



LESSON 101

God's Will for me is perfect happiness.

Sarah's Commentary:

Jesus explains to us in this Lesson that if sin were indeed real, punishment would be called for and our salvation would require that we suffer for what we have done. I watched an Easter parade somewhere in South America. They were walking without shirts and beating each other on the back, drawing blood as part of their penance, believing that by this act of Atonement, they were demonstrating their love for Jesus and their willingness to suffer on behalf of what they believed he went through. Here Jesus says, **"Who would seek out such savage punishment?"** (W.101.4.1) Would we ever want to turn to a God who smiled approvingly on such self-sacrifice? Why do we insist on accepting the self-flagellation that we undertake when we crucify ourselves? No, we don't draw blood by physically beating on ourselves, but we do believe that we must be punished for what we have done wrong, and we crucify ourselves unmercifully with our self-attacking thoughts. We judge ourselves harshly for our perceived "sins," and we judge others equally. The ego seems to smile approvingly on such self-punishment, seeing it as appropriate penance for our "sins."

We believe Atonement can only come by satisfying God's need for vengeance. This is not the God Jesus talks about in the Course. This is the god of the ego. When we listen to the voice of the ego, it tells us that we deserve punishment for what we have done in leaving God and stealing His treasure. We are not unlike the Prodigal Son who stole his father's treasure and was afraid to go home and face him and believed he deserved to be punished for what he did.

We have established our separate self on God's demise. Thus, we believe Oneness has been destroyed, and God has been killed for us to exist. The ego has convinced us that we have committed a horrendous sin, and if we could see the extent of our guilt, we would want to die by our own hand. All who walk this world hold this belief. There is no question in our minds that sin and guilt always call for punishment. Through punishment, we think we are atoning for sin and thus making it all good with God. Basically, we hope the really guilty perpetrators in this world will be the ones severely punished. Now God can see how, in comparison to them, we did our best in a savage world. From this perspective, our salvation must be purchased. We have to pay a dear price in suffering, pain, victimization, and ultimately death. **"The sinful warrant only death and pain, and it is this they ask for. For they know it waits for them, and it will seek them out and find them somewhere, sometime, in some form that evens the account they owe to God."** (W.101.2.4-5)

To see this clearly, we need to look at our lives. Can you see how our lives are centered on so many experiences of pain and suffering? We attempt to avoid pain and distract from our suffering as much as possible, yet it is impossible for any of us to escape it. Our fear of God's punishment made up the world. We made up this world and the self we identify with in order to hide from God and avoid His punishment. Thus, the world of separation is where we hide from His love because we

fear that, in the experience of His love, we will be annihilated. Now we punish ourselves, seeing ourselves as limited and lacking instead, hoping in the end that we will have suffered enough and thus atoned for our sin. Jesus says that God does not want this for us. He wants us to release our fears and our self-attacks by looking at them with him and recognizing we have been mistaken and have done nothing to deserve punishment.

It is important to understand the metaphysics of the Course, because otherwise our ego insanity will never get exposed. Without this teaching, our lives here as bodies and personalities, seemingly living in the world, appear to be very real and solid to us. We do our best to live with the pain and suffering and celebrate our periods of respite. In the end, we hope that we have been good enough and God will punish all those bad people out there, but not us, since we have adequately punished ourselves. We make efforts to be as good as we can be, atoning as much as possible for our mistakes.

Regardless of how much we try, we can't evade the end, which is death. The ego has tried to convince us that we will be safe in the body and in the world, but this is entirely bogus. Why would we not run from God if death were our salvation? We look to death as the assumed bringer of peace. How could we love a God who wills our death, especially a redeeming death full of pain and suffering? Isn't that what we are afraid of? Aren't we afraid that we have to suffer to atone for what we have done wrong? We are called to look at this part of ourselves that believes in the value of sickness and suffering.

"If sin is real, salvation must be pain." (W.101.3.1) Jesus says, **"It is essential that error be not confused with sin, and it is this distinction that makes salvation possible. For error can be corrected, and the wrong made right. But sin, were it possible, would be irreversible."** (T.19.II.1.1-3) (ACIM OE T.19.III.17) **"Sin calls for punishment as error for correction, and the belief that punishment is correction is clearly insane."** (T.19.II.1.6) (ACIM OE T.19.III.17) Sin says that I have done something terrible, and now God is justified in punishing me so I can make it up to Him by my suffering.

