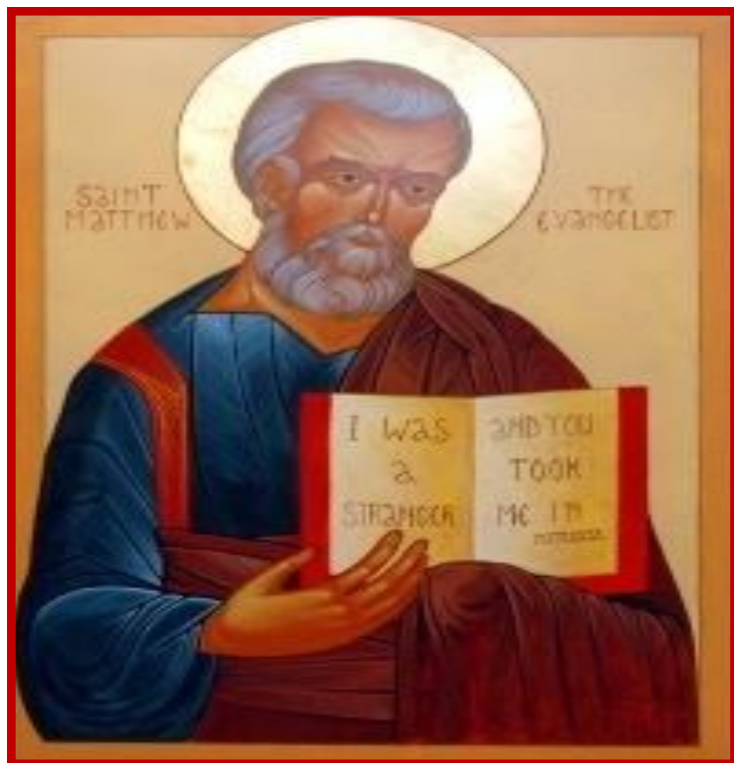


falsely or unjustly, and, still more frequently, lightly, foolishly and rashly; hence on account of the peril of these things, they forbade an oath to Christians, that they should refrain from it as much as possible. But if any one is careful to avoid such dangers, then it is lawful for him to swear in a case of necessity. This is plain from S. Chrysostom, who, in his homilies to the people of Antioch, frequently and sharply rebuked their habit of rash swearing. And to those who wondered at his so doing, he thus replies. "I say and repeat, as I am accustomed, because ye say and repeat what ye are accustomed." And he declares that he will not cease from this repetition until they leave off swearing. "For a hard knot a hard and constant wedge must be used."

**Verse 34 (Continued)**- *Neither by heaven, &c.* It seems that the Jews were wont to swear by heaven and earth, and similar oaths. And because the Pharisees thought that these oaths, being made by creatures, were of small account, Christ here teaches the contrary—viz., that he who swears by heaven or earth, swears by God their Creator, who has placed the throne of His glory in heaven, and his footstool on earth.



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

### Continuation of Matthew 5: 19-34

**Verse 19-** *Whosoever therefore shall break, &c. Of these least commandments—viz., which the Law just spoken of commands, or in respect of which I am about to explain and perfect the Law. This is why He subjoins, I say unto you that unless your righteousness, &c. It does not mean, then, that all the commandments of the Law are very small; but that he should be condemned who should break one of even its smallest precepts, or, like the Pharisees, pervert them by a false interpretation, as by teaching, for example, that only outward adultery, not inward concupiscence, was forbidden by the Law. We must observe in this place that commandment is to be taken strictly for a weighty precept binding under the penalty of mortal sin, like the Ten Commandments. For he who shall break one such commandment, although the least in the Decalogue, shall surely be condemned. For it is entirely probable that certain trifling things in the Old Law, although they were commanded by God Himself, bind only under venial sin and temporal punishment. Such, I mean, as taking a bird together with her young ones in the nest, seething a kid in its mother's milk, &c. Not*

(2) Theophylact and Euthymius are of opinion that an oath was a legal precept of the old law, like circumcision. Wherefore, as the latter has been done away by Christ, so has the former.

(3) Others think that an oath was allowed by God to the Jews, as being uninstructed, imperfect, and hard of belief, but has been forbidden to Christians because more perfect things become them as being more perfect, and because they ought to beware of the slightest peril of perjury. That in the same way divorce was permitted to the Jews, lest they should kill the wives whom they hated; and yet Christ takes away this permission from Christians. Thus think S. Hilary (*in loc., Can. 4*), S. Ambrose (*in Ps. 119, Sermon. 1*), S. Basil (*in Ps. 13*), Chromatius and Origen (*in loc., Tract. 35*), Epiphanius (*Hæres. 19*), S. Athanasius (*Serm. de Passione et Cruce Domini*), S. Chrysostom (*Hom. ad pop.*).

