

John: 12:44–50

From Catena Aurea:

44. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.

45. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

46. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

47. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

48. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

49. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

50. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) Because the love of human praise prevented the chief rulers from believing, Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me: as if to say, Why are ye afraid to believe on Me? Your faith through Me passes to God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liv. 2) He signifies to them that He is more than He appears to be, (for to men He appeared but a man; His Godhead was hid.) Such as the Father is, such am I in nature and in dignity; He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, i. e. on that which He sees, but on Him that sent Me, i. e. on the Father. [1He that believes in the Father must believe in Him as the Father, i. e. must believe that He has a Son; and reversely, he who believes in the Son thereby believes in the Father.] And again, if any one thinks that God has sons by grace, but not a Son equal and coeternal with Himself, neither does he believe 2on the Father, who sent the Son; because what he believes on is not the Father who sent Him. (c. 3.). And to shew that He is not the Son, in the sense of one out of many, a son by grace, but the Only Son equal to the Father, He adds, And He that seeth Me, seeth Him that sent Me; so little difference is there

between Me and Him that sent Me, that He that seeth Me, seeth Him. Our Lord sent His Apostles, yet none of them dared to say, He that believeth on Me. We believe an Apostle, but we do not believe on an Apostle. Whereas the Only Begotten says, He that believeth on Me, doth not believe on Me, but on Him that sent Me. Wherein He does not withdraw the believer's faith from Himself, but gives him a higher object than the form of a servant, for that faith.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxix. 1) He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me: as if He said, He that taketh water from a stream, taketh the water not of the stream, but of the fountain. Then to shew that it is not possible to believe on the Father, if we do not believe on Him, He says, He that seeth Me, seeth Him that sent Me. What then? Is God a body? By no means; seeing here is the mind's vision. What follows still further shews His union with the Father. I am come a light into the world. This is what the Father is called in many places. He calls Himself the light, because he delivers from error, and disperses the darkness of the understanding; that whosoever believeth in Me should not abide in darkness.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liv. 4) Whereby it is evident, that He found all in darkness. In which darkness if they wish not to remain, they must believe in the light which is come into the world. He says in one place to His disciples, Ye are the light of the world; but He did not say to them, Ye are come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on you should not abide in darkness. All saints are lights, but they are so by faith, because they are enlightened by Him, from Whom to withdraw is darkness.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxix. 1) And to shew that He does not let His despisers go unpunished, from want of power, He adds, And if any man hear My words and believe not, I judge him not.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liv. 5, 6) i. e. I judge him not now. He does not say, I judge him not at the last day, for that would be contrary to the sentence above, The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son. (5:22) And the reason follows, why He does not judge now; For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. Now is the time of mercy, afterward will be the time of judgment.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxix. 2) But that this might not serve to encourage sloth, He warns men of a terrible judgment coming; He that rejecteth Me, and heareth not My words, hath one that judgeth him.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liv. 6) Mean time they waited to know who this one was; so He proceeds: The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day. He makes it sufficiently clear that He Himself will judge at the last day. For the word that He speaks, is Himself. He speaks Himself, announces Himself. We

gather too from these words that those who have not heard, will be judged differently from those who have heard and despised.

AUGUSTINE. (i. de Trin. c. xii. [26.]) I judge him not; the word that I have spoken shall judge him: for I have not spoken of Myself. The word which the Son speaks judges, because the Son did not speak of Himself: for I have not spoken of Myself: i. e. I was not born of Myself.

AUGUSTINE. e I ask then how we shall understand this, I will not judge, but the word which I have spoken will judge? Yet He Himself is the Word of the Father which speaketh. Is it thus? I will not judge by My human power, as the Son of man, but as the word of God, because I am the Son of God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 2) Or, I judge him not, i. e. I am not the cause of his destruction, but he is himself, by despising my words. The words that I have just said, shall be his accusers, and deprive him of all excuse; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him. And what word? This, viz. that I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father which sent Me gave Me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. All these things were said on their account, that they might have no excuse.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liv. 7) When the Father gave the Son a commandment, He did not give Him what He had not: for in the Wisdom of the Father, i. e. in the Word, are all the commandments of the Father. The commandment is said to be given, because it is not from him to whom it is said to be given. But to give the Son that which He never was without, is the same as to beget the Son who never was not.

