

Attitudinal Therapy: Evaluation and Theology of *A Course in Miracles*—Part One

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Evaluation

All in all, the *Course* is a masterpiece of spiritual strategy. It claims to be a revelation from Jesus Christ Himself, and it is intelligently organized and simply written. It appeals to personal pride and can become almost addicting emotionally. It is carefully designed to radically restructure a person's perception against Christian faith and toward New Age occultism.

We would say the text was designed not only for spiritually searching individuals of a secular or psychic persuasion, but especially for nominal Christians in the church who have recognized the bankruptcy of theological liberalism and desire more spiritual "reality" in their lives.

In essence, the course simultaneously indoctrinates its students in Eastern metaphysics and human potential psychicism, while it specifically insulates them against biblical revelation and true Christianity. In achieving this end, its manipulation of psychological and emotional states is impressive. It offers carefully thought-out spiritual exercises, one for every day of the year.

Publisher Robert Skutch observes, "The concepts of the *Course* are such that anyone who studies the material seriously *must* find that his or her perceptions are changing...."¹ (Skutch is the author of *Messages from My Higher Self*, produced through a form of automatic writing.)

Theological Content

As noted earlier, Eastern religion, particularly Hinduism (advaita Vedanta), plays an important part in the *Course*. Robert Skutch writes:

What they now had in their possession was a spiritual document that was very closely related to the teachings of the non-dualistic Vedanta of the Hindu religion, and that the profundity of the Vedanta certainly paralleled the obvious profundity of the *Course*. He [Thetford] realized the basic spiritual teachings of both had many striking similarities to each other, and that the main difference between them was that the *Course* was stating the perennial philosophy of eternal truths in Christian terminology with a psychological application that seemed expressly aimed at a contemporary audience.²

In *Course* philosophy, biblical words undergo drastic changes of purpose. Often, the new meanings are the opposite of their biblical meaning. For example, "atonement" no longer refers to Jesus Christ's substitutionary death on the cross for sin. In biblical teaching, the atonement is based on the fact that man's sinfulness separates him from God. Before man can be reconciled to God, there must be a divine judgment of sin. Christ sacrificed His own life on the cross—He was judged in our place—to accomplish this. This is what Christians mean by the word "atonement," or the atoning sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16,18). In 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 we read, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world," and, "This is love: not that we loved

God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” God tells everyone, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:2), and therefore, because of God’s mercy to us, “God presented him [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood [i.e., His death]. He did this to demonstrate his justice... at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies [those who have] faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26).

But in the *Course*, the word “atonement” means the exact opposite: that one is not, and never has been, separate from God. Therefore, an atoning sacrifice in the biblical sense is meaningless. For the *Course*, the term “atonement” refers to *correcting* the belief that men are separate from God, which is presumed to be a false belief. Hence, because “the atonement” is not yet completed (i.e., some people still think they are separate from God), *Course* students are told they have an important role to play “in the Atonement.”³ In other words, their job is to help reconcile men to the spiritual truth they are God and therefore cannot be separate from Him.

According to the Bible, God freely pardons, or forgives, a believer’s sins on the basis of Jesus Christ’s atonement: “Who is a God like you, who pardons sins and forgives the transgression?” (Micah 7:18); and, “[We] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). And consider the important words of the apostle John, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1:8-10, NIV). But the *Course* denies this, just as it rejects the biblical concept of the atonement.

The *Course* also denies the biblical teaching on forgiveness. “Forgiveness” does not pardon sins before God, because sins aren’t even real to begin with. Therefore, “forgiveness” merely involves the realization that there never were any sins to pardon. Likewise, “sinners” do not exist, because “sin” is an illusion. According to an interview with *Course* editor and teacher Kenneth Wapnick:

Wapnick: There’s a line in the *Course* that says, God does not forgive because he has never condemned. Technically, God doesn’t forgive, God simply loves. Forgiveness in the *Course* is the correction for the belief in sin, the belief in separation, the belief in guilt.

SCP [*Spiritual Counterfeits Project*]: Christ did not die for our sins?

Wapnick: No. Absolutely not. Because once you see his death in that way, then you make sin real.... The whole idea of the *Course* is that sin is an illusion.... The crux of the whole thing is that our relationship with God has never been impaired. It’s only in our thinking that it was. In other words, for the *Course*, sin never really happened.... What Jesus did for us was show us that the separation never really happened.⁴

As a result of this distorted theology, the *Course* approach to “salvation” lies in understanding that no one requires salvation in the biblical sense because all men are already divine. “Salvation” is merely accepting one’s “true” identity as being one in essence with God. Each individual is the Son of God; each is already perfect. Therefore we need nothing from God because our true nature *is* God.⁵

Sin, guilt, death, judgment, propitiatory atonement and other biblical doctrines are viewed as “attack” philosophies by the *Course*. That is, they are concepts which greatly hinder spiritual “progress” and severely damage the realization of our “true” divine nature.

Men must become free of these false, enslaving, and evil ideas if they desire true spiritual freedom. Otherwise, they choose to “remain in hell” and to “kill” the God of love.⁶ In the *Course* worldview, orthodox Christian beliefs (biblical teachings given by the one true God) are held to be “evil,” “insane,” and “anti-Christ”

We can see just how unbiblical the instructions of the *Course* are when we contrast them to what the Bible teaches:

- The *Course* explains that men are not separated from God. The Bible teaches, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2, NASB).
- The *Course* explains that there was no atonement for sin and that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for our sins. The Bible teaches, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...” (1 Peter 2:24, NASB), and, “Jesus Christ, the Righteous One... is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2, NASB). Jesus Himself taught, “The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, NASB).
- The *Course* explains that no one needs to believe on Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins. The Bible teaches, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus Himself warned, “If you do *not* believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24). And, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever *believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, emphasis added).

In the next article we will present a chart with a sampling of *Course* theology to document the anti-biblical nature of *A Course in Miracles*.

Notes:

1. James Bolen, “Interview: William N. Thetford,” *New Realities*, vol. 6, no. 2, September/October 1984, Part 2, p. 78.
2. James Bolen, “Interview: William N. Thetford,” *New Realities*, vol. 6, no. 1, July/August, Part 1, p. 24.
3. *A Course in Miracles*, Volume 1, text, Huntington Station, New York: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1977, p. 10.
4. Dean C. Halverson, Kenneth Wapnick, “A Matter of Course: Conversation with Kenneth Wapnick,” *Spiritual Counterfeits Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1987, pp. 13-14).
5. *Course*, Volume 1, chs. 13,22-23.
6. *Ibid.*, chs. 5-6; pp. 374-78.