. How can we learn that this peace is still in us?*

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The Holy Spirit is God’s covert secret agent (8:1). He works within our minds, which are clouded by the ego, bringing us constantly toward clarity. Our belief that separation from God is desirable can block out the constant outflow of God’s peace, so that we are unaware of it although we “have it now” (8:2,4–5). Yet, because of the Holy Spirit we “cannot be wholly closed and separated from” God (8:3).

The way that we become aware of the already-present peace is by *using* it, which means extending it to others (8:6). As we have already noticed, this is the primary lesson the Course seems to be teaching in this chapter: Extension is the way. This paragraph refers to us as “His channels of reaching out” (8:3). That clearly implies that you and I are the means through which God extends Himself. We are the agents through whom He carries out His Will, and unless there is some power capable of overthrowing the Will of God, we *will* be those agents, carrying out His Will and expressing His Being throughout the universe. We will be in Heaven, and Heaven will flow through us (8:9).

The final sentence of the paragraph is one of my favorites: I love the words “no chance” (8:9). Will I fail to awaken to God? No chance! Will I fail to express God’s Love adequately? No chance! Will my ego keep me forever bogged down in spiritual mediocrity? No chance!

Paragraph 9

• Study Question •

9. *What does this paragraph say about your darkest nightmare?*

The lesson of extension is driven home even further here (9:1). The way to be saved is to learn how to save others. That is “the lesson of awaking” that Jesus promises we will learn (9:6). We saw this lesson spelled out in an earlier section: We learn to awaken by waking others (T9.VI.5:1–3). We cannot avoid learning this lesson (9:2). We may fight and kick and scream, we may try to substitute other ways to find salvation, but this is the only way there is (T13.X.10:1–2; WpII.256.1:1–2). God wills salvation for everyone; learning this lesson is the only way to be saved; therefore, everyone will learn to extend God’s peace to others and to help them awaken to their own divine inheritance.

The “darkest nightmare” cannot keep us from awakening. That is true for you, for me, and for everyone we encounter. Some of us have pretty dark nightmares, too! I recently talked with a young man I’ve known since he was born, with whom I’d been out of touch for about six years. He was a bright, intelligent youngster with a spiritual orientation. When he was sixteen, he played a key role in introducing me to “A Course in Miracles.” But as he entered his twenties he became troubled and plagued with uncertainties.

I learned that over the past several years, he has spent six months homeless, on the streets. He experienced a major psychotic break. He was diagnosed with multiple psychiatric disorders and is taking medication for his problems, probably for the rest of his life (unless a miracle intervenes). He is currently living on disability. As I listened to his litany of woes, I felt overwhelmed and very nearly hopeless. I did feel that there was utterly nothing I could say or do that would help him, except to accept him as a human being worthy of my attention and my love.

Jesus is reassuring us that even nightmares of this magnitude hold no power over us. My young friend “will learn the lesson of awaking” (9:6). And so will I.

Paragraph 10

• Study Question •

10. *What added reason for certainty and assurance does this paragraph give?*

As if the assurance of God’s immutable Will, the imperative teaching mission of the Holy Spirit, the unbroken link between us and God, and God’s own certain knowledge were not enough, this paragraph offers yet another reason for certainty: Within each of us there is an irresistible “call to waken” (10:1). This is another aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit (T-5.II.2:2). I’ve noticed that, in my worst moments of turning away from God, I simply can’t be happy in doing it. There is in my heart an undying attraction to God. This, to me, seems like the reserve anchor that holds me from drifting too far away. Even when my mind has been filled with rebellion, something in my heart was saying,

“No, I cannot give up God!”

We simply can't get rid of this inner attraction; it's God's homing beacon. It's an inner compass that always points to God, no matter what we do. We cannot rid ourselves of it (10:2).

Perhaps a better analogy than homing beacon or compass is an alarm clock. After all, this is something that is calling us to wake up! Not long ago I began using a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant, or handheld computer). One of its neat features is the ability to set appointments or “to do” items with alarms, which can be anything from a few gentle beeps to a raucous, seemingly endless rendition of the theme from “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” Many different programs offer the ability to set alarms, and being the techno-geek that I am, I downloaded all of them from the Internet and tried them out. At one point I had an alarm that had somehow been mistakenly set at midnight. It went off every night after I had fallen asleep, and for days I could not find what program was triggering it. Finally, I found it, and I was able to turn it off. We cannot, however, turn off the Holy Spirit! We may think that spiritually we can sleep through anything, but this is an alarm that will even wake the dead.