THEOPHYLACT. Since the Son is the Word of the Father, and reveals completely what is in the mind of the Father, He says He receives a commandment what He should say, and what He should speak: just as our word, if we say what we think, brings out what is in our minds.

And I know that His commandment is life everlasting.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liv) If life everlasting is the Son Himself, and the commandment is life everlasting, what is this but saying, I am the commandment of the Father? And in the same way in the following; Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak, we must not understand, said unto Me, as if words were spoken to the Only Word. The Father spoke to the Son, as He gave life to the Son; not that the Son knew not, or had not, but that He was the Son. What is meant by, as He said unto Me, so I speak, but that I am the Word who speaks. The Father is true, the Son is truth: the True, beget the Truth. What then could He say to the Truth, if the Truth was perfect from the beginning, and no new truth could be added to Him? That He spake to the Truth then, means that He beget the Truth.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

12:44 Belief in the Sender

Ignorance of the Son Is Ignorance of the Father.

Ambrose: The one who confesses the Father believes on the Son. For the one who does not know the Son does not know the Father. For everyone that denies the Son does not have the Father, but the one who confesses the Son has both the Father and the Son. What, then, is the meaning of “believes not in me”? It speaks not about what you can perceive in bodily form, nor merely on the man whom you see. For he has stated that we are to believe not merely on a man, but that you may believe that Jesus Christ himself is both God and man. This is why, for both reasons, he says, “I came not from myself.” And again: “I am the beginning, of which also I speak to you.” On the Christian Faith 5.10.119–20.

Deferring Honor to the Begetter.

Augustine: What is this we have just heard, brothers and sisters: the Lord saying, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me, but in the one who sent me”? It is good for us to believe in Christ, especially since he himself also said quite plainly what you heard just now, that is, that he had come as light into the world, and that whoever believes in him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

So it is good to believe in Christ. It is a great good to believe in Christ and a great evil not to believe in Christ. But because Christ the Son is whatever he is from the Father, while the Father is not from the Son but is the Father of the Son, that is why the Son does indeed call for faith in himself but refers the honor of it to his only-begetter. Sermon 140.1.

12:45 Whoever Sees Jesus Sees the Father

From the Human to the Divine.

Cyril of Alexandria: [Our Lord] gradually accustoms their minds to penetrate the depth of the mysteries concerning himself, [leading them] not to the human person but to that which was of the divine essence. He does this inasmuch as the Godhead is apprehended completely in the person of God the Father, for he has in himself the Son and the Spirit. With exceeding wisdom he carries them onward, ... for he does not

exclude himself from being believed on by us because he is God by nature and has shone forth from God the Father. But skillfully (as has been said) he handles the mind of the weak to mold them to godliness in order that you might understand him to say something like this: “When you believe on me—I who, for your sakes, am a man like yourselves, but who also am God by reason of my own nature and because of the Father from whom I exist—do not suppose that it is on a man you are setting your faith. For I am by nature God, notwithstanding that I appear like one of yourselves, and I have within myself him who begat me. Forasmuch therefore as I am consubstantial with him that has begotten me, your faith will assuredly pass on also to the Father himself.” As we said therefore, the Lord, gradually trains them to something better and profitably interweaves the human with what is God-befitting. Commentary on the Gospel of John 8.

Seeing God.

Chrysostom: What then! Is God a body? By no means. The “seeing” of which he here speaks is that of the mind. This demonstrates the consubstantiality. And what does it mean when he says “he that believes on me”? It is as though one should say, “He that takes water from the river does not take it from the river but from the spring that supplies the river.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 69.1.

Apostles Are Seen, but We Do Not Believe in Them.

Augustine: There is so little difference between me [i.e., the Son] and him who sent me [i.e., the Father] that he that sees me sees him. Certainly, Christ the Lord sent his apostles ... yet none of them dared to say, “He who believes in me.” ... We believe an apostle, but we do not believe in an apostle, for it is not an apostle who justifies the ungodly.... An apostle might say, “He who receives me receives him who sent me,” or “He who hears me hears him who sent me,” for the Lord tells them so himself. ... For the master is honored in the servant and the father in the son. But then the father is as it were in the son, and the master as it were in the servant. But the Only Begotten could rightly say, “Believe on God, and believe on me,” as what he also says here, “He who believes in me does not believe in me but on him that sent me.” Here he does not deflect the believer’s faith from himself but gives him a higher object than the form of a servant for that faith. Tractates on the Gospel of John 54.3.