If you object that in Holy Scripture God took an oath, as in Gen. xxii. 16, SS. Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose answer that such oaths of God were not strictly speaking oaths, but asseverations only—or promises; or, as S. Ambrose says, God may swear because He is able to fulfil that which He swears, and He cannot repent of it. But a man ought not to swear because he has not any certain power of doing that to which he pledges his oath. If, further, you object that surely S. Paul swore when he said (2 Cor. i. 23), "I call God to witness upon my soul" (Vulg.), S. Basil answers that this is not really an oath, but only a simple mode of speech, uttered with the appearance and form of an oath as a stronger affirmation.

But I say that not to the Jews only, but to Christians, is it lawful to swear. This is of faith, as is plain from the perpetual sense, use, and practice of the Church. "For of all strife among men"—even Christians—"an oath for confirmation is the end," says the Apostle to the Hebrews (vi. i6). Moreover, in Scripture there is no affirmative precept for swearing, as there is for praying, sacrificing, loving and praising God, honouring parents, &c., because an oath is not, *per se*, desirable, but only for the sake of something else, and, as it were, *per accidens*, in such sort that it is a kind of medicine for unbelief. And there is a negative precept for swearing, namely that you shall not commit perjury or swear by false gods, but only by the true God. There is also a conditional precept that if you swear you shall only swear what is just, true, and necessary.

You may say, Christ here solemnly says to Christians, *Swear not at all*. I answer, this is true because, *per se*, it is unbecoming and improper to call the Great and Good God to witness about human disputes on account of men's mutual distrusts, unless this impropriety may be excused by mutual necessity, as it is often excused by the want of witnesses and other judicial proofs.

To the Fathers who have been cited, I reply that they seem to have spoken in the same sense that Christ did, because they saw men often swearing

2. The Scribes erred, who thought that by this precept perjury only was forbidden. On the contrary Christ here teaches that by it every oath is forbidden, all irreverence and abuse of the name of God.

*But I say unto you, &c.* From this passage, the Pelagians, as S. Augustine testifies (*Epist. 89, q. 5.*) taught that no oath was lawful for Christians. The Waldenses thought the same, as we see from the Council of Constance, and the Anabaptists of the present day hold the same opinion, who will not swear in a trial at the bidding of the judge.

But this is an error of faith, which the perpetual practice of the Church, as well as the example of God Himself, of S. Paul, and the Saints condemns, as is plain from Ps. cx. 4; Rom. i. 9; Philip. i. 8; 1 Cor. xv. 31, &c. Reason itself shows us the same thing; for an oath is an honour to God as the prime Verity, because he who swears appeals to Infallible Truth as his witness. Wherefore an oath is an act of religion, and the highest worship, so that it be done in truth and justice, as Jeremiah says, iv. 2.

You will ask, Why, then, does Christ say, *Swear not at all*? S. Bernard answers (*Serm. 65 in Cant.*)

1. that this is not of precept, but only of counsel.
2. Others allow that this is a precept, but one which only forbids perjury.
3. Others think that the command, *Swear not at all*, applies only to swearing by creatures, not by God. To this opinion S. Jerome inclines.

But all these explanations are forced and incorrect, and are refuted by what follows; for Christ bids us *swear not at all*, (1) because, as S. Augustine says (*de Verb. Apostoli*), "False swearing is destructive, true swearing is perilous, swearing not at all is safe." *Not at all—i.e.*, "As far as lieth in thee, that thou shouldst not affect nor love swearing, nor take any pleasure in an oath, as though it were a good thing." Again, to swear is, *per se*, a moral evil of irreverence with respect to God; just as it is a moral evil, *per se*, to kill any one; yet there are cases in which it is a duty. So it is with an oath. In Paradise it was not lawful to swear, nor will it be lawful in heaven. So great is the majesty of the Name of God that It must not be called to witness unless necessity compel. For to invoke It about small and worthless things is to make It small and vile, just as would be the action of one who should call the king as witness about a single guinea. Hence the saints were cautious about swearing. In the Life of S. Chrysostom it is recorded as a notable thing that he never swore. The same is testified of S. John the Almoner.

You will ask whether also for Christians it is lawful to swear? For,

(1) many of the Fathers seem to say that it is not. SS. Jerome, Chrysostom, Euthymius, say that swearing *was permitted by God* to the Jews, lest they should swear by idols, but is not permitted to Christians.

such as these are here called *least commandments*, but those which are least amongst the great commandments, such as to look upon a woman to lust after her, which the Pharisees considered a very small thing, and scarcely a sin at all.

