

Matthew: 12:22–37

From Catena Aurea:

22. Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

GLOSS. (non occ.) The Lord had refuted the Pharisees above, when they brought false charges against the miracles of Christ, as if He had broken the sabbath in doing them. But inasmuch as with a yet greater wickedness they perversely attributed the miracles of Christ done by divine power to an unclean spirit, therefore the Evangelist places first the miracle from which they had taken occasion to blaspheme, saying, Then was brought to him one that had a dæmon, blind and dumb.

CHRYSOSTOM. We may wonder at the wickedness of the dæmon; he had obstructed both inlets by which he could believe, namely, hearing and sight. But Christ opened both, whence it follows, And he healed him., insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

JEROME. Three miracles were wrought in one and the same person at the same time; the blind sees, the dumb speaks, the possessed is delivered from the dæmon. This was at that time done in the flesh, but is now daily being fulfilled in the conversion of them that believe; the dæmon is cast out when they first behold the light of the faith, and then their mouths which had before been stopped are opened to utter the praises of God.

HILARY. Not without reason, after having mentioned that all the multitude was healed together, does he bring in the cure of this man separately who was dæmoniac, blind and dumb. For after the man of the withered hand had been brought before Him, and been healed in the Synagogue, it behoved that the salvation of the Gentiles should be represented in the person of some other afflicted man; he who had been the habitation of a dæmon, and blind and dumb, should be made meet to receive God, should contain God in Christ, and by confession of God should give praise to the works of Christ.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 4.) For he that believes not, is truly dæmoniac, blind, and dumb; and he that has not understanding of the faith, nor confesses, nor gives praise to God, is subject to the devil.

AUGUSTINE. (De Cons. Ev. ii. 37) This narrative is given by Luke, not in this place, but after many other things intervening, and speaks of him as dumb only, and not blind. But he is not to be thought to be speaking of another man, because he is silent respecting this one particular; for in what follows he agrees exactly with Matthew.

HILARY. All the multitude were astonished at this which was done, but the jealousy of the Pharisees grew thereupon, And all the multitude were astonished and said, Is not this the Son of David?

12:25–26

25. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand;

26. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

JEROME. The Pharisees ascribed the works of God to the Prince of the dæmons; and the Lord makes answer not to what they said, but to what they thought, that even thus they might be compelled to believe His power, Who saw the secrets of the heart; Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said unto them.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xli.) Above they had accused Christ of having cast out dæmons by Beelzebub; but then He did not reprove them, suffering them, if they would, to acknowledge Him from further miracles, and to learn His greatness from His doctrine. But because they continued to maintain the same things, He now rebukes them, although their accusation had been very unreasonable. But jealousy reckes not what it says, so that only it say somewhat. Yet does not Christ contemn them, but answers with a gracious mildness, teaching us to be gentle to our enemies, and not to be troubled, even though they should speak such things against us, as we neither acknowledge in us, nor have any reasonableness in themselves. Therein also He proves that the things which they had said against Him were false, for it is not of one having a dæmon to shew such mercy, and to know the thoughts. Moreover, because this their accusation was very unreasonable, and they feared the multitude, they did not dare to proclaim it openly, but kept it in their thoughts; wherefore he says, Knowing their thoughts. He does not repeat their thoughts in His answer, not to divulge their wickedness; but He brings forward an answer; it was His object to do good to the sinners, not to proclaim their sin. He does not answer them out of the Scriptures, because they would not hearken to Him as they explained them differently, but He refutes them from common opinions. For

assaults from without are not so destructive as quarrels within; and this is so in bodies and in all other things. But in the mean while He draws instances from matters more known, saying, Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation; for there is nothing on earth more powerful than a kingdom, and yet that is destroyed by contention. What then must we say concerning a city or a family, that whether it be great or small, it is destroyed when it is at discord within itself.

HILARY. For a city or family is analogous to a kingdom, as it follows, And every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.

JEROME. For as small things grow by concord, so the greatest fall to pieces through dissensions.

HILARY. But the word of God is rich, and whether taken simply, or examined inwardly, it is needful for our advancement. Leaving therefore what belongs to the plain understanding thereof, let us dwell on some of the more secret reasons. The Lord is about to make answer to that which they had said concerning Beelzebub, and He casts upon those to whom He made answer a condition of their answering. Thus; The Law was from God and the promise of the kingdom to Israel was by the Law, but if the kingdom of the Law be divided in itself, it must needs be destroyed; and thus Israel lost the Law, when the nation whose was the Law, rejected the fulfilment of the Law in Christ. The city here spoken of is Jerusalem, which when it raged with the madness of its people against the Lord, and drove out His Apostles with the multitude of them that believed, after this division shall not stand; and thus (which soon happened in consequence of this division) the destruction of that city is declared. Again He puts another case, And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?

