**A Simple, Clear, and Direct Course**

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Part 1 of 2

A common source of misunderstanding for students of *A Course in Miracles* lies in not recognizing the original context for the scribing which was directly personal to Helen Schucman and William Thetford. Jesus' "notes" (his word) to Helen were a mixture of personal messages and the objective teaching. Even though the more informal nature of the latter dropped off as the scribing progressed, we continue to find subtle references to Helen and her reluctance to learn the Course all the way through, as seen for example in "The Simplicity of Salvation," the first section in Chapter 31 of the text. One reason for the writing of [*Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles*](https://facimstore.org/products/absence-from-felicity-book) was to clear up any potential confusion as to the meaning of many passages, and of the Course itself. As is discussed at length in that book, Helen was in great conflict regarding *A Course in Miracles* as it was coming through her. While she had no questions whatsoever about the "voice's" identity as Jesus, nor of the absolute truth of his words to her, the Course did arouse tremendous anxiety as its message was totally antithetical to her personal thought system. She was therefore in the uncomfortable position of writing down (over a seven-year period!) a document that undermined her ego's very existence. As a result of her great ambivalence—loving and being devoted to Jesus on the one hand, and terrified on the other of the implications to her ego of such devotion—Helen on occasion would attempt to disprove the legitimacy of the Course's author, not to mention his message. Jesus gently chided her over these attempts, which, again, are documented in *Absence from Felicity*. And when these attempts would fail, Helen would then argue that this Course was too difficult and demanded too much of her. While some of Jesus' responses to Helen were taken out of the published edition of the Course, as directed by Jesus himself, enough have remained to allow the reader to see the importance to Jesus of the simple, clear, and direct nature of the Course he was giving to Helen and to the world. It is the purpose of this article to underscore this very important aspect of *A Course in Miracles*—which emerges from Helen's direct and personal experience of scribing the Course from Jesus, which allowed her in turn to experience *his* relationship with the Course—as a help for students who are becoming confused about the "different interpretations" of the Course that are being offered by its students and commentators.

**Simple, Clear, and Direct**

As *A Course in Miracles* becomes more and more popular, one can sample among students an increasing number of written and spoken commentaries that purport to express what the Course teaches. However, it is difficult to reconcile many of these positions with the very clear and unequivocal position Jesus himself took regarding his Course, which he most certainly did not see as being complex, difficult to understand, or open to interpretation, as he reminded Helen many times. The following statements from *A Course in Miracles* are illustrative—though not exhaustive—of his attitude:

This is a very *simple* course (T-11.VIII.1:1; italics ours).

The reason this course is *simple* is that truth is simple (T-15.IV.6:1; italics ours).

Like the text for which this workbook was written, the ideas used for the exercises are very *simple*, very *clear* and totally *unambiguous*. We are not concerned with intellectual feats nor logical toys. We are dealing only in the very obvious, which has been overlooked in the clouds of complexity in which you think you think (W-pI.39.1:2-4; italics ours).

... how *direct* and *simple* the text is (W-pI.39.2:5; italics ours).

You have surely begun to realize that this is a very practical course, and *one that means exactly what it says* (T-8.IX.8:1; italics ours).

This course offers a very *direct* and a very *simple* learning situation, and provides the Guide Who tells you what to do (T-9.V.9:1; italics ours).

It is important to note here that by "simple" Jesus does not mean simplistic or simple-minded. *A Course in Miracles* is simple because it says only one thing, without deviation, and without compromise:

How *simple* is salvation! All it says is what was never true is not true now, and never will be. The impossible has not occurred, and can have no effects. And that is all (T-31.I.1:1-4; italics ours)

This next passage, dealing with the answer of forgiveness to all problems, can certainly also represent Jesus' view of *A Course in Miracles*—his answer to Helen and Bill's request for "another way":

... for here we have an answer, *clear* and *plain*, beyond deceit in its *simplicity*. All the complexities the world has spun of fragile cobwebs disappear before the power and the majesty of *this extremely simple statement of the truth* (W-pI.122.6:6-7; italics ours).

In response to Helen's complaints about the difficulty of the Course he was teaching her, Jesus responded with the following passages, so that she would understand that his words—the reflection of the Holy Spirit's purpose and God's truth—could not be misunderstood and, moreover, require no interpretation:

In fact, in order to be *simple* it [the Holy Spirit's purpose] *must* be unequivocal. The simple is merely what is easily understood, and for this it is apparent that it must be *clear*
(T-17.VI.1:2-3; first and third italics ours).

Reflections are seen in light. In darkness they are obscure, and their meaning seems to lie only in shifting interpretations, rather than in themselves. *The reflection of God needs no interpretation. It is clear* (T-14.IX.6:1-4; italics ours).

Therefore, "shifting interpretations" of what Jesus is teaching in *A Course in Miracles* can only come about when people are in the "darkness" of their wrong minds, and are unconsciously perverting the "reflection of God," which "needs no interpretation."

Finally, in light of Helen's (and all students') proclivity for projection of guilt onto God and him, Jesus made this very clear statement to her:

I have made every effort to use words that are almost impossible to distort, but it is always possible to twist symbols around if you wish (T-3.I.3:11).

**Different Interpretation**

It should be evident from these few quotations how Jesus viewed his book. Nevertheless, it has not prevented students from believing that *A Course in Miracles* can be subject to *different* and equally valid "interpretations," nor from twisting its symbols around to suit their ego's wishes. Can you imagine Helen saying to Jesus: "I understand what you are saying to me and teaching in this Course, but I think there is another interpretation you can give to this section and to these ideas that you have just dictated." In all the years Helen and I (Kenneth) spent in going over the Course, both in preparation for the published edition, as well as in discussing different portions from the three books, it never once occurred to either of us that there might be *another* possible explanation for what Jesus was teaching so clearly and directly.