*Shall be called the least.* Shall be accounted the least; shall be looked upon as vile; shall be had in contempt by God and the holy angels, as the last of men, and altogether unworthy to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, but to be damned and cast into hell. Wherefore S. Chrysostom and Theophylact interpret *least* to mean *not at all*, because in heaven there are none who are not great, as S. Augustine says, "all kings of heaven, sons of God."

*In the kingdom of heaven.* Strictly so called, say S. Chrysostom and Theophylact. But S. Augustine and others interpret the kingdom of heaven here to mean the Church.

*But whosoever shall do and teach, &c. Great, viz.*, a doctor, father, and prince of the disciples whom he has taught. And all the commandments of the Law are reckoned as having been done, when whatsoever has not been done is pardoned by God, says S. Augustine. For a fault is corrected and compensated for by penitence. As S. Bernard says (*Tr. de dispensat. et præcept.*), "A part of rule is regular correction." When, therefore, the guilty one undergoes this, he fulfils the rule.

*Moraliter.* Learn from hence the right way and method of teaching, that a doctor should first do what he is about to teach. Christ, says S. Luke, began to *do* and to teach. He was first Himself poor, humble, meek, a mourner, and then He taught, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Let a doctor therefore examine his conscience before God before he teach, whether he be poor in spirit, meek, and soon; let him see whether he cleave to the world or to Christ, for that he may be Christ's he ought to break his pledge of friendship with the world, and be able to say with S. Paul, "If I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ."

**Verse 20-** *For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed, &c., i.e.*, be more abundant, excellent, full, and perfect. *Your righteousness, i.e., your observance of the Law.* For it fulfills that which the Law declares to be just or righteous. It also makes us really just before God. As the Apostle says, "Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." (Rom. ii. 13.)

**Verse 21-** *Ye have heard that it was said, i.e., commanded. Ye have heard, i.e., from the Scribes, teaching and expounding the Law of Moses.* Christ here begins to show in detail that He was not dissolving the Law, but fulfilling it, and that Christian righteousness ought to excel Judaic and Pharisaic righteousness. Christ therefore here proposes and prefers Himself

and His own doctrine both to the Scribes and Pharisees, who by their *δευτερώσεις*, or traditions, perversely interpreted the Law, as is plain from verses 20 and 43, and to the Law of Moses itself. For Christ added to the Law precepts of explicit belief concerning God the Three in One, and concerning Christ's Incarnation, Passion, and Redemption. He moreover supplied the defects and imperfections of the Old Law, for the Law of Moses was given to the comparatively uninstructed Jews, and this Law Christ perfected by His Evangelical Law.

*Thou shalt not kill.* Many thought that by this law *murder only* was forbidden, but Christ here teaches that by it even all angry words, blows, reproaches, are forbidden, for such things are, as it were, preludes leading by a direct road to homicide.

**Verse 22-** *But I say unto you, &c.* Christ here explains and fulfills the commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*, and teaches that even inward anger is forbidden by it. *I say unto you.* I decree, assert, and sanction, I who am Legislator of all law, Evangelical, Mosaic, and natural.

*Whosoever is angry.* The Greek adds *εἰκῆ*, *rashly, without cause.* But the Roman Codices, S. Jerome, and S. Augustine (lib. 1, *Retract.*, c. 19) omit it. But those or similar words must be understood. For unlawful anger is what is here treated of; since anger for a just cause, as for example against sin and sinners, is both lawful and praiseworthy. Anger has been for this very purpose implanted in man's nature, that it should make them brave against vice, and against those things which are really their enemies.

Observe, anger is the thirst for vengeance, and is itself a mortal sin if it deliberately contrive, or wish for, any serious evil of body, or goods, or reputation of one's neighbour, or rejoice in such evils, even though he deserve them, for he who is angry rejoices in them not as fruits of justice but of revenge. But anger is a venial sin if it desire some trifling calamity to one's neighbour, even though the anger be violent, and flame out both internally and externally. Lastly, anger is no sin at all if it be assumed from zeal for righteousness, for the extirpation of sin and sinners. Such was the anger of Mattathias when he slew the legate of Antiochus, who was forcing the Jews to sacrifice to idols. (1 Mac. ii. 25.) Such was the anger of Christ when He drove the buyers and sellers out of the Temple.

Hear S. Chrysostom on the words in Ps. iv., *Be ye angry and sin not*: "We may be angry lawfully, for Paul was angry with Elymas, and Peter with Sapphira. But I should not call this anger without qualification. I should call it philosophy, carefulness. The father is angry with his child, but it is because he cares for him. It is he who avenges himself who is rashly angry, but he who corrects the faults of others is of all men the meekest. For even God is angry, not to revenge Himself, but to correct us. Let us therefore imitate Him. Thus to act is divine, otherwise it is human anger." Hear also S. Gregory (on Job v. 2, *Anger slayeth the foolish man*): "There is an anger which springs from zeal for righteousness. This is the anger which, because Eli had it not, he roused against himself the vengeance of the wrath of God. For the sword of the eternal Ruler

You will say it is lawful to put away a wife if she endeavour to draw her husband into any sin, as is laid down in the chapter, *Quæsi de divortis*, and as Christ Himself sufficiently indicates, ver. 29. Also if the wife practise sorcery, or compass her husband's death; so that it is lawful to put a wife away for other causes besides fornication.