Heaven is ours whether we know it or not (10:5–6), and whether or not, at the moment, we want it! If we don't want it, we don't know we have it; we are still learning to realize not only that we want Heaven, but that Heaven is *everything* we want. It is our will. Then, we will know we have it (10:7).

Paragraph 11

• Study Question •

11. (a) *What is the reconciliation the ego attempts to offer us, and by contrast, what is the reconciliation offered to us by the Holy Spirit?*
- (b) *What is the inevitable outcome of the ego's program?*

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Opposites cannot be reconciled (T-3.VII.6; T-10.IV.1:1–2), although that is what the ego is constantly trying to do (11:1). It teaches us that somehow death is part of life. It contends that we have to accept sickness and limitation as our lot in life. It tries to make its illusions as real as God's reality. The ego's kind of reconciliation consists of compromise. The Holy Spirit overthrows all such concepts, which are doomed to failure (11:3–4).

The Holy Spirit's reconciliation does not try to bring opposites together; it realigns us with sanity and peace (11:2). It does not *make* us compatible with truth and peace; it *reveals* our inherent compatibility. This kind of reconciliation is certain to succeed, as this section has constantly hammered home (11:3). God's plans never fail; the ego's plans always fail (11:4–5). God's plan is to save everyone, so everyone will be saved (11:5).

Therefore, “you will be released” (11:6). End of story. Let's all take a deep breath and repeat those words to ourselves, using “I” instead of “you.” Repeat them a dozen times or so until they begin to sink in just a little bit.

When God releases us from our illusions, we will not even remember them (11:6). Our peace in Heaven will not be marred by any memory of the pain we have made for ourselves; “God Himself shall wipe away all tears” (WpII.301.Title). All these things never existed in reality, and so there is nothing in them to be remembered (11:7). Our minds will be filled instead “with truth, and only truth” (11:8). We will recognize the reality of what is real, and nothing else, which consists of what God created or what we created with Him. These are the things that are eternal, and that are shared. There is no conflict in them and they have no opposite. It is in learning to value only these things that we find our peace.

Summary

• Study Suggestion •

12. Make a list of the ten most reassuring sentences or phrases from this section.

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Answer Key

1. The realization that one of the combatants in the “war” is imaginary; that is, that guilt is completely unreal and has no justification.
2. Our freedom or any real threat to it.
3. Heaven has completely different values. There is no question about what to value or how much to value it; there is no duality in Heaven, and therefore no opposites to choose between. There is no darkness, no contrast, no variation, no interruption; just constant, unimaginably deep peace.
4. He has perfect faith that our final choice will be for union with Christ, rather than a separate ego. His faith in that outcome is based upon His knowledge that He, Himself, will be responsible for it.
5. (a) To eradicate doubt and guilt from our minds.
(b) Because nothing can impede God’s Will.
6. They help us identify what is desirable and what is undesirable; they teach us that truth is all that we want.
7. (a) That God wills for us to be in Heaven, and nothing can keep us from it.
(b) (Opinion) The paragraph gives me tremendous comfort and reassurance that all the things I am afraid will keep me from Heaven cannot do so.
8. By allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us how to use peace, and how to extend it to others.
9. It has no power over me.
10. The call to awaken that has been placed within us. We cannot lose something that is part of us. What is more, that something is broadcasting an irresistible and inescapable wake-up call.
11. (a) The ego tries to reconcile truth and falsehood. The Holy Spirit reconciles us to truth; He undoes our faith in lies and illusions.
(b) The ego’s program will inevitably fail; God’s will succeed.
12. Summary: Ten reassuring sentences or phrases. This is just my selection, more than ten:

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| • 4:5 | • 5:3 | • 7:1 | • 8:4-5 |
| • 5:1-2 | • 5:4-5 | • 7:2-3 | • 8:9 |
| | • 6:8-9 | • 7:6-7 | • 9:2-6 |

- 10:2-6
- 11:4-6