JEROME. As much as to say, If Satan fight against himself, and dæmon be an enemy to dæmon, then must the end of the world be at hand, that these hostile powers should have no place there, whose mutual war is peace for men.

GLOSS. (ord.) He holds them therefore in this dilemma. For Christ casts out dæmons either by the power of God, or by the Prince of the dæmons. If by the power of God, their accusations are malicious; if by the Prince of the dæmons, his kingdom is divided, and will not stand, and therefore let them depart out of his kingdom. And this alternative He intimates that they had chosen for themselves, when they refused to believe in Him.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or thus; If he is divided, he is made weak, and perishes; but if he perishes, how can he cast out another?

HILARY. Otherwise; If the dæmon was driven to this division to the end that he should thus afflict the dæmons, even thus must we attribute higher power to Him who made the division than to those who are thus divided; thus the kingdom of the Devil, after this division made, is destroyed by Christ.

JEROME. But if ye think, ye Scribes and Pharisees, that the dæmons depart out of the possessed in obedience to their Prince, that men may be imposed upon by a concerted fraud, what can ye say to the healing of diseases which the Lord also wrought? It is something more if ye assign to the dæmons even bodily infirmities, and the signs of spiritual virtues.

12:27–28

27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

CHRYSOSTOM. After the first answer, He comes to a second more plain than the first, saying, And if I by Beelzebub cast out dæmons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges.

JEROME. He alludes, as is His manner, under the name children of the Jews, either to the exorcists of that race, or to the Apostles who are by race of that nation. If He means the exorcists who by the invocation of God cast out dæmons, He thus constrains the Pharisees by a wise enquiry to confess that their work was of the Holy Spirit. If, He would say, the casting out of the dæmons by your children is imputed to God, and not to dæmons, why should the same work wrought by Me not have the same cause? Therefore shall they be your judges, not by authority but by comparison, they ascribe the casting out of the dæmons to God, you to the Prince of the dæmons. But if it is of the Apostles also that this is said, (and so we should rather take it,) then they shall be their judges, for they shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

HILARY. And they are worthily appointed judges over them, to whom Christ is found to have given that power over the dæmons, which it was denied that He had.

CHRYSOSTOM. Yet He said not, My disciples, or Apostles, but your children; that if they chose to return again to their own privileges, they might take occasion hence; but if they should be ungrateful, they might not have even an impudent excuse. And the Apostles cast out dæmons by virtue of power which they had from Him, and yet the Pharisees made no such charge against them; for it was not the actions themselves,

but the person of Christ to which they were opposed. Desiring then to shew that the things which were said against Him were only jealous suspicions, He brings forward the Apostles. And also He leads them to a knowledge of Himself, shewing how they stood in the way of their own good, and resisted their own salvation; whereas they ought to be joyful because He had come to bestow great goods upon them; If I by the Spirit of God cast out dæmons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. This also shews that it is a matter of great power to cast out dæmons, and not an ordinary grace. And thus it is He reasons, Therefore is the kingdom of God come upon you, as much as to say, If this indeed be so, then is the Son of God come upon you. But this He hints darkly, that it may not seem hard to them. Also to draw their attention, He said not merely, The kingdom hath come, but, upon you; that is to say, These good things are coming for you; why do you oppose your own salvation; for this is the very sign given by the Prophets of the presence of the Son of God, that such works as these should be wrought by Divine power.

JEROME. For the kingdom of God denotes Himself, of whom it is written in another place, The kingdom of God is among you; (Luke 17:21) and, There standeth one in the midst of you whom ye know not. (John 1:26) Or surely that kingdom which both John and the Lord Himself had preached above, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Mat. 3:2 4:17.) There is also a third kingdom of the Holy Scripture which shall be taken from the Jews, and be given to a nation that brings forth the fruit thereof.

HILARY. If then the disciples work by Christ, and Christ by the Spirit of God, already is the kingdom of God transferred to the Apostles through the office of the Mediator.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 5.) Whence the sense might be this, If I by Beelzebub vast out dæmons, then, according to your own opinion, the kingdom of God is come upon you, for the kingdom of the Devil, being thus divided against itself, cannot stand. Thus calling that the kingdom of God, in which the wicked are condemned, and are separated from the faithful, who are now doing penitence for their sins.