I answer, what you say is true, but Christ here assigns fornication as the only cause of divorce, both because it is the only proper cause of divorce, speaking in a strict sense, from marriage, as being immediately destructive of it, whilst the others are general causes, and would absolve a Christian from any union whatever; also because the divorce of even a repentant adulteress is conceded in perpetuity, so that although the wife repent of her adultery the husband is not bound to receive her again to his house, whereas in the other cases he is bound to receive her back again to favour; lastly, because Christ here wishes entirely to exclude all such causes of divorce as the wife's deformity, poverty, disagreeableness, &c., which were common among the Jews. And to them He is here addressing Himself.

*And whoso shall marry her that is put away committeth adultery.* Cajetan and others here repeat the words, *excepting for the cause of fornication*, as though it were lawful for the man putting away the adulterous wife, and for the adulteress herself, to enter again into matrimony. But what S. Paul says (1 Cor. vii. 11), is plainly repugnant to this idea. For he there bids the innocent wife remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her adulterous husband. See what I have there said; and this is the constant usage and interpretation of the Church, of which more on chap. xix. 9.

**Ver. 33.**—*Again, ye have heard, &c. Thou shalt perform, i.e., Thou shalt pay,* shalt fulfil what thou hast sworn unto the Lord, or by the Lord that thou wilt do. So S. Chrysostom properly explains that by oaths are here meant vows confirmed by an oath, that we are bound to render them, that is, perform them unto God. Suarez explains differently. "If thou desirest to swear, swear by the true God, not by idols."

**Ver. 34.**—*But I say unto you, &c.* Christ here explains and perfects the third precept of the Decalogue, which the Scribes and Pharisees had explained falsely. For,

1. they asserted that an oath became an oath, and was binding, if it were made by God, and called Him to witness, but not so if it were sworn by creatures. Christ here teaches the contrary. For in creatures the Creator is understood, for they were made by God, and all that they have and are is from God. For he who swears, calls God, who is the prime Verity, to witness his oath. He therefore who swears by a creature, either makes that creature a God, which is the sin of idolatry, or else it behoves to understand God the Creator in the oath.

tooth. They who have gone through it know what it is. Whence it is called mortification, because it produces the feeling and pain of death.

Thus according to the letter, SS. Aquilinus and Andomarus, as is related in their Lives in Surius, who had been blind, and recovered their sight by a miracle, asked of God that they might be again deprived of sight, that they might be free from the distractions and temptations to which sight gives rise. Furthermore it was by a special leading of God that the virgin mentioned in the *Spiritual Meadow* of Sophronius, plucked out her eyes and sent them to her lover, who persecuted her with his attentions, because he was ravished with the beauty of her eyes. When he received this gift the lover was smitten with compunction, and exchanged his secular for a monastic life.

S. Antonius asked Didymus, a blind man, whom S. Jerome calls his seer, that is, his teacher, if he grieved over his blindness. He was silent for a little while, and nodded; then he said, "A prudent man ought not to grieve because he is without eyes, which are possessed by flies and bees; but he ought to rejoice, because he has greater opportunities for opening the eyes of his mind, by which he may see God and divine things."

**Ver. 31.**—*It has been said, &c.* See what I have written upon the giving a bill of divorce in Deut. xxiv. 1.

**Ver. 32.**—*But I say unto you, &c.* Christ here corrects and settles the law of divorce.

1. Because the law easily conceded divorce for various causes. But Christ permits it only on account of fornication, if a wife be an adulteress; and from an adulterer the innocent wife is at liberty to depart, according to that maxim, "If a man break his marriage vow that may be broken with him."

2. The Law conceded both to the woman who was put away, and to the husband who repudiated her, the liberty of contracting a second marriage. But Christ denies it to both.

3. The Law conceded to the husband alone the power of giving a writing of divorcement. But Christ, with respect to this matrimonial right places the man and the woman upon a perfect equality, as S. Paul teaches, 1 Cor. vii. 4.

**Verse 32-** *Except for the cause of fornication.* By fornication here some understand any sin whatever, that is, in the form of a sort of spiritual fornication with any creature, leaving God, the Creator and Husband of the Soul. Thus S. Augustine, Origen, *in loc.* But this is taking it in too loose a sense.