In this regard, I (Kenneth) remember in the very early years of the Course's publication having a discussion with Helen about an individual who was attempting to teach the Course without really understanding it, and maintaining that it was saying something it was not, taking sentences out of context to prove his point. Helen was furious and incredulous at the same time: furious at the person for his arrogance in teaching something he clearly had no comprehension of, but pretended that he did; and incredulous at the idea that there would actually be people claiming that *A Course in Miracles* said something it obviously did not mean, and arrogantly believing they were right.

While she was not always happy with the Course's teachings, Helen never forgot Jesus' statements about its simplicity, clarity, and directness. And as has been documented in *Absence from Felicity*, she had little tolerance for those who sought to distort the Course's teachings for the glorification of their own egos. Helen's integrity was such that even though she had difficulty in applying the principles of *A Course in Miracles* to her own life, which she always readily admitted to, she never once attempted to change what it said to meet her ego's needs. Specialness, after all, is only a problem when it is denied, leading inevitably to projection onto others. We are not asked by Jesus in his Course to be *without* the limitations imposed by our specialness, but only to *escape* the terrible burden of guilt we place upon ourselves (M-26.4:1-2), a burden which is maintained by our stubborn refusal to acknowledge the ego thought system we have made real and accepted within our minds. Honesty with oneself regarding the investment in specialness is essential to the process of forgiveness, for it undoes denial and projection, the ego's "double shield" that protects its guilt and therefore its own existence. That is why Jesus pleads with us in the text:

Watch carefully and see what it is you are really asking for. Be very honest with yourself in this, for we must hide nothing from each other.... Think honestly what you have thought that God would not have thought, and what you have not thought that God would have you think. Search sincerely for what you have done and left undone accordingly, and then change your mind to think with God's (T-4.III.8:1; T-4.IV.2:4-5).

Once again, *A Course in Miracles* is simple, clear, and direct in its teachings. It is the wrong mind that weaves the obscuring webs of complexity.

It is always helpful as a point of reference, to ensure that one does not get off-track when working with the Course, to keep in mind the original instant of separation when we chose against God and experienced the seeming effects of that choice. That ontological moment not only contains the original error, but is the source of all the succeeding ones as well, *including the one we are discussing here*. Yet, therein too is found the only answer to all problems: the Holy Spirit's forgiveness. As the text explains:

Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love.

And that instant is the

tiny tick of time in which the first mistake was made, and all of them within that one mistake.... [It also holds] the Correction for that one, and all of them that came within the first (T-26.V.13:1; 3:5).

And so we relive that moment when we believed in the reality of the separation, and took seriously the "tiny, mad idea." Thus we became convinced that we could be different and therefore separate from our Creator and Source, with Whom we can only exist in perfect oneness and love. We believed in our insanity that there could be *different* interpretations of reality, and that the simple, clear, and direct truth of God's Heaven could be discussed and debated. And that, in fact, our interpretation was every bit as valid, *if not more so*, than God's.Imagine the arrogance of the Son who believed not only that he could be right while God's truth was wrong, but also was convinced that his happiness resided in his *being* right. The clarity of this single error of separation quickly was obscured by the complexity of the ego's thought system. This complexity then was reflected in the projection of the separation thought which became the physical universe, wherein was contained the glorification of the Son's newly-won separated individuality and triumph over God—his specialness as a self-created being, a seeming travesty of God's perfect and unified creation. The ego's attempt to use the world's complexity to conceal the origin of the one error is dramatically described in the following passage from the text:

You who believe that God is fear made but one substitution. It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It has become so splintered and subdivided and divided again, over and over, that it is now almost impossible to perceive it once was one, and still is what it was. That one error, which brought truth to illusion, infinity to time, and life to death, was all you ever made. Your whole world rests upon it. Everything you see reflects it, and every special relationship that you have ever made is part of it.

You may be surprised to hear how very different is reality from what you see. You do not realize the magnitude of that one error. It was so vast and so completely incredible that from it a world of total unreality *had* to emerge. What else could come of it? Its fragmented aspects are fearful enough, as you begin to look at them. But nothing you have seen begins to show you the enormity of the original error, which seemed to cast you out of Heaven, to shatter knowledge into meaningless bits of disunited perceptions, and to force you to make further substitutions.

That was the first projection of error outward. The world arose to hide it, and became the screen on which it was projected and drawn between you and the truth (T-18.I.4:1-6:2).

The hallmark of this newly-emergent dream of miscreation is that truth is relative and subject to different interpretations. This was the famous position taken by the Greek Sophists, who became enshrined in history through Plato's Dialogues, where their arrogance is exposed and countered by Socrates' repeated demonstrations of their ignorance, and his teaching that truth is absolute and not subject to whatever the Sophists would have it be. This argument continues today, and students of *A Course in Miracles* familiar with the section "The Laws of Chaos" will recall this important statement of the ego's first law, which is based in part upon the original Sophist argument:

The *first* chaotic law is that the truth is different for everyone. Like all these principles, this one maintains that each is separate and has a different set of thoughts that set him off from others. This principle evolves from the belief there is a hierarchy of illusions; some are more valuable and therefore true. Each one establishes this for himself, and makes it true by his attack on what another values. And this is justified because the values differ, and those who hold them seem to be unlike, and therefore enemies (T-23.II.2).

Differences in interpretation of *A Course in Miracles* thus become the rallying cry of those hellbent on proving the reality of their perceived separation from God and from certain members of the Sonship.