Believing and Beholding.

Origen: Notice in the passage before us that there are two aspects about the Savior: first, believing in him, and second, what is above believing, that is, to behold (contemplate) the Word and in beholding the Word to behold the Father. Believing occurs even among the multitude of those who come to religion. But to behold the Word, and in him to regard the Father, does not pertain to all who believe but only to the pure in heart. This is how I understand "He who has seen me has seen the Father." For it is not the one who applies the power of vision lying in the eyes of the body to Jesus and his body who has seen his Father and God. And I think that time and training were needed in order to see Jesus, and seeing the Son to behold also the Father. ...

For one believing on the Son believes not on the Son but on God the Father of all. But one beholding the Word and Wisdom and Truth beholds not this alone but also the Father. And I think that it is in order to show the greatness of the mystery involved first in believing on the Son and secondly in beholding him that it is prefixed, "Jesus cried and said." For the mystical pronouncement about these things was indeed great. And the Evangelist makes clear elsewhere that it is possible to believe without beholding. Fragment 93 on the Gospel of John.

12:46 Faith Brings Us Out of Darkness

The True Light Shines in the Darkness.

Origen: When the Savior of the world came, he made the true light shine. But they did not want to gaze on it, nor were they willing to walk by the radiance of his teaching. Consequently, darkness overtook them and demanded a penalty for the wickedness that had preoccupied them. And this [darkness] might be said to have reasonably blinded and hardened them. And, just as it follows that the one who has chosen to walk in the light also knows where he is going, so it follows that the one who has not chosen to walk in the light walks in darkness and travels wretchedly along the road of the blind....

For just as the visible sun shoots out its bright beams in order to enlighten those who have ailing eyes, so also does the spiritual Sun, the Light that has no setting or evening, come to the world and through his divine and ineffable miracles cast the brilliant gleam of his deity far and wide. Fragment 94 on the Gospel of John.

To Withdraw from Christ Is Darkness.

Augustine: He says in one place to his disciples, "You are the light of the world" ... but he did not say to them, "You have come as a light into the world, that whosoever believes on you should not abide in darkness." ... All saints are lights, but they are illuminated by Christ through faith, and everyone that becomes separated from him will be enveloped in darkness. But that light that enlightens them cannot become separated from itself. For it is altogether beyond the reach of change. We believe, then, the light that has thus been lit is the prophet or apostle. But we believe him for this end, that we may not believe on that which is itself enlightened, but, with him, on that light that has given him light. Then we too may be enlightened, not by him, but along with him by the same light as he. And when he says, "That whoever believes on me may not abide in darkness," he makes it sufficiently clear that all have been found by him in a state of darkness. But so that they do not remain in the darkness in which they have been found, they ought to believe on that light that has come into the world, for that is how the world was created. Tractates on the Gospel of John 54.4.

12:47 Not Judging, but Saving

He Does Not Judge, Do You?

Ambrose: He judges not, and do you judge? He says that "whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness," that is, that if he is in darkness he may not remain that way but may amend his error, correct his fault and keep my commandments. For I have said, "I do not desire the death of the wicked, but their conversion." I said above that he who believes on me is not judged, and I keep to this: "For I have not come to judge the world, but that the world may be saved through me." I pardon willingly, I quickly forgive. "I will have mercy rather than sacrifice," because by sacrifice the just is rendered more acceptable, by mercy the sinner is redeemed. Concerning Repentance 1.12.54.

Condemnation Is Self-Inflicted.

Cyril of Alexandria: Those who refuse to hear Jesus and accept saving faith will condemn themselves, for he who came to illumine came not to judge but to save. Therefore, he who disobeys and subjects himself to the greatest miseries can only blame himself as justly punished. Commentary on the Gospel of John 8.

12:48 The Word as Judge

The Word That Will Judge.