12:29

29. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

CHRYSOSTOM. Having concluded the second answer, He brings forward yet a third, saying, Or how can any enter into a strong man's house? For that Satan cannot cast out Satan is clear from what has been said; and that no other can cast him out, till he have first overcome him, is plain to all. Thus the same as before is established yet more abundantly; for He says, So far am I from having the Devil for my ally, that

I rather am at war with him, and bind him; and in that I cast out after this sort, I therein spoil his goods. Thus He proves the very contrary of that they strove to establish. They would shew that He did not cast out dæmons of His own power; He proves that not only dæmons, yea but the prince also of the dæmons He hath bound, as is shewn by that which He hath wrought. For if their Prince were not overcome, how were the dæmons who are His subjects thus spoiled. This speech seems also to me to be a prophecy; inasmuch as He not only casts out dæmons, but will take away all error out of the world, and dissolve the craft of the Devil; and He says not rob, but spoil, shewing that He will do it with power.

JEROME. His house is this world, which is set in evil, not by the majesty of the Creator, but by the greatness of the sinner. The strong man is bound and chained in tartarus, bruised by the Lord's foot. Yet ought we not therefore to be careless; for here the conqueror Himself pronounces our adversary to be strong.

CHRYSOSTOM. He calls him strong, shewing therein his old reign, which arose out of our sloth.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) For he held us, that we should not by our own strength be able to free ourselves from him, but by the grace of God. By his goods, he means all the unbelievers. He has bound the strong man, in that He has taken away from him all power of hindering the faithful from following Christ, and gaining the kingdom of heaven.

12:30

30. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

CHRYSOSTOM. After that third reply, here follows a fourth, He that is not with me is against me.

HILARY. Wherein He shews how far He is from having borrowed any power from the Devil; teaching us how great the danger to think amiss of Him, not to be with Whom, is the same as to be against Him.

JEROME. But let none think that this is said of heretics and schismatics; though we may apply it besides to such; but it is shewn by the context to refer to the Devil; in that the works of the Saviour cannot be compared with the works of Beelzebub. He seeks to hold men's souls in captivity, the Lord to set them free; he preaches idols, the Lord the knowledge of the true God; he draws men to sin, the Lord calls them back to virtues. How then can these have agreement together, whose works are so opposite?

CHRYSOSTOM. Therefore whoso gathereth not with me, nor is with me, may not be compared together with me, that with me he should cast out dæmons, but rather seeks to scatter what is mine. But tell me; If you were to have fought together with some one, and he should not be willing to come to your aid, is

he not therefore against you? The Lord also Himself said in another place, He that is not against you is for you. (Luke 9:50) To which that which is here said is not contrary. For here He is speaking of the Devil who is our adversary—there of some man who was on their side, of whom it is said, We saw one casting out dæmons in thy name. Here He seems to allude to the Jews, classing them with the Devil; for they were against Him, and scattered what He would gather. But it is fair to allow that He spoke this of Himself; for He was against the Devil, and scattered abroad the things of the Devil.

12:31–32

31. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

CHRYSOSTOM. The Lord had refuted the Pharisees by explaining His own actions, and He now proceeds to terrify them. For this is no small part of correction, to threaten punishment, as well as to set right false accusation.

HILARY. He condemns by a most rigorous sentence this opinion of the Pharisees, and of such as thought with them, promising pardon for all sins, but refusing it to blasphemy against the Spirit; Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 71. 13.) For what difference does it make to the purpose, whether it be said, The spirit of blasphemy shall not be forgiven, or, Whose shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him. (Luke 12:10) as Luke speaks; except that the same sense is expressed more clearly in the one place than in the other, the one Evangelist not overthrowing but explaining the other? The spirit of blasphemy it is said shortly, not expressing what spirit; to make which clear it is added, And whoso shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him. After having said the same of all manner of blasphemy, He would in a more particular way speak of that blasphemy which is against the Son of Man, and which in the Gospel according to John He shews to be very heavy, where He says concerning the Holy Ghost, He shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me. That then which here follows, He who shall speak a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall not

be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come, is not said because the Holy Spirit is in the Trinity greater than the Son, which no heretic ever affirmed.

HILARY. And what is so beyond all pardon as to deny that in Christ which is of God, and to take away the substance of the Father's Spirit which is in Him, seeing that He performs every work in the Spirit of God, and in Him God is reconciling the world unto Himself.

JEROME. Or the passage may be thus understood; Whoso speaks a word against the Son of Man, as stumbling at My flesh, and thinking of Me as no more than man, such opinion and blasphemy though it is not free from the sin of heresy, yet finds pardon because of the little worth of the body. But whoso plainly perceiving the works of God, and being unable to deny the power of God, speaks falsely against them prompted by jealousy, and calls Christ who is the Word of God, and the works of the Holy Ghost, Beelzebub, to him it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) But if this were said in such manner, then every other kind of blasphemy is omitted, and that only which is spoken against the Son of Man, as when He is pronounced to be mere man, is to be forgiven. That then that is said, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, without doubt blasphemy spoken against the Father is included in its largeness; though here again that alone is declared irremissible which is spoken against the Holy Ghost. What then, hath the Father also taken upon Him the form of a servant, that the Holy Ghost is thus as it were spoken of as greater? For who could not be convicted of having spoken a word against the Holy Spirit, before He become a Christian or a Catholic? First, the Pagans themselves when they say that Christ wrought miracles by magic arts, are they not like those who said that He cast out dæmons by the Prince of the dæmons? Likewise the Jews and all such heretics as confess the Holy Spirit, but deny that He is in the body of Christ, which is the Church Catholic, are like the Pharisees, who denied that the Holy Spirit was in Christ. Some heretics even contend that the Holy Spirit Himself is either a creature, as the Arians, Eunomians, and Macedonians, or deny Him at least in such sort that they may deny the Trinity in the Godhead; others assert that the Father alone is God, and the same is sometimes spoken of as the Son, sometimes as the Holy Spirit, as the Sabellians. The Photinians also say, that the Father only is God, and that the Son is nothing more than a man, and deny altogether that there is any third Person, the Holy Spirit. It is clear then that the Holy Spirit is blasphemed, both by Pagans, Jews, and heretics. Are all such then to be left out, and looked upon as having no hope? For if the word they have spoken against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven them, then in vain is the promise made to them, that in Baptism or in the Church, they should receive the forgiveness of their sins. For it is not said, 'It shall not be forgiven him in Baptism;' but, Neither in this world, nor in the world to come; and

so they alone are to be supposed clear of the guilt of this most heavy sin who have been Catholics from their infancy. Some again think that they only sin against the Holy Ghost, who having been washed in the laver of regeneration in the Church, do afterwards, as though ungrateful for such a gift of the Saviour, plunge themselves into some deadly sin, such as adultery, murder, or quitting the Christian name, or the Church Catholic. But whence this meaning can be proved, I know not; since place for penitence of sins however great was never denied in the Church, and even heretics are exhorted to embrace it by the Apostle. If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. (2 Tim. 2:25.) Lastly, the Lord says not, 'If any Catholic believer,' but, Whoso shall speak a word, that is, whosoever, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. 1.22.) Otherwise, The Apostle John says, There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. This sin of the brother unto death I judge to be, when any one having come to the knowledge of God, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, opposes Himself against the brotherhood, or is roused by the fury of jealousy against that grace by which he was reconciled to God. (1 John 5:16) The stain of this sin is so great, that it may not submit to the humility of prayer, even when the sinful conscience is driven to acknowledge and proclaim its own sin. Which state of mind because of the greatness of their sin we must suppose some may be brought to; and this perhaps may be to sin against the Holy Ghost, that is through malice and jealousy to assail brotherly charity after having received the grace of the Holy Spirit; and this sin the Lord declares shall be forgiven neither in this world, nor in that to come. Whence it may be enquired whether the Jews sinned this sin against the Holy Ghost when they said that the Lord cast out dæmons by Beelzebub the Prince of the dæmons. Are we to suppose this spoken of our Lord Himself, because He said in another place, If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more they of his household? (Mat. 10:24) Seeing they thus spoke out of jealousy, ungrateful for so great present benefits, are they, though not Christians, to be supposed by the very greatness of that jealousy to have sinned the sin against the Holy Spirit? This cannot be gathered from the Lord's words. Yet He may seem to have warned them that they should come to grace, and that after that grace received they should not sin as they now sinned. For now their evil word had been spoken against the Son of Man, but it might be forgiven them, if they should be converted, and believe on Him. But if after they had received the Holy Spirit, they should be jealous against the brotherhood, and should fight against that grace which they had received, it should not be forgiven them neither in this world, nor in the world to come. For if He had there condemned them in such sort that no hope remained for them, He would not have added an admonition, Either make the tree good, &c.

AUGUSTINE. (Retract. i. 19.) But I do not affirm this for certain, by saying that I think thus; yet thus much might have been added; If he should close this life in this impious hardness of heart, yet since we may not utterly despair of any however evil, so long as he is in this life, so neither is it unreasonable to pray for him of whