

Our Gratitude to God

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Part XX

"It Can Be But My Gratitude I Earn" (W-pl.197) (conclusion)

Returning to Lesson 197 we read:

(W-pl.197.2:2-3) Deny your strength, and weakness must become salvation to you. See yourself as bound, and bars become your home.

If I believe that I am a prisoner and my mind has no power, then my home—the body—in fact does become a prison. The Course says the body "is a limit on love . . . it was made to limit the unlimited" (T-18.III.1.2-3). In other words, the ego took love and stuck it in a prison, the body being the bars, and our mind choosing to identify with the ego, the jail keeper. The entire thing rests on the premise that we are bound. We put ourselves there; but the reality is that we are not imprisoned and are not chained to that left-hand chair that the ego sits in. No one is holding us there except our own thought system, our belief that we have no power. Once we remember that we have power, we simply pick ourselves up and go back to the middle chair. That is all we have to do. It is that simple.

(W-pl.197.2:4) Nor will you leave the prison house, or claim your strength, until guilt and salvation are not seen as one, and freedom and salvation are perceived as joined, with strength beside them, to be sought and claimed, and found and fully recognized.

We have to be able to tell the difference between the ego's and the Holy Spirit's plan for salvation. The ego's plan is for salvation from God's Love, and what keeps us from God's Love is guilt and our never questioning the basic premise that it is true. The way we keep ourselves safe from God's Love and out of His clutches is to keep ourselves guilty. Then we keep ourselves from experiencing the pain of our guilt, now that we have made it real, by denying it in ourselves and projecting it onto others.

That is the ego's plan. Guilt saves us from love, and attack saves us from guilt. Then defense saves us from counterattack. This is a brilliant system—a little stupid, but brilliant. It is stupid because it does not accomplish what the ego tells us it will; but it is brilliant in terms of the ego's real goal, which is to keep us in prison, to keep us guilty and fearful, and above all, to keep us away from God's Love.

What we need, then, is a thought system that corrects our thought system. Our thought system tells us that guilt and salvation are one and the same, so we need another thought system—what the Course is giving us—that tells us guilt and salvation are not the same. Salvation and freedom are the same, salvation and guiltlessness are the same, salvation and gratitude are the same, but not salvation and guilt. This means learning how to dis-identify or step aside from the ego's thought system and identify with the Holy Spirit's thought system.

(W-pl.197.3:1-2) The world must thank you when you offer it release from your illusions. Yet your thanks belong to you as well, for its release can only mirror yours.

When I can release you by not reinforcing your ego thought system, which I do when I forgive you, then you would feel grateful to me. This would be a legitimate expression of gratitude. If we are having a fight and you are caught in your ego and I in mine, and I suddenly change my mind, then I have ended the battle. If I can recognize that this whole thing is silly—I do not want to be on this battlefield anymore, and we are not on a battlefield at all—then I have ended the battle, because it takes two to have a fight. When I end the battle, I am giving you a message, reminding you that you can make the same choice. When you choose to identify with what I have done, with the love and peace that is now coming through me, there is a part of you that would then feel grateful.

Let me read a prayer-like passage from the text that nicely expresses this. It is from "The Happy Dream" (T-18.V.6-7). In these two paragraphs Jesus is giving us a way out of the problem of being caught in a relationship where there is a lot of fear, and following from that, a lot of guilt, attack, and counterattack. In addition to the theme of gratitude, these passages express the fact that you and I are not different and that we must be the same. If I am guilty, then I am making you guilty; and if I am fearful, I am going to see you as fearful, but I am going to try to deny that that is the case. The ego tells me that we are different, and therefore it is possible for you to be guilty and I innocent. The fact of the matter is that if I am guilty and project my guilt onto you, we are both guilty in my mind. By the same token, if I can forgive you, then both of us are forgiven. It is impossible that I could have a feeling without believing you have the same feeling.

(T-18.V.6:1) When you feel the holiness of your relationship is threatened by anything, stop instantly and offer the Holy Spirit your willingness, in spite of fear, to let Him exchange this instant for the holy one that you would rather have.

One important idea expressed in this passage is that it takes two people to have a fight, but it only takes one person to heal. Thus, if I am in a relationship with you and things are really getting out of hand, and we both are angry, depressed, fearful, anxious, and at each other's throats, I just have to realize what is happening. I do not have to realize it for you; I just have to realize it for me—that I have gotten caught in the battleground again, and believe this relationship is a battlefield.