If you are wondering if this is true for you, look at some of the ways it is expressed in our daily lives. We may feel something is too good to last; or if we are too happy, we become afraid the "other shoe would drop." Chuck Spezzano, who developed *Psychology of Vision* based on the Course, used to say in his sessions, "How good can you stand it?" Often, we don't allow the good into our lives. We sabotage ourselves. We stop ourselves from feeling "too happy." Or we may feel guilty if we are happy and someone in our lives is suffering. We feel obligated to join them in their misery, and we call this empathy.

True empathy does not mean joining with someone in his suffering. To do so is the ego's version of empathy. The Holy Spirit would teach us that suffering is not understandable and asks us not to try to join in their pain. We don't lighten it by sharing the delusion of suffering. **"Make no mistake about this maneuver; the ego always empathizes to weaken, and to weaken is always to attack."** (T.16.I.2.5) (ACIM OE T.16.I.2) To empathize from a place of strength is to **". . . merely sit quietly by and let the Holy Spirit relate through you."** (T.16.I.2.7) (ACIM OE T.16.I.2) In other words, we really don't know how to help or heal anyone. The only healer is the Holy Spirit. When we get out of the way, His Light shines through us. We will always be doing the loving thing under His guidance and not our own. When we see someone suffer, we are seeing wrongly. We are then called to heal our own misperception of who they are as limited and lacking. We are called to look beyond such appearances to the truth.

We think happiness cannot be a constant state. We believe in suffering. When I worked in juvenile detention, I saw young people mutilate their bodies. They would tell me that the pain was the only thing that made them feel like they were alive. They were so cut off from any kind of joy and were actively choosing pain in order to feel something---anything. And in many ways, we may do the same thing. We mess it up if it gets too good because we get scared. We all have some form of this self-inflicted pain because we believe we deserve punishment. Death is just further proof of God's vengeance on us for what we have done. **"An angry father pursues his guilty son. Kill or be killed, for here alone is choice. Beyond this there is none, for what was done cannot be done without. The stain of blood can never be removed, and anyone who bears this stain on him must meet with death."** (Manual for Teachers.17.7.10-13)

Aren't we afraid that if there were no sin, people would get away with murder, and without guilt people would do whatever they wanted, with no consequences? There would be no control. We have a strong investment in sin and punishment. There is no question that, within the illusion, controls are necessary. There are consequences for breaking the law, but this Course is not about behavior. It is about healing our mistaken notions of God---our fear of God---which is the final obstacle to peace. Jesus assures us constantly that God is only love. He is our refuge. Why would we be attracted to salvation if it required pain and suffering from us? Jesus keeps reminding us that God's will for us is perfect happiness. He does not want pain for us. We will know this is the case when we accept our innocence. It has always been there. We have not changed ourselves with our ideas of sin. **"Accept Atonement with an open mind, which cherishes no lingering belief that you have made a devil of God's Son."** (W.101.5.3) Let go of the idea of sin and guilt and recognize that mistakes can all be corrected. All of our misperceptions and mistaken notions of who we are can now be brought to the truth.

We are being asked today to look at how much we cherish sin in ourselves and others. Whether we blame ourselves or others, it is the same, because if we blame our brothers, it is just our self-blame and our guilt projected onto them. Forgiveness corrects our belief that sickness and suffering are the answer for us as a way to purchase our innocence, which we believe we have lost. Jesus clearly wants us to question this deeply held belief. Today, we recognize that to forgive others is our road back to forgiveness of God. We recognize that seeking happiness at the expense of our brothers only brings more guilt. Healing requires that we see our interests as the same as our brothers'. We all share the same need to heal our minds. When we see sameness in everyone, it reflects the Oneness of Heaven.

Today in our meditation practice, we go deep into the mind where we connect with the joy and happiness that are constant in us. The ego does not need to be punished and attacked in order to be subdued. Simply be willing to look at it. To resist it just strengthens the ego and makes it real; but when we connect to joy and peace, the ego has no defense. We do that by looking at our thoughts and bringing our false beliefs to the light of truth.

Knowing that God only wants happiness for me strengthens my willingness to continue on this path. I find that my determination, as well as my trust, grows through the dedicated practice of watching the mind and releasing the blocks to love. This is about being willing to take responsibility for my attack thoughts and bringing my projections back to my own mind.

When we have hurt or attacked someone, we don't have to go through a long period of remorse. Yes, we may deeply regret our actions, but instead of crucifying ourselves, we can recognize that what we have done is a mistake and not a sin. We are called to bring our misperceptions to the Holy Spirit. That is what God wills for us. That is the choice we can make. **"There is no sin; it**

has no consequence." (W.101.6.7) Jesus did not die for our sins. He only demonstrated that he did not die, and neither can we.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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