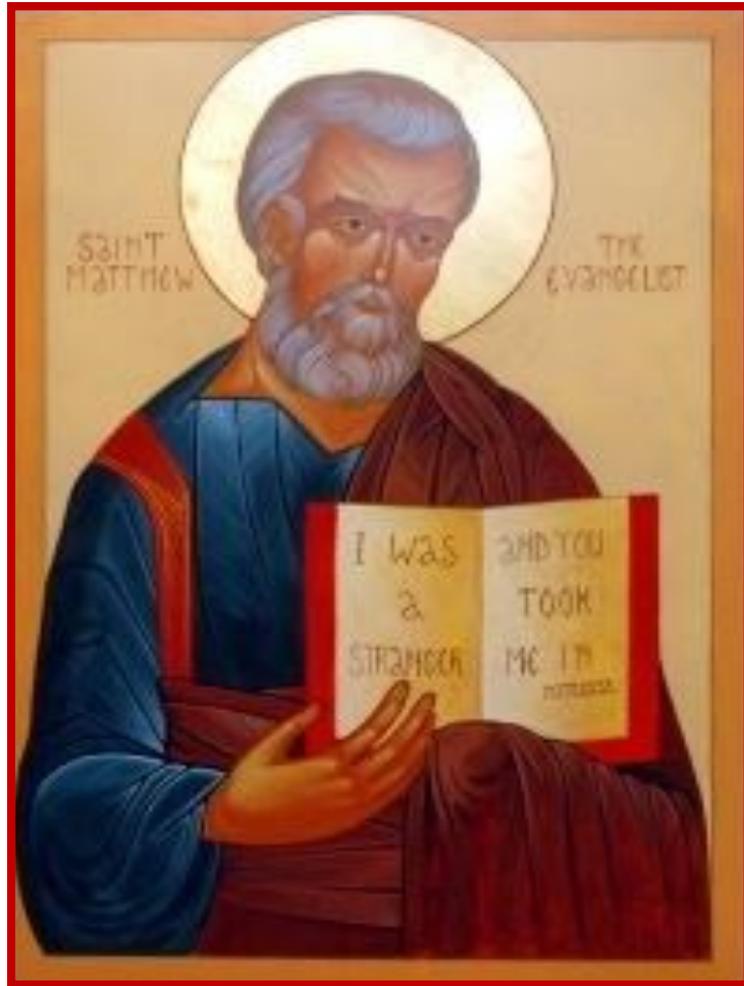


and the Apostles (Acts iv. and v.), and persecute from city to city, like Paul and Barnabas (Acts xiii. and xiv.).

*Tropologically:* Origen says (*hom. 23, in Num.*), "And I, this day, if I will not hear the words of a Prophet, if I despise his warnings, stone that Prophet, and as far as in me lies, kill him."



PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE: [www.pamphletstoinpire.com](http://www.pamphletstoinpire.com)



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.

## Matthew 23: 1-34

Douay Rheims Version

*Christ admonishes the people to follow the good doctrine, not the bad example of the scribes and Pharisees. He warns his disciples not to imitate their ambition and denounces divers woes against them for their hypocrisy and blindness.*

1. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples,
2. Saying: The scribes and the Pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses.
3. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do: but according to their works do ye not. For they say, and do not.
4. For they bind heavy and insupportable burdens and lay them on men's shoulders: but with a finger of their own they will not move them.

longer He waits the more just may be His judgment. But when God does determine to destroy that city or nation, He seems to avenge upon them the sins of all the preceding generations; as though that generation alone suffered what all the previous ones deserved. Thus God commanded Saul to blot out the posterity of Amalek on account of the wickedness of their parents, and their perpetual hostility to Israel (1 Sam. xv. 16). The reason is, because children and descendants are counted as one with their parents; hence the merits or demerits of the parents are imputed to the children, when, indeed, children imitate the wickedness and manners of their parents. Then, indeed, when the measure of sins predetermined by God is filled up, they suffer for their own and their fathers' sins.

Observe, however, that children are not punished more grievously than their own sins deserve, but because they imitate their parents' sins, and fill up the measure of iniquity. Hence it comes to pass that the anger of God burns against them when it would not have so fiercely burned unless they had filled up that measure. And in this sense and for this reason children are said to have visited upon them the sins of their parents, because God, in punishing, looks to the offences of both, according to Deut. v. 9, "A jealous God, rendering the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me."

**Verse 33-** *Ye serpents, &c. . . . the damnation of hell*, wherewith I will condemn you in the day of judgment as Christicides and Deicides. He calls the Scribes *serpents* and *vipers*, because of their serpentine disposition, and wish to slay Himself and His Apostles.

**Verse 34-** *Therefore, behold, I send, &c.* Observe the word *therefore*, that it expresses from the preceding verse an effect, as it were, from a cause. It means, "because ye, as serpents and vipers, will kill Me, your Messiah, for which wickedness ye will be cut off and condemned to hell. I have had pity upon you, and will send to you My disciples after My death, that they may avert from you this destruction, that they may arouse you to repentance and faith in Me. But I foresee that ye will slay them also, as I have predicted in the 32d verse."

*I send.* Luke xi. 49 says, *The wisdom of God hath said*, that is, indeed, Christ Himself.

*Prophets, and wise men, and Scribes.* Luke has *Prophets and Apostles*. S. Jerome says "This marks the various gifts of Christ's disciples. *Prophets*, who foretell things to come; *wise men*, who know when they ought to speak the word; *Scribes*, those learned in the law."

*Some of them ye shall kill*, as S. Stephen by stoning, James the greater by the sword; *and crucify*, as S. Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, successor of S. James (see Euseb. *H. E.* ii. 32); *and some of them ye shall scourge*, as Peter

sons of robbers bury those whom their fathers have murdered, that they may conceal the crime." So Origen, S. Jerome, and others.

By adding the word *hypocrites*, He intimates that they built the tombs of the Prophets, not from true, but merely pretended piety, that they might hide their own wickedness; and that they might appear religious defenders of the law, and that it was out of zeal for righteousness that they persecuted Christ unto the death, as though He were a breaker and an enemy of the law. And herein was a twofold wickedness. First, the compassing the death of Christ; secondly, hypocrisy, because of the pretence that they did it in order to vindicate the law. Somewhat similarly, when the Emperor Caracalla had slain his brother Geta upon his mother's bosom, being persuaded by his servants to enrol his brother among the gods, with the object of veiling the crime, cried, "Let him be a god if you please, so long as he is not alive." Thus the Scribes did not wish Christ and the Prophets to live, lest they should reprove their evil deeds. They preferred to kill them, and to cover the crime by building them magnificent sepulchres. Wherefore, *Auctor Imperfecti* says, "The Jews always held departed Saints in honour, and despised and persecuted living ones." There are persons who act in a like manner among Christians even now.

**Verse 30-** *And say, &c.* They deceive themselves, and utter falsehoods. For if they killed Christ, the Prince of the Prophets, because He reprov'd their wickedness, surely they would have killed the Prophets, who were wont to do the same.

**Verse 31-** *Wherefore ye testify against yourselves, &c.* That is, you testify that you are the sons of those who murdered the Prophets, and consequently that you have the same disposition and the same propensity to kill those who rebuke your vices, which they had. For children are like their parents. For a father is wont to transmit his inclinations, talents, and views to his children. Hence children "favour their parents." Also there is the example and training of parents, by means of which they influence their children to do the same things that they do themselves.

**Verse 32-** *Fill ye up then; Arab. ye fill up, &c.* That is, by killing Me and the Apostles, as your fathers killed the Prophets. These words of Christ are not a command, but a prediction. It is as though He said, "I do not command, but I permit and foretell that you, O ye Scribes, by killing Me, will fill up the measure of your fathers, who slew the Prophets; and when this measure has been filled up, God will, at one and the same time, avenge both your own and your fathers' crimes, by the extreme destruction which He will bring upon Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian."

From this and the 35th and 36th verses Theologians teach that God has decreed to kingdoms and states and individuals a certain measure of sins, before He fully and perfectly punishes them. But by and by, when they have been completed, then He punishes all at the same time most fully. Thus Christ looked for the killing of Himself and His Apostles before Jerusalem was overthrown. So, also, God said to Abraham (Gen. xv. 16), "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." *Auctor Imperfecti* says, God does not immediately punish a nation or a city when they sin, but waits for many generations, and sometimes threatens, and sometimes chastises in part, that the

