



LESSON 198

Only my condemnation injures me.

Sarah's Commentary:

Once again we see a Lesson that emphasizes our responsibility for what we feel, whether it is gratitude or injury. This Lesson affirms that we are not the victim of this world. In fact, the world can have no power over us, except that which we give it. No one can take our peace away. If we blame anyone for taking our peace, we need to recognize that we have actually chosen to throw it away. We justify our decision to do so by insisting that someone else is responsible for taking it from us. Isn't it hopeful to know the decision for peace rests with us? The power is in our own minds to choose Heaven or hell. Today, the Lesson is again about forgiveness, but we must remember that we only forgive what has not really happened, meaning we forgive our belief that there is a world outside of our own minds.

When all the blocks to love have been healed through forgiveness, we "**perceive no more.**" (W.198.12.5) God takes the last step to bring us home, where there is only a state of Oneness with our Father. We could experience this now, but we don't because of our fear of our Father's love. Undoing this fear is a process of bringing our blocks to the light. Jesus exhorts us to be content with healing by forgiving all our brothers without exception because that is the way we become attuned to reality. "**The Holy Spirit knows your part in the redemption, and who are seeking you and where to find them. Knowledge is far beyond your individual concern.**" (T.13.VIII.7.3-4) (ACIM OE T.13.II.7) We are to be content with our role in the redemption and not be concerned with goals for which we are not yet ready. We still have guilt to heal. We still have judgments to release or we would not be here. We still value our separation because we still value our existence, our specialness, and our uniqueness. While we still hold onto this image of ourselves, we will resist love. "**Now you must learn that only infinite patience produces immediate effects.**" (T.5.VI.12.1) (ACIM OE T.5.VIII.81)

The guilt we are holding onto is due to our belief that we have sinned in separating from creation in the first place. Sin reminds us that we are separate, and separation affirms that we exist. There would be no existence without it. The end of separation does not depend on time. The end of separation can come today, as it is within our power to choose to end it. How far we open the door depends on how much fear we have. Our fear shows up as resistance. Remember the first Lesson of the Holy Spirit, which is "**To have, give all to all.**" (T.6.V.A.) (ACIM OE T.6.V.a.) It takes us away from trying to get.

As we step onto this path of healing, the door opens to new awareness---though it may just open a crack at first. Conflict comes with this opening because we now hold two opposing thought systems in our minds. We are at the beginning step in reversing the perception of how we have always seen things. Our wrong-minded perceptions are now being turned right-side up. This conflicts with our current way of seeing. Thus, while we want what Holy Spirit has to offer, the conflict becomes more and more acute, as we have one foot in each world. This is painful and disorienting to us. It is like standing with one foot on the dock, while the other is in a boat moving out to the sea. However,

when we release our wrong-minded perceptions, we will be easily carried down the river of truth. Our willingness and our desire will determine how quickly we let go of our fear and step into the thought system of the Holy Spirit, where all conflict is resolved. When we have forgiven it all, time will be no more.

Even though the separation did not actually happen and this is all a dream, we are reminded that we have to deal with the illusion as if it has happened. **"What seems to be its influence and its effects have not occurred at all. Yet must we deal with them a while as if they had."** (W.198.2.6-7) It is true that we are not actually here, but only dreaming our existence. We are not a body; we, therefore, can't be sick and can't die. In fact, there is no world. Even though it is all illusion, our way out of this illusion is through forgiveness of what has not happened. Forgiveness is an illusion as well, but it is the only illusion that ends all illusions. While duality does not exist in truth, to us it still seems to be our reality.