In a later passage where Jesus is describing some of this kind of insanity, he says this is not an army; it is a madhouse (T-21.VII.3:13). What is going on with us is not reality; it makes no sense; and it is not really a battle. The whole thing is insane because I believe you are my problem, and you believe I am your problem. We just fight and try to steal from each other what we believe will save us. And of course, what happens is that both of us remain condemned and imprisoned. At the moment that happens, and I can come to my right mind and realize this is not what I want, I offer the Holy Spirit my little willingness (T-18.IV). That means a little willingness to step back and look at what is going on. I do not have to change it. I do not have to try to change you. I do not try to change my thoughts or my reactions. I just look at what is going on, and if I am looking, it is not my ego that is looking with me. If I am really looking at what is going on, and am honest about it, I have already lifted myself above the battleground to look back down on it. When I lift myself above the battleground, it can only be the Holy Spirit or Jesus Who is looking with me, because the ego is not above the battleground. Obviously, the ego *is* the battleground.

The minute I stop and offer the Holy Spirit my willingness instead of fear, I have already exchanged my fear for His love, my attack on you for His forgiveness. What I am doing then is saying I have a choice in this matter. I cannot necessarily change what you are doing or not doing, but I can certainly change the way I am looking at you and what is going on. When I do that, what I am really doing is getting up from the ego's chair and coming back into the middle chair, which is the part of my mind that can choose. That is all that is necessary; that is all the Course ever asks.

(T-18.V.6:2) He will never fail in this.

The reason He does not fail in this is that it is already done. The Holy Spirit does not do anything. He is simply that Presence of Love that automatically shines away the ego's darkness the minute the darkness is brought to It. The minute I bring to Him the investment I have in our fighting, and say, "Look at what I am doing; I must be afraid of Your Love," the darkness is automatically dispelled. Because I brought the fear to His Love and the darkness to His light, it must disappear. That is the meaning of this statement—that He will not fail in this. If I do not feel any better, it is not because He has failed; it is because I am still holding on to the fear, or anger, or grievance, or the judgment.

All I do is bring that to Him and say, "Oh, I am still holding on to it. No wonder I am still feeling miserable, depressed, angry, or sick—because I do not want to let it go." And that is what I bring to Him. In other words, I just keep being aware of what my ego is doing, what my ego is choosing. But the part of me that is aware of it is no longer the ego. That is what is crucial in all of this.

(T-18.V.6:3) But forget not that your relationship is one, and so it must be that whatever threatens the peace of one is an equal threat to the other.

Within my mind it cannot be that you and I are different. This is not talking about what is going on in *your* mind, but about what is going on in *my* mind. If I feel threatened, then I must believe you are threatened. Again, this has nothing to do with you. It has to do only with *my perception of you*. It cannot be that I see you any differently from the way I see myself, or that I see Jesus or God any differently from the way I see myself. That is what Jesus means in "The Obstacles to Peace" when he says:

Let me be to you the symbol of the end of guilt, and look upon your brother as you would look on me. Forgive me all the sins you think the Son of God committed [which would be us, ourselves]. And in the light of your forgiveness he will remember who he is, and forget what never was. I ask for your forgiveness, for if you are guilty, so must I be (T-19.IV-B.6:1-4).

Obviously, Jesus does not mean that he is guilty because of his own thoughts. It means that in *our* mind, if we perceive ourselves as guilty, we must see Jesus as guilty, too: by giving him our guilt, we thereby magically think we become guiltless. It cannot be any other way. That is why the world hates him—because we hate ourselves. So in our mind, not only are we imprisoned in this world, but he is imprisoned in this world with us. In my mind, if I am guilty, sinful, and there is something terrible in me, it must be that Jesus took my innocence from me, which means he is now as guilty as I am. It cannot be, within my ego system, that he is the same as I am. He must be different from the ego system. So if I am guilty, he must be the light of innocence. If he is the light of innocence, and I am guilty, it must be that he took it from me. Therefore, he is as guilty as I am. Therefore, if I hate myself, I must hate him. If I believe in suffering and sacrifice, I must believe he believes in suffering and sacrifice. But then I forget I am the one who believes it, and I blame it on him.

My ego will always try to have me believe we are different, but the truth is we are the same. I then blot out, or deny, or repress the fact that I am the one who believes that. Now it is Jesus, or St. Paul, or God who believes in suffering and sacrifice, not me. Then Jesus says in the next line:

But if I surmounted guilt and overcame the world, you were with me (T-19.IV-B.6:5).

However, when I see him as the light of shining innocence, and recognize that we are the same, then I must be the light of innocence, too. What he has done I also have done, because minds are joined. The way I perceive him is the way I perceive myself. The way I perceive myself is the way I perceive him.

Would you see in me the symbol of guilt or the end of guilt, remembering that what I signify to you you see within yourself? (T-19.IV-B.6:6)

Again, what we believe about Jesus is like a Rorschach inkblot that will tell us what we believe about ourselves, and vice versa.