5. And all their works they do for to be seen of men. For they make their phylacteries broad and enlarge their fringes.
6. And they love the first places at feasts and the first chairs in the synagogues,
7. And salutations in the market place, and to be called by men, Rabbi.
8. But be not you called Rabbi. For one is your master: and all you are brethren.
9. And call none your father upon earth; for one is your father, who is in heaven.
10. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, Christ.
11. He that is the greatest among you shall be your servant.
12. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.
13. But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for you yourselves do not enter in and those that are going in, you suffer not to enter.
14. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour the houses of widows, praying long prayers. For this you shall receive the greater judgment.
15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you go round about the sea and the land to make one proselyte. And when he is made, you make him the child of hell twofold more than yourselves.
16. Woe to you, blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but he that shall swear by the gold of the temple is a debtor.
17. Ye foolish and blind: for whether is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?
18. And whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it is a debtor.
19. Ye foolish and blind: for whether is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?
20. He therefore that sweareth by the altar sweareth by it and by all things that are upon it.
21. And whosoever shall swear by the temple sweareth by it and by him that dwelleth in it.
22. And he that sweareth by heaven sweareth by the throne of God and by him that sitteth thereon.
23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you tithe mint and anise and cummin and have left the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and faith. These things you ought to have done and not to leave those undone.
24. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.
25. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within you are full of rapine and uncleanness.
26. Thou blind Pharisee, first make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean.

27. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthiness.

28. So you also outwardly indeed appear to men just: but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, that build the sepulchres of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the just,

30. And say: If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31. Wherefore you are witnesses against yourselves, that you are the sons of them that killed the prophets.

32. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

33. You serpents, generation of vipers, how will you flee from the judgment of hell?

34. Therefore behold I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes: and some of them you will put to death and crucify: and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city.

35. That upon you may come all the just blood that hath been shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the just, even unto the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias, whom you killed between the temple and the altar.

36. Amen I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation.

37. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not?

38. Behold, your house shall be left to you, desolate.

39. For I say to you, you shall not see me henceforth till you say: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

**Verse 1-** *Then Jesus spake, &c. Then*, that is to say, when, by His most wise answers and reasonings, He had confounded the errors of the Scribes and Pharisees, and had proved that He was the Messiah,—then, I say, He put to rebuke their persistent effrontery by this powerful and pathetic speech, by which He uncovered their feigned appearance of sanctity, and showed their lurking dishonesty, so that the people might avoid it.

**Verse 2-** *Saying, &c. By seat* we here understand the *honour, dignity, and authority* of teaching and commanding, which Moses had with the Jews, and to which the Scribes had succeeded. We gather from S. Luke iv. 16, that the Scribes not only sat, but sometimes stood when they taught. In like manner, the *chair* of S. Peter is used to signify *the power and authority* of teaching and ruling all the faithful throughout the world, in which the Roman Pontiffs succeed S. Peter. For otherwise no Pontiff ever sits now in that actual wooden chair in which S. Peter sat, but it is religiously preserved in his basilica, and is shown to the people every year on the Feast of S. Peter's Chair, to be venerated. Hence S. Jerome said to Damasus, "I am united in communion to your blessedness, that is, to the chair of Peter." For although as a private man the Pontiff may err, yet when he defines anything *ex cathedra*, that is, by

Briefly and simply we may explain thus. "Ye are zealous to cleanse the external cups and plates, out of which ye eat and drink; ye neglect to cleanse by repentance the interior cups and dishes of the conscience, which are filthy with sin."

*Full of uncleanness*, Vulg. The translator had in his Greek text, *ἀκαθαρσίας*, where we now read *ἀδικίας*, or *ἀκζασίας*, i.e., *intemperance*. It means, "Ye think ye are defiled, if ye drink out of a dirty cup; but ye do not think ye are defiled by intemperance, when ye are drunken. But it is intemperance which defiles the soul, not a dirty cup."

**Verse 26-** *Thou blind Pharisee, &c.* "O thou who art a teacher of others, and art blind thyself, cleanse first thine own mind and inward conscience, then shall all outward things become clean unto thee."

**Verses 27, 28-** *Woe unto you . . . full of iniquity; Gr. ἀνομία*, i.e., *perversion of the law*. "Ye simulate an outward zeal for the law, whilst inwardly ye despise and pervert it." Appositely says *Auctor Imperfecti*, "Tell me, O hypocrite, if it is good to be good, why do you not wish to be what you wish to appear? It is more base to be what it is base to appear: and what it is beautiful to appear, it is beautiful to be."

"Moreover, there are many in our days like the Pharisees," says S. Chrysostom, "who take the greatest care of cleanliness and outward adorning, but whose souls have no ornaments; yet who fill their souls with worms and gore and an inexpressible stench; who fill them, I say, with wicked and absurd lusts."