Jesus reminds us, **"Injury is impossible,"** (W.198.1.1) which is clearly the case outside of this dream. In effect, there is nothing to forgive because nothing has happened. However, we do have the experience of an injury in the dream, and it has painful consequences for us while we believe all of this is real. We need to forgive what we believe has happened. If we condemn, retaliate, and attack instead of forgive, we demonstrate that the injury was real. Our illusory belief in the ego myth that we separated from God brings a thought system of sin and guilt. When this thought system is projected out, the result is an illusory world and illusory bodies. **"And yet illusion makes illusion."** (W.198.1.2)

"For you have believed that you can injure, and the right you have established for yourself can now be used against you, till you lay it down as valueless, unwanted and unreal." (W.198.1.4) We believe we can cause injury and therefore others have that same right. We believe that attack has power and sin demands punishment. Forgiveness shows us that the erroneous thought system of the ego can be undone. Then we see that attack has no value. When we have given up our "right" to attack and see no value in it, we will know our invulnerability. We will know that we can't be hurt. **"Then does illusion cease to have effects, and those it seemed to have will be undone."** (W.198.1.5) Forgiveness undoes the cause, which is the mind's belief in sin and guilt; and therefore, the effects are also undone. Without a cause, there can be no effects. Our interpretations of past misdeeds are replaced by the love we gave and what was given us. The story of the past is no longer relevant, and we recognize that it is not even true.

All the ways we try to fix our perceived problems in the world, all the ways we justify our "good" reasons to condemn others, and all the ways we even wish injury, punishment, and withdrawal of love from those whom we perceive have injured us are based on the belief that we are vulnerable, that we can be hurt, and that we have the right to retaliate in whatever form we choose. When we attack, we believe that attack will be used against us and when it is, we feel victimized. Why do we hold onto victimhood? Why do we hold onto hurt feelings of what others have seemingly done to us? In other words, why do we make our self-worth dependent on what others may see in us? Jesus reminds us that we do this to justify our attack on them. We look for this justification in our desire to judge, condemn, and attack, which continues the separation. Is this what we really want?

Jesus says that the unworthiness and other forms of self-attack that we hold onto in our minds are attributed by us to something that our parents or others did to us. This is our wish to make them guilty and responsible for our condition. **"Whatever form they take, they are always an attack on the self to make the other guilty."** (T.16.V.1.4) (ACIM OE T.16.VI.43) We accept this picture of ourselves to produce the illusion that others have hurt us, yet these attributes we experience within ourselves are what we have actually accepted as true about ourselves. In other

words, it is a self-inflicted wound for which we crucify others outside of ourselves. It is an attack on myself to make the other guilty and is the basis for the special relationship. **"Whenever you consent to suffer pain, to be deprived, unfairly treated or in need of anything, you but accuse your brother of attack upon God's Son. You hold a picture of your crucifixion before his eyes, that he may see his sins are writ in Heaven in your blood and death, and go before him, closing off the gate and damning him to hell."** (T.27.I.3.1-2) (ACIM OE T.27.II.3)

"A sick and suffering you but represents your brother's guilt; the witness that you send lest he forget the injuries he gave, from which you swear he never will escape. This sick and sorry picture you accept, if only it can serve to punish him. The sick are merciless to everyone, and in contagion do they seek to kill. Death seems an easy price, if they can say, 'Behold me, brother, at your hand I die'." (T.27.I.4.3-6) (ACIM OE T.27.II.4)

While we pay a price for the pain that we hold onto, it may seem to us like a small price to pay if it **"can serve to punish him."** (T.27.I.4.4) (ACIM OE T.27.II.4) As long as we appear to be the victim of what others have done, we feel vindicated of our responsibility for our own issues. Yet, in effect, we are actually the victimizer, holding them guilty of what they have done to us. This is something to really take in and ponder. Unsettling as that may be, we are liberated when we see it is only our own condemnation that injures us.

Forgiveness leads us out. It points to the truth. It helps us remember the Song of Heaven. Time was made for us to learn that the answer to every problem is in our own minds. There is only one problem, and it is the belief in separation. We have been given the Answer and that is the Holy Spirit, Who will give us a whole new interpretation, correcting every misperception we hold about ourselves and about our brothers. Course-based forgiveness is not about seeing the sin in the other and forgiving it. It is not about overlooking anything real. It is, in fact, about releasing any condemning thoughts that we hold about the self or the other and offering these thoughts to the Holy Spirit for healing. We don't do the healing. We watch our minds for unforgiving thoughts, inquire deeply into their source, and put them on the inner altar. The Holy Spirit is the Healer, Who shines our misguided thoughts away. We bring our darkness to His Light.

When I believe that I have been hurt in any way, I remind myself that I can't be hurt. If what you say has hurt me, I remind myself that it is my guilt projected onto you. We will experience injury, as long as we justify and believe in our right to condemn. Jesus tells us again and again in the Course, **"Forgiveness is the only road that leads out of disaster, past all suffering, and finally away from death."** (W.198.4.1) Yet he asks, **"And why would you oppose it, quarrel with it, seem to find a thousand ways in which it must be wrong; a thousand other possibilities?"** (W.198.4.3)

We believe in this world that we made and justify its existence and argue for the correctness of our perceptions. We would rather be right than happy. **"Is it not wiser to be glad you hold the answer to your problems in your hand? Is it not more intelligent to thank the One Who gives salvation, and accept His gift with gratitude? And is it not a kindness to yourself to hear His Voice and learn the simple lessons He would teach, instead of trying to dismiss His words, and substitute your own in place of His?"** (W.198.5.1-3) This is what we do every time we invest in the illusion and try to fix things "out there" in the world. It is a losing proposition. What we have the power to do is to change our minds. No matter how much we invest in arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, it will still sink. No matter how invested we are in trying to control things in the world, we will still lose.

I just have to look at my life to see how much I have tried to control things in the world to no avail. It has all unfolded as it will. Control is painful, but we do it in the mistaken belief we can have what we want by controlling people and events. It is beautifully illustrated in the movie *Ruby Sparks*, where a writer named Calvin produces an ideal romantic partner of his dreams who he can control only to learn that control does not bring him the love that he craves and is not the answer to his loneliness.

We can change our minds about the way we see the world, and we can respond to seeming attack by recognizing that we can't be hurt. Jesus reminds us, "**Forgive, and you will see this differently.**" (W.193.3.7) While the forms of our problems change, the answer is always the same. The answer is forgiveness and letting go of the guilt in our own minds. Yet so often we choose not to apply it; instead, we argue with it, we avoid it, and we give ourselves reasons why forgiveness does not apply to the situation. This one, we tell ourselves, is beyond my ability to forgive; and this one is different and needs my own solution. Yet this is how we keep ourselves prisoner to the world.

No matter how guilty we feel or how much we think we have hurt others, the Self that we are is untouched. "**The stillness of your Self remains unmoved, untouched by thoughts like these, and unaware of any condemnation which could need forgiveness.**" (W.198.8.1) This Self becomes apparent when we release our thoughts of anger, worry, specialness, and attack of any kind. Whether I attack you or me, only I can be injured by my condemnation. Even this is an untrue perception. Jesus tells us that what we are in truth remains untouched. Therefore, none of our experiences, no matter how seemingly horrendous, can touch the truth of what we are.

Today, we practice saying, "**Only my condemnation injures me. Only my own forgiveness sets me free.**" (W.198.9.3-4) These are the words that have power when we apply them. "**His words are born in God, and come to you with Heaven's love upon them.**" (W.198.6.4) There is no suffering or pain forgiveness cannot heal. Jesus asks us to recognize the importance of this to our lives in ending illusions, which means ending the suffering and pain of our lives. "**Forgive and you will see this differently.**" (W.193.3.7) Even when I accept that and remind myself of the truth of these words, I recognize that I still try to fix and control situations in the world, manage circumstances and events in my life in my own way, believe I know my own best interests, and justify attack. It is such insanity. Forgiveness truly sets us free. "**Then are you free, for freedom is your gift, and you can now receive the gift you gave.**" (W.198.1.6) By seeing the holiness in our brother, instead of condemnation, we come to know our own holiness, and thus we are taken to the end of time and space and delivered from bondage. We are set free. All we need do is to recognize how wrong we have been about everything and choose Jesus as our teacher in all circumstances.

"**Those who hear His words have heard the song of Heaven.**" (W.198.6.5) When we contemplate these words and live by them, they "**contain all hope, all blessing and all joy that ever can be found upon this earth.**" (W.198.6.3)

Love and blessings, Sarah
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