Chrysostom: The word that I have just said shall be their accusers and deprive them of all excuses. The same word that I have spoken will be the word that will judge them. And what word is this? "That I have not spoken of myself, but the Father who sent me told me what I should say and what I should speak." All these things were said on their account so that they might have no pretense or excuse. Homilies on the Gospel of John 69.2.

Jesus Is the Word Who Will Judge.

Augustine: In the meantime, while they were waiting to know who this [judge] was, he went on to add, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day." He makes it sufficiently clear that he himself will judge at the last day. For the word that he speaks is himself. He speaks himself, announces himself and sets himself as the gate where he enters as the Shepherd to his sheep. We gather too from these words that those who have not heard will be judged differently from those who have heard and despised it. Tractates on the Gospel of John 54.6.

12:49 Jesus Speaks by the Father's Authority

Jesus Reveals the Will of God the Father.

Cyril of Alexandria: Since Jesus was the living and personal Word of God the Father, he is necessarily the medium of interpreting what is in the Father. Thus, by saying that he has received a commandment, Jesus means that he brings to light that which is, as it were, the set will and purpose of his own Father. Commentary on the Gospel of John 9.

The Word Gives Knowledge of the Father.

Basil the Great: Through all these words [Jesus] is guiding us to the knowledge of the Father and referring our wonder at all that is brought into existence to him, to the end that "through him" we may know the Father. On the Holy Spirit 8.19.

The Son Is Not Given Orders by the Father.

Basil the Great: It is not because Jesus lacks deliberate purpose or initiative, nor is it because he has to wait for some prearranged signal, that he employs language of this kind. His purpose is to make plain that his own will is connected in indissoluble union with the Father. Let us not then understand that what he calls a "commandment" is a peremptory mandate delivered by organs of speech, and giving orders to the Son, as to a subordinate concerning what he ought to do. Let us rather, in a sense befitting the Godhead, perceive a transmission of will, like the reflection of an object in a mirror, passing without note of time from Father to Son.... Everything the Father has also belongs to the Son. The Son does not acquire it piecemeal. Rather, he has it all at once. Among people, the workman who has been thoroughly taught his craft through long training and experience is able to work for his own future, utilizing that training he has received. And are we to suppose that the wisdom of God, the Maker of all creation, he who is eternally perfect, who is wise without a teacher, the Power of God, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," needs piecemeal instruction to mark out the manner and measure of his operations?... If you consistently follow this line of reasoning, you will turn the Son into an eternal student who is never able to graduate since the Father's wisdom is infinite. On the Holy Spirit 8.20.

12:50 Just as the Father Has Told Me

The Humility of Jesus.

Chrysostom: Do you see the humility of the words? For he who has received a commandment is not his own master. Yet he says, "As the Father raises up the dead and enlivens them, even so the Son enlivens whom he will." Does he have power then to enliven whomever he wants, and does he not have the power to say what he wants? What he intends then by the words is this: It is not possible that he [the Father] should speak one set of words and I should utter another. "And I know that his commandment is life everlasting." He said this to those who called him a deceiver and who asserted that he had come to do harm. However, when he says "I judge not," he shows that he is not the cause of their destruction. By this he all but plainly testifies (when he is about to remove himself from them and leave) that "I converse with you, speaking nothing on my own but everything as from the Father." Homilies on the Gospel of John 69.2.

The Son Is the Commandment of the Father.

Augustine: If life everlasting is the Son himself and the commandment is life everlasting, what is this but saying, "I am the commandment of the Father"? And in the same way in the following, "Whatever I speak therefore, even as the Father said to me, so I speak," we must not understand "said to me" as if words were spoken to the only Word or that the Word of God needed words from God. The Father spoke to the Son in the same way as he gave life to the Son. It was not that the Son was ignorant or did not [already] have life. Rather, it was simply because the Son was what he was. What, then, is meant by "as he said to me, so I speak" but that I am the Word who speaks. The Father is true, the Son is truth: the True begat the Truth. What then could he say to the Truth if the Truth was perfect from the beginning and no new truth could be added to him? That he spoke to the Truth then means that he begat the Truth. Tractates on the Gospel of John 54.8.