**Verse 29-** *Woe unto you . . . because ye build; Vulg. who build, the combs, &c.* For although this was in itself a holy and religious thing, yet in the Scribes it was vicious and wicked. S. Chrysostom gives three reasons—1st. He says Christ does not blame the work, but the intention. They did it for pomp. But as regards pomp, what does it profit them to be praised when they are not, and to be tormented when they are in hell? 2d. Because, without reason, he honours the just, who despises justice; and the Saints cannot be the friends of those to whom God is an enemy. 3d. Because the martyrs take no pleasure in being honoured with money which has caused the poor to weep. For the Scribes exacted money from the poor, that they might build with it magnificent monuments to the Prophets, or rather for their own glory. And 4th, and principally, Christ here blames the Scribes for building monuments to the Prophets, because at the very time they did it, they were thinking how they might kill other and greater prophets, such as Christ Himself and His disciples. And this was why they seemed to imitate the murders and the sacrileges of their fathers, and to give an implied consent to them. As though He had said, "Ye bury the prophets who were slain by your fathers; and ye have a like desire to kill and bury Me. Rightly, therefore, do ye bury the Prophets whom your fathers slew; just as the

what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

These care the things which ye ought to have done, and not to omit the others, such as *the tithing of mint*, which was either commanded or permitted by the law.

**Verse 24-** *Ye blind guides which strain out, &c.*; Gr. *διυλίζοντες*, i.e., *straining, purifying, draining* wine, milk, or oil from gnats or other impurities or dregs, by means of a strainer of linen, or other such material. As Apuleius says of the Gymnosophists, "They know not how either to cultivate land or to strain gold." *Swallow a camel.* For *camel*, Cajetan puts wrongly *asilum, a gadfly*, an insect which makes a horrid noise. All the codices, Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Arabic have *camel*, which is properly opposed to *gnat*, as something very large to something very small. The sentence is proverbial, and means, "Ye have exact care of trifling things, such as tithing of herbs, lest any one should defraud you in the smallest possible degree; but you at the same time commit, without any scruple, all manner of injustice, rapine, and other wickednesses, as big, as it were, as camels, which ye may be said to swallow down." As it is said in Job xv. 16, "Who drinketh iniquity like water." "Christ derides the zeal of the Scribes," says Origen, "in being so scrupulous about very trifling things, and so free and bold in the commission of great crimes; in being superstitious about ceremonial washings, but devoid of true relation and charity." They have those who are like them among Christians even now, who scrupulously recite the rosary, and fast in honour of the Blessed Virgin, and withal are guilty at the same time of luxury, rapine, theft, &c.

Proverbs with a similar meaning are: "To draw water from a fountain to fill the sea." "To strip one who is bare, to heap garments upon those who are clothed." "He takes a candle to add to the sunlight." "To hunt a dog with a lion, a hare with an ox."

*Mystically:* S. Gregory understands by *the gnat*, Barabbas; by *the camel*, Christ. This is what he says (*lib. 1, Moral c. 6*), "The gnat wounds in humming but the camel of its own accord bends to receive its burden. The Jews, therefore, *strained out the gnat*, because they asked that the seditious robber might be set free. But they *swallowed the camel*, because by their cries they strove to destroy Him, who of His own will had come down to bear the burdens of our mortality."

**Verse 25-** *Woe unto you, &c.* This is another parable, in which Christ calls man *a cup and a plate*. The body and external goods He calls *the outside of the cup and the platter*. The soul and the conscience He calls *that which is within*. The meaning is, "You, O ye Pharisees, studiously wash and cleanse your hands, your bodies, the cups and plates and glasses out of which ye eat and drink, but ye fill your conscience with the uncleanness of rapine and every sort of wickedness. Whereas ye ought to take chief care that your conscience should be purified, for it is that alone which makes us clean in the sight of God, as it is also that from which flows all impurity of acts and deeds. It is the conscience which is the source of the goodness or wickedness of actions. Wherefore, if the conscience be clean, all other things will be clean also."

his Pontifical authority concerning the faith, he cannot err, because he is assisted by the Holy Ghost.

Observe, many of the Scribes and Pharisees were priests or Levites, whose duty it was to teach the people (Mal. ii. 7). But Christ did not wish to name the Priests, because He would not derogate from the sacerdotal honour.