By fornication others understand infidelity. For this is constantly called fornication by the prophets, that is to say, spiritual and mystical fornication.

But expositors, ancient and modern, *passim*, understand fornication here in its strict, literal sense, as denoting all illicit sexual intercourse.

flames against him who is lukewarm in correcting the vices of those who are placed under him."

*Shall be in danger of the judgment.* Judgment here is to be taken in a somewhat different sense from that in which it occurs just above, *Whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.* For there the human tribunal by which men were condemned to death for murder is meant; but here is understood the Divine judgment, which judges and condemns venial anger to temporal punishment, such as purgatory, but deadly anger to eternal punishment, *i.e.*, to hell.

How vile a thing anger is! See S. Basil and S. Chrysostom (*Hom. on Anger*); Cicero (4 *Tuscul.*), where, among other things, he says, "Is there anything more like to madness than anger—anger which Ennius well calls the beginning of madness? The colour, voice, glare of the eye, impotence of words and deeds, what have they to do with sanity? What is more shameful than Homer's Achilles—than Agamemnon quarrelling? Anger brought Ajax to madness and death."

*But whoso shall say to his brother, &c. Raca.*

1. S. Chrysostom thinks *raca* here signifies *thou*, as if any one should say contemptuously to his neighbour, *Go thou about thy business, what wouldst thou?*—to address any one as *thou* out of disrespect.
2. Theophylact says *raca* means one worthy of being spat upon, for *רוקרוק* means *spittle*; but this would be a worse form of reproach than to call any one a fool, which Christ here places as the worst reproach.
3. Some think *raca* here is the Greek *ρακος*, *ragged*.
4. And more probably, S. Augustine, Rupert, Anselm, and others think *raca* is an interjection of despising and opposing, and that by it are denoted all the tokens of an evil-disposed mind, whether murmuring, shouting, or spitting, or wrinkling the brow, and so on.
5. And last, S. Jerome, Angelus Caninius, and others think that *raca* is a Hebrew word, derived from *ריק* *ric*, *i.e.*, "empty," though not in brain, as S. Jerome says, for that would be a fool; but *empty* in purse; so that *raca* would mean *a man of straw, a pauper*. So the Vulgate translates Judg. xi. 3.

Lastly, George Michaelis, the Maronite (in *Proœmio Grammaticæ Syriacæ, c. de præstantia Syr. Linguæ*) says *raca* is Syriac, and has three meanings—

1. A tortoise, which animal is considered so deformed by the Syrians that they nauseate and abhor it; so too, the Italians, when they would speak of a man slow and deformed, say, *pare tartaruga*, like a tortoise.
2. *Raca*, from *rac*, "he has spit." For the Syrians, when they would burn any one up with ignominy, call him *racu*, *i.e.*, "spat upon;" or *raca* is the same as *rauco*, *i.e.*, "spittle;" for a Syrian, to show that he made no account of a person, would say, "Thou art but as spittle to me."

3. *Raca* with the Syrians means *one despised, vile, abject, dirty*; and this is the sense in which I think the word *raca* is here used by Christ. Thus far Georgius.

It is certain that *raca* is more than to be angry, less than to say, *Thou fool!* Again, *raca* is ambiguous. It may be venial, or it may be mortal; but to say, *Thou fool*, is certainly a mortal sin.

*In danger of the council.* Gr. *συνεδριω*, from which word the Jews called their highest tribunal the “Sanhedrim.” As though Christ had said, “He shall be obnoxious to the judgment of the highest court, the Sanhedrim.”

Observe, the Talmudic Doctors, and from them Franc. Lucas, Maldonatus, and others, say that the Hebrews had three courts:

The first *din mammona*, which was a court for the trial of money causes; it was a court presided over by three judges.

The second court was *din mishpat*, or *the Court of Judgment*, *i.e.*, for capital offences. By this tribunal cases of murder were examined and decided. This court consisted of twenty-three judges.

The third was the *Sanhedrim*, which consisted of seventy-two judges, by which grave causes and crimes were tried, such as heresy, false prophets, idolatry, apostacy, &c. Christ, omitting the first, alludes here to the two latter tribunals, and calls the second the judgment, the third *συνεδριον*, the Sanhedrim, the council. The meaning is, that the proportion between anger and a reproachful word, and between the punishment of both, was the same as between the judgment of *Mishpat* and the *Sanhedrim*, or the highest tribunal—that as the latter excelled the former, so the penalty of an opprobrious word exceeded the penalty of anger. For in this comparison, as is usual, it is not necessary to make everything apply. There is, then, a catachresis in the words *judgment* and *council*. For by *judgment* is signified the lesser fault of anger, and consequently the lesser condemnation and penalty; and by *council* the greater fault and the severer punishment.

The meaning then is, as a murderer under the Old Law was in danger of the *judgment*—namely, that his cause should be tried by the criminal judges, and he himself condemned to death; so in like manner anger, which is the first step to murder, is a criminal cause, and consequently pertains not to the lowest tribunal of *Mammona*, but of *Judgment*, not human but Divine; so that if it should be intense and voluntary, that is, with a deliberate intention of inflicting death or grave evil upon his neighbour, he should for this be condemned to death, not temporal but eternal.

But if anger should break forth into a rough word, such as *raca*, a man would sin grievously—grievously I say, because he would manifest anger by an outward sign, which would pertain to the tribunal of the Sanhedrim, to be heavily punished, according to the degree of the fault. But if he should say, *Thou fool*, it would not be a case for the *Judgment*, but would render him liable to the damnation of hell.

From this explanation it appears, in opposition to the Stoics and Jovinian, that there

**Vers. 29 and 30.**—*But if thy right eye, &c.* It is plain that there are here two parables, taken from the two most excellent and most useful of our bodily members—the right eye and the right hand. And Christ signifies that everything which entices us to sin must be cast away, however dear, precious, and necessary it may be to us. He makes mention of the eye first, because he had just before said, *Whoso looketh upon a woman, &c.* 1. Thus, S. Chrysostom (*Hom.* 17), by *the right eye and hand*, understands a woman beloved, such a one as he had just been speaking of, that she must be cast off, if by her look, voice, or gesture she provoke to lust. 2. S. Augustine (*lib. de Serm. Dom. in Mont.*, lib. 1), understands any friend and minister, even one who is necessary. 3. S. Hilary, Theophylact (*in loc.*), Cyril, Pacian (*Epist.* 3), understand parents and relations, that intercourse with them must be cut off, if it leads us into sin. 4. S. Jerome understands affections and vices of the mind. 5. Auctor *Imperfecti* considers that by the right eye and hand the mind and will are meant, which must be called away from carnal pleasures.

But more simply and plainly you may take *the right eye and hand* to be actually meant, but in such a sense as to subserve the meaning of the parable, and to be parabolically explained. For there is here a continuous parable, in which Christ has regard to concupiscence of sight. Christ is dealing with such an implied objection as this which follows: “You may urge that if the eye and the sight are adulterous when they look upon a woman to lust after her, what then shall I do with the eyes which God has given me to see with?”

Again, it is a metaphor taken from surgery. As those who are sick and injured take care that a surgeon should amputate or remove the most noble and useful of our members, if their remaining imperil the safety of the whole body; so, also, I admonish you, O my faithful people, that ye endure any loss whatsoever, rather than commit a sin, especially a deadly sin; that, indeed, whatever is a stumbling-block to you and draws you to sin, although it be as dear and necessary to you as your right eye, you should altogether pluck it out and cast it from you, at whatever cost to you of pain and inconvenience: for example, that ye should put away the sight of an eye, even if modest in other respects, that is, the friendship and society of female relations, a wife, a son, a parent, if they bring upon you peril of sin, *i.e.*, if by other means you are not able to escape sin, for it is better to enter into heaven having one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell. But because it is always possible to escape from sin in some other way than by cutting off a member, it is not lawful to cut it off and so mutilate oneself. Thus it was that Origen, who made himself a eunuch for the sake of chastity, was condemned by the Church. Finally, the concupiscences which have to be cut off and mortified by every one so tenaciously cleave to the eyes and the body, yea, to the soul itself, that they cannot be rooted out without great force and sense of pain, so that they who cut them off suffer as much as if they plucked out an eye or a



already corrupted her in his mind, and therefore before God, who beholds the heart, he is an adulterer, and as an adulterer he will be punished by Him.

Christ passes from anger to concupiscence, because these two passions have the greatest influence over men. And as He explained the commandment, *Thou shall nor kill*, to forbid anger, so He here explains *Thou shall not commit adultery* to forbid concupiscence. For many of the Scribes and Pharisees greatly erred in their exposition of this precept as well as of the former. For although they knew that it was commanded by the tenth precept of the Decalogue, *Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife*, nevertheless they erred—

1. Because they understood it of concupiscence, not altogether internal, but such as is wont to break out in touch, kisses, lascivious words, and such like, according to the maxim, "The law prohibits the hand, not the mind." But this is true of civil and state law, which only punishes external wrongdoing, but not of the law of God, which weighs and chastises the inmost thoughts of the heart. Josephus, the Jewish historian, fell into this very mistake, when, in the twelfth book of his *Antiquities*, he cites Polybius as saying that Antiochus Epiphanes perished miserably because he had wished to spoil the temple of Diana. Josephus finds fault with Polybius, saying, "To have wished merely, and not to have effected the sacrilege, does not seem a thing worthy of punishment." And R. David Kimchi, cited by Gerebrard (Ps. lxvi.), says, "Even if I should see iniquity in my heart, which I was even prepared to carry out in act, that it should be in the presence of God, and if I should utter it with my lips, yet will not God hear it—*i.e.*, it will not be imputed to me for wickedness. For God does not reckon an evil thought as a work, unless it be against the faith of God and religion." Thus, too, there are many in this day who say, "To think evil is not a sin, but to do evil."

But this is a crass error, known and confuted by Aristotle and other heathens. For free will is the proper test and criterion of goodness and wickedness, of virtue and vice. For if free will seeks what is good and honest, it is itself good and laudable; but if evil, it is evil and blameworthy. Wherefore the external act, as, for instance, of adultery, is not, speaking precisely, a sin in itself (as in plain from the case of idiots being adulterers), unless it proceeded from free will. For from free will it derives all its *formal* sinfulness.

2. The Scribes erred in thinking that immodest looks, touch, kisses, &c., were not sins of adultery and fornication, but of concupiscence, and so were done against the Tenth Commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife*, but not against the Seventh. In opposition to this Christ here teaches the contrary, and so expounds the Seventh Commandment that all impurity is forbidden by it, because all such things are the road to adultery, and so a kind of beginning of adultery.

3. They were in error who thought that by this commandment only concupiscence in respect to another man's wife, but not of any unmarried woman, was forbidden. This error Christ here corrects, and teaches that all impurity between the sexes is forbidden by this law.

are degrees of faults and punishments, that some sins are worse than others, and so deserve a severer punishment from God. Whence there is sin which is venial, and there is sin which is mortal. Consequently, in opposition to Calvin, there is clearly a distinction between hell and purgatory.

*But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, &c.* Under this word *fool*, we are to understand all kinds of revilings, calumnies, reproaches, curses, which are mortal sins, if the be uttered grievously to dishonour our neighbour, or if the desire to do him injury and revile him, spring from the heart. For the gravity or triviality of a contumelious word must be weighed by the intention of the speaker. If you say it in joke, or not really to dishonour, but to correct, it is not formal, but material contumely, says D. Thom. (2. 2. q. 72, art. 2). Hence parents may severely correct and reprove and rebuke their children, and masters their servants, if it be done with moderation, and for just correction. Thus Christ calls Peter Satan (Matt. xvi. 23), and Paul calls the Galatians "foolish" (Gal. iii. 1). Again, the gravity of the contumely must be measured by the dignity of the person spoken to. For to say to a grave and honourable man, "Thou fool," is a grave contumely; but to call a man a fool who really is one, is a comparatively light reproach.

*Of hell fire.* The Arabic has, *the fire of hell*. S. Jerome observes that Christ here first uses the word *Gehenna* for hell. It is nowhere in the Old Testament used in that sense. *Gehenna* is derived from *ge*, a *valley*, and *Hinnom* or *Ennon*, a Jew so called. *Gehenna* is the valley of *Hinnom*. It was a pleasant vale near Jerusalem, in which parents were accustomed to burn their children in sacrifice to Moloch; and they beat drums that their cries and wails might not be heard. Hence the same place was called *Tophet*, *i.e.*, "a drum." Wherefore, Christ here speaks of the *Gehenna of fire*, to show that nothing but fire, and that eternal fire, is meant. See Isaiah xxx.33, where *Gehenna* and its torments are graphically depicted. *For Tophet is ordained of old, &c.*

**Ver. 23.**—*Therefore, if thou bring thy gift, &c.* If thy brother have anything to complain of in thee, any wrong for which to expostulate with thee, as that thou hast called him *raca*, or *fool*. This is the force of *therefore* in this passage. It would appear that the Scribes taught that all sins, and especially violations of the Sixth Commandment, were expiated by sacrifices and offerings at the altar of God, even when no satisfaction was made for a wrong done to one's neighbour. But Christ teaches the contrary, and sanctions the law of justice and charity, by which He bids that satisfaction must first be made to our neighbour who has been injured by us either in word or deed. Wherefore he subjoins,

**Verse 24-** *Leave there thy gift, &c.* This is a precept both of law and of natural religion, which has been by Christ in this place most strictly

sanctioned, both because by the Incarnation of Himself He has, in the very closest manner, united us all to Himself and to one another. This greater union, which we have therefore through Christ, demands greater love and unity among Christian brethren: so He has said, “A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.” Furthermore, the sacrifice of the Eucharist is more holy than the ancient sacrifices. It is the gathering together and the communion of the Body, of which we all partake; and therefore we are all mutually united to Christ and one another. Hence it is called communion, that is, the common union of all. Since therefore the Eucharist is a sacrifice, as well as a Sacrament and profession of mutual love and peace, it is necessary that all discord should be done away, and that those who have offended should reconcile themselves to those whom they have offended before this holy Synaxis, lest they be found liars. For in truth he is a liar who takes the Sacrament of union, that is, the Eucharist, and is not in union with, but bears a grudge or rancour against, his neighbour.

This is why it used to be the custom at Mass, that before Holy Communion, Christians were wont to give one another a holy kiss, as a symbol of reconciliation and union, in place of which what is called the *Pax* is now bestowed.

S. John the Almoner, Patriarch of Alexandria, to fulfil literally this precept or counsel of Christ, was once standing at the altar to say Mass, when he remembered that a certain cleric had conceived a hatred for him, and although he was the offended party, yet he asked his pardon first, and being thus reconciled, he went with him joyfully to the altar and finished the sacrifice, saying with confidence to God, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” as Leontius records in his Life. He adds that the same John repelled Damianus, a deacon, from Communion, and said to him, “Go first and be reconciled to thy brother.” Damianus promised so to do, when the Patriarch gave him the Sacred Mysteries.

**Verse 25-** *Agree*, Gr. εὐνοῶν, i.e., *be of good will*, Syriac, *a friend: with thine adversary*, Gr. τῷ ἀτιδικῷ σου, i.e., *thine accuser, thy prosecutor*, Syriac, *Beel dinoch*, “the master, or lord of thy lawsuit,” Arabic, *with him who is at law with thee: the uttermost fathoming*, i.e., of thy debt.

You will ask, who is this *adversary*?

1. Tertullian (*lib. de Animâ*), answers, it is the devil. He is Satan, i.e., our adversary.
2. S. Athanasius, or whoever be the author of *Quæst. S. Script. ad Antioch.* (*quæst.* 26), thinks the adversary means the flesh: for it is an adversary to the soul. “For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh” (Gal. v. 17). But we must not agree either with the devil, or the flesh, which is what we are here told to do by Christ.
3. The same Athanasius says with better reason, elsewhere, that it is our conscience, for this is our adversary, and stings us when we do ill, until we agree with it, by following its dictates.
4. SS. Augustine, Anselm, and Bede are of opinion that God, or the law of God is meant, for these fight against our lusts. Wherefore clearly we ought to consent unto

them, lest we incur the punishments with which they threaten us. But these are mystical, or symbolical interpretations.

Wherefore I say with SS. Jerome, Hilary, and Ambrose, that by our *adversary* is here meant any one who has been unjustly offended, or injured by us, and is therefore in a position to be able to accuse us before God. With such a one Christ in the preceding verse bade us be reconciled.

Note that there is here a Hebraism, and a parabolical form of expression, in which it is not necessary to adapt every word, but the general scope and meaning is what must be chiefly considered. And these, in this case, are rather hinted at than expressed. The sense then is this:—As a debtor, or one who is accused by a prosecutor before a judge, acts prudently if he agree with his adversary before judgment, and so escape the condemnation of the judge, prison, or infamy, so in like manner do thou act; and if thou hast injured thy brother in any way, as for instance by calling him *raca*, or *a fool*, thou hast made thyself a debtor, as it were, to restore him to honour: come in then, and be reconciled with him speedily, before thou be delivered as guilty to God the judge, who by a righteous vengeance shall deliver thee to prison, until thou shalt pay all thy debt. That prison is hell, or purgatory, according to the greater or less heinousness of thy sin. The word until, seems to bear a reference to purgatory, as though it signified terminable punishment, which is purgatory, whereas the punishment of hell has no end.

**Verse 26-** *Farthing*. Greek, κοδράντην. This is a word which has been borrowed from the Latin, like many others which are found in the Evangelists, such as *prætorium*, *centurio*, &c.

The *quadrans*, here translated *farthing*, was the fourth part of the Roman *as*, and is put for any very small coin. And the spiritual application is, that every debt, even the very least of the fault of anger, must be paid and atoned for after this life, in the place of justice. Wherefore in this life, where is the place for mercy, agreement and pardon, let us be reconciled to our adversary—i.e., whomsoever we have injured, either by word or deed. I have read in a history that a certain servant who had departed this life appeared to his master, who asked him of his state and condition. The servant answered, “I am in that place where every debt is exactly and rigidly reckoned, and where not so much as a straw is overlooked.” Doctor Jacobus also relates that a certain religious man, who had departed this life, appeared in vile raiment and with a sad countenance, and said to a companion, “No one believes, no one believes, no one believes how strictly God judges, and how severely He punishes.”

**Ver. 27 and 28.**—*Ye have heard*, &c. . . *to lust after her*—that is, with the design and object of indulging sinful passion with her—*hath already committed adultery with her in his heart*. Because by adultery he hath