**Verse 3-** *All things therefore whatsoever, &c.* He means, of course, all things not contrary to Moses and the Law. For the doctrine of the Scribes, when they taught men to say *corban* to their parents, was contrary to the Law, as Christ showed (xv. 4). In like manner, it was contrary to the Law of Moses to teach, as the Scribes did, that Jesus was not the Messiah, or the Christ. For Jesus showed those very signs and miracles which Moses and the Prophets had foretold Messiah would perform. In such things, therefore, the people must not follow the doctrine of the Scribes, nor be obedient to them; but in other things, in which their teaching was generally conformable to the Law of Moses, it was their duty to obey them. Christ therefore here teaches that all the other dogmas of the Scribes, which were not repugnant to the law, even though they were vain and foolish, and therefore not binding (for that a law should be obligatory, it must command something honest and useful, as Civilians and Theologians teach in their treatises upon laws, also D. Thomas, 1. 2 *quæst.* 95, *art.* 3), such as were the frequent washings of the hands and other parts of the body, might yet serve for the merit of blind and simple obedience, and for reverence of the sacerdotal order. So Jansen, Franc. Lucas, and others. But Maldonatus restricts the word all to such commands alone as are contained in the Law of Moses. Certainly these were what Christ chiefly referred to.

*For they say, i.e., command, and do not.* They teach and order well, but they live ill. They both break the law, and scandalise their subjects by their evil example, and thus incite them likewise to break the law. For as one hath said, "The whole world comports itself according to the king's example," we may add, of the Teacher's likewise. For men give more credit to deeds than they do to words. Christians ought to bear in mind these words of Christ when they see certain Bishops, Pastors, and Magistrates not living in accordance with the law of Christ.

**Verse 4-** *For they bind . . . upon men's shoulders; Arab. upon their necks; Gr. δεσμεύουσι, i.e., they bind and, as it were, gather them together in heaps.* This signifies both the multitude and the heavy weight of the precepts with which they burden the people.

*Unbearable; Vulg. Gr. δυσάστακτα, as English version, difficult to be borne, rather than impossible.* Such were the numerous precepts, beyond what the Law required, concerning oblations, tithes, first-fruits, &c. Consider only the vigorous observance of the Sabbath, which they enjoined, so that

they would not allow Christ to heal the sick on that day, nor suffer His disciples to satisfy their hunger by plucking ears of corn.

*Move them; Vulg. Syr. and English Version, touch them.* As S. Chrysostom says, “He shows that theirs was a double wickedness, both because they wish the multitude to live in the strictest possible manner, without the least indulgence, and because, indulging themselves inordinately, they assume great license. Which things are the very opposite of what is required in a good prince. For such a one permits himself no indulgence, but is mild towards his subjects, and ready to bestow pardon.”

**Verse 5-** *All things that they may be seen; Gr. θεαθῆναι, i.e., be a spectacle.* He notes their vain ostentation of sanctity in praying in the public streets, &c Christ here touches upon the root of the incredulity of the Scribes, that they would not believe in Him, because they sought after vainglory and the applause of men. “For it is impossible,” says S. Chrysostom, “that he who covets the earthly glory of men should believe in Christ preaching heavenly things.”

*They make large their fringes; Vulg. They prolong the fringes of their cloaks; Syr. They, the Jews, interpreted too literally the words of Deut. vi. 8, “Thou shalt bind them, i.e., the precepts of God, for a sign upon thine hands, and they shall be moved (Vulg.) before thine eyes.”* They bore certain pieces of parchment about their arms and foreheads. Whence they were called armlets and frontiers. They did this that they might strike against their eyes and foreheads, and admonish them to meditate upon and keep the Divine Law. The words inscribed upon the pieces of parchment were, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.” They were called phylacteries, from φυλάττω, *to guard, to keep*, because they put them in constant remembrance of observing the law.

For a similar reason, in Num. xv. 38 and Deut. xxii 12, the Lord commanded the Jews to wear fringes, threads depending from the lowest skirt of their garments, and that they should be of a light blue or dark blue colour, as men who professed and lived the heavenly life by keeping the law. S. Jerome adds that the more devout Jews were wont to insert very sharp thorns in these fringes, that being pricked by them as they walked, they might be always reminded of the Divine Law. All these things the Pharisees wore larger and broader than other people, that they might appear to all to be stricter observers of the law, although they made but little of it in their minds. “Not understanding,” says S. Jerome, “that these things should be carried in the heart, not in the body, for bookcases and chests have books, but have not therefore the knowledge of God.” Moreover, S. Chrysostom, by *phylacteries*, understands amulets worn to preserve health, for such the Scribes esteemed the pieces of parchment described above. In the same way, some Christians wear the Gospel of S. John about their necks as a kind of charm to preserve health.

things, such as the offering in it of prayers and sacrifices to God. This, therefore, was only an external holiness which the temple communicated to the other things offered in it to God. Wherefore the Temple was more holy than anything offered in the Temple, and therefore an oath made by the Temple was more binding than an oath made by the gold offered in the Temple.

**Verse 18-** *And whose shall swear by the altar, &c.* The same reasoning applies to the *altar* which Christ has already applied to the *Temple*.

**Verse 19-** *The altar which sanctifieth, Syr. consecrates, the gift.* A gift offered to God is not properly *sanctified*, so that it should be in itself *righteous* or *holy*, but it is said to be *sanctified* extrinsically, because it is offered to God, and thus sanctified.

*Mystically:* S. Augustine says (1 *Quæst. Evang.* 34), “The Temple and the Altar is Christ. The gold and the gifts are the praises and sacrifices which are offered in Him and by Him.” Origen says, the altar is the heart; the gifts are prayer and fasting, which the heart makes holy.

**Verse 21-** *Whoso shall swear by the temple, &c.* That is, he swears by God, who has His throne in the Temple, that He may be worshipped there. For the sacred majesty and holiness of God are supposed by men to abide in the Temple. Whence, S. Nilus says, “Come to the church as to Heaven.”

**Verse 22-** *And he that sweareth by heaven, &c.* For by the common usage and belief of men, he who swears by God, who only is infallible, and the uncreated Truth itself, calls Him to attest what he says or promises. Wherefore, he who swears by Heaven, swears by God, the King and Lord of Heaven, and calls Him to witness.

**Verse 23-** *Woe unto you, &c.* Tithes were sanctioned by God in the law. Whence R. Achiva says in *Pirke Avoth*, “Tithes are the bulwark of riches,” because they defend and preserve them. “Tradition is the bulwark of the law. A vow is the bulwark of abstinence; silence, of wisdom.”

*Mint*, a herb of sweet smell, which is often put into broth. *Anise*, says Pliny, is of efficacy against flatulency and pains in the stomach.

*And ye have left, &c. . . . judgment, i.e.,* justice and equity, passing unjust sentences, so as to favour your own friends and those who offer you gifts. *Mercy*, because ye rigidly and cruelly exact tithes of widows and the poor. *And faith, i.e.,* fidelity in words and compacts. Or *faith* in God, and Christ who has been sent by Him. Therefore, ye are unbelievers, in that ye lack faith, hope, and charity, which are the things that God above all requires, according to the words in Micah vi. 8, “I will show thee, O man,

**Verse 14-** *Woe unto you, &c.* Because ye *devour*, that is, *exhaust*, the substance of widows, in extracting money from them by selling them under a feigned appearance of sanctity your long public prayers. This is why He adds in explanation, *making long prayers*. Gr. *προφάσει μακρᾶ πρὸςσεχόμενοι*, *praying at length as a pretext*.

*Wherefore ye shall receive greater damnation.* The Syriac translates, *ye are about to receive the extremest judgment*; both because ye rob from widows, and because, as Chrysostom says, ye paint avarice the colour of religion, that iniquity may be loved, being esteemed as piety. Ye also imbue widows with your own errors and wickedness. Wherefore ye ought to receive the punishment of your own sin and the guilt of their ignorance, as S. Hilary says.

**Verse 15-** *Woe unto you . . . hypocrites, &c.* Instead of *hypocrites*, the Syriac has here and in the verses which follow, *acceptors of persons*. *Proselyte* means the same in Greek as *advena*, or *stranger*, in Latin. A proselyte was one who was converted from heathenism to Judaism, and became attached to the Jewish Church and religion. In Hebrew *proselytes* are called *gerim*. Christians call such persons *neophytes*. The Scribes strove to turn many Gentiles to Judaism, for the sake of ambition as well as avarice, that they might augment their oblations. *Sea and land*, that is, the whole world.

*Ye make him the son*, that is, *guilty, worthy of hell, twofold more than yourselves*; Gr. *διπλότερον ὑμῶν*. For, as Euthymius says, it is the same as in nature, that scholars easily surpass their teachers in vice. "Because," as Chrysostom says, "being provoked by the evil example of their teachers, they become worse than them, especially when they are stirred up by the words and examples of their teachers." Again, many proselytes, when they see your evil doings, return to heathenism. For he who relapses commits a greater and, as it were, *a double sin*.

**Verse 16-** *Woe unto you, &c. . . . but if he shall swear by the gold of the temple, &c., the gold*, that is, which he has vowed to pay. Instead of *he is a debtor*, the Arabic translates *he has sinned*, that is, *he does not pay what he has sworn*.

Observe (from the words in Matt. v. 34), that the Scribes thought from what God had commanded, that they should swear by Him alone,—an oath by any creature was not an oath, nor obligatory; but being blinded by avarice, they excepted such things as, being offered to God, filled their own coffers, as if these alone were to be accounted most sacred. Wherefore they are rightly called by Christ *blind guides*. Moreover, the Scribes were wont to say that the oblations were more holy than the Temple itself, "that they might make men more ready for offerings than for prayers," says the Gloss. He calls *the gold* which was cast into the treasury of the Temple for maintaining its ministers *the gold of the Temple*. Truly says the Gloss, "He that swears by a creature, swears by the Deity which presides over the creature."

**Verse 17-** *Ye fools and blind, &c.* This reasoning of Christ is clear, and convicts the Scribes of folly. Holiness is properly interior virtue, and the grace which sanctifies the soul. But the Temple is here called *holy* by metonymy, because it is set apart for holy

**Verse 7-** *And salutations in the market-places; Vulg. in the forum. S.* Chrysostom says, "They love the first salutations, not only as regards time, that we should salute them first, but also as regards the voice, that we should cry out, 'Hail, Rabbi;' and as regards the body, that we should bow the head to them; and as regards place, that we should salute them in public." Wisely saith R. Matthies in *Pirke Avoth*, "Always be the first to salute every one. Be the tail of lions, and not the head of foxes; that is, be the lowest among good and honourable men, not the chief among deceitful, proud, and impious ones."

*Rabbi*, from *רבי*, *e.*, *much or great*, because a great man, such as a Rabbi, or Doctor of the Law, was equivalent to many persons, as excelling others in learning and authority. Well saith R. Benzoma in *Pirke Avoth*, "Who is a wise man? He who willingly learns of all, according to the words, 'I had more understanding than the aged, because I sought Thy commandments.' Who is the mighty man? He who rules over anger, and his own spirit, according to the saying, 'Better is the patient man than the strong, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city' (Prov. xvi. 32). Who is the rich? He that is contented with his own, as it is said (Ps. cxxviii.), 'Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands; O well is thee, and happy shalt thou be.' Who is honoured? He that honoureth others, as it is written, 'Him that honoureth Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.'"

**Verse 8-** *But be not ye called Rabbi, &c.* He forbids the ambition of the Scribes and Pharisees, who desired to be honoured and called Rabbi above Christ, yea, even to the exclusion of Christ. But it is lawful to desire a doctor's degree, as a testimony of learning, that by it we may obtain authority, and preach, and have influence with the people, and by this means gain the greater fruit. Wherefore the Council of Trent (sess. 24 c. 12) orders that all dignities, and at least the half of canonries in cathedral and collegiate churches, should be conferred only upon masters and doctors, or at least licentiates in theology or canon law. Christ does not say, *do not be*, but *do not be called*, Rabbi.

Christ does not forbid the doctor's degree, but the proud ambition of the name, that by it a man should please himself and despise others, as though he had his knowledge and learning from himself, and not from Christ, which was what the Scribes did. Therefore He adds the reason, *for one is your Master, even Christ*. He means, there is one chief Rabbi over all, of whom all others are the disciples, and all are brethren, equal one to another. Therefore let none of them proudly lift himself above the rest, and wish to be called Rabbi, as though he were of himself a doctor and master of others, for this is a wrong done to Christ, who alone has all wisdom in Himself, and is the only supreme Doctor of all, who indeed makes them doctors. And in this lower sense Paul himself, as S. Jerome says, with modesty calls himself the doctor of the Gentiles.

**Verse 9-** *Call no one your father upon earth, &c.* He means in the sense of the prime author of life and the preserver of all things, as though ye entirely depended upon any but God. This was what the Gentiles and Atheists did, and others who trusted in men rather than in God. That this is the meaning, is plain from the reason which He subjoins, *for one is your Father, &c.* “Of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named” (*Eph.* iii. 15). God therefore is the only real Father of all, forasmuch as He only gives soul and life, creates, and preserves. In comparison of Him, says S. Jerome, earthly fathers are only so in a figurative sense, and ought not therefore insolently to command their children, but ought to submit themselves together with their children to God, the chief Father of all.

**Verse 10-** *Neither be ye called, i.e., be not ambitious of being called masters; Vulg. magistri; Gr. καθηγηταί, or governors, moderators; Syr. rulers; for One is the Ruler and Orderer, Gr. καθηγητής, of your life, that is, Christ.* He Himself, in the first place, by Himself teaches us, and leads us by the way of virtue to heavenly glory. All others teach as they have been first taught by Him. Secondly, all others only teach in words that sound in the outward ears, like a tinkling cymbal; but Christ makes known their meaning inwardly to the mind. For, as S. Chrysostom says, “it is not man who gives man understanding by teaching, but exercises by means of admonition what has been ordained by God.” Thirdly, all others only show what the law commands and what God requires; but Christ gives grace to the will, that we, when we hear the things which ought to be done, may indeed constantly fulfill the same.

**Verse 11-** *He that is the greater of you, &c.* “He teaches,” says S. Chrysostom, “that the disease of vainglory must be got rid of by humility.” And Origen says, “If any one ministers the divine words, knowing that it is Christ who produces fruit by His means, he by no means holds himself forth as a master, but a minister.” Whence it follows, *He that is the greatest, &c.,* because even Christ Himself, who is the true Master, hath professed Himself to be a minister, in that He saith, I am among you as he that ministereth; and well does He add after the whole saying, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* These words are true as applied both to God and men, says Remigius. For both God and men exalt the humble and depress the proud. “Glory follows them that flee from it, and flees from those who pursue it. God will bring down insolent pride from its lofty height, and will raise up humility to glory,” says S. Hilary.

Blessed Peter Damian gives a memorable example (*Epist.* 15). There was, he says, a certain bold and warlike clergyman, who became great by means of his pride and his arms. And he had in consequence a quarrel about certain estates with another powerful man, which he determined to decide by the fortune of war, and the troops of both were drawn up in battle array. The clergyman before the battle went into a church and heard Mass. It chanced that the words of the Gospel were read, *All that exalteth himself shall be abased.* When he heard them he said insolently, or rather blasphemously, “These words are falsified in me, for if I had humbled myself I should never have become as great as I am.” By and by, in the heat of battle, his horse being very thirsty, ran, contrary to his wish, to some water that was near. He struck his horse with his shield, in order to cause it to return into the battle, when, behold, an

enemy’s sword transfixed that blaspheming mouth of his like a thunderbolt, and slew him, humbling his pride and casting him down to the ground, showing that the words of Christ are indeed true.

**Ver. 13.** *Woe unto you, Scribes, &c.* Observe that, as Christ enumerated eight beatitudes, repeating the word *blessed* eight times in S. Matt. v., so does He here bestow eight maledictions upon the impious Scribes, eight several times repeating the word *woe*. Christ the new Lawgiver imitates Moses, the ancient lawgiver, who promises many blessings to those who keep the law, and threatens with as many curses those who break it. Thus Origen.

Moreover, the word *woe* is partly prophetic of the grave punishment which should fall upon the wickedness of the Scribes, and is partly condoling and pitying in its signification. Whence Basil says, “This word *woe*, which is prefixed to intolerable pain, applies to those who were soon afterwards to be destroyed by dreadful punishments.” The word *woe* therefore presupposes a deadly fault, for it threatens the punishment of hell, as Christ explains in ver. 33.

*For ye shut, &c* “I indeed open to all the kingdom of Heaven; for I preach, *repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* For this kingdom has been shut for four thousand years, through Adam’s sin. I, expiating that sin by My death, will now open it, that whoso believeth in Me and followeth My life, may enter into the open kingdom. Wherefore many of the Jews, being aroused by My preaching, are striving to enter in. But you, O ye Scribes, turn them away, and shut Heaven against them by your vain and perverse traditions, which ye instil into their minds.” For, as S. Chrysostom says, “The kingdom of Heaven is Holy Scripture; the door is the understanding of Scripture, or Christ; the bearers of the keys are the Scribes and Priests; the key is the word of knowledge; the opening of the door is interpretation. Ye also cause men to offend by your wickedness and evil example; and because ye calumniate and persecute Me, and draw them away from believing in Me, which is the road to Heaven. For I am the door, because by Me alone there is entrance into Heaven.”

*Tropologically,* they shut up the kingdom of Heaven who excommunicate any one without cause.

*For ye enter not in yourselves, &c.* This is a grievous sin. For if, says Chrysostom, it is the part of a doctor to recall the erring, he who draws those who are going on safely into error is altogether a son of perdition, yea, he is a pestilence itself. Wherefore such a doctor deserves, and brings upon himself as many hells as the number of souls whom he corrupts and destroys, because he is not a teacher and promoter of salvation, but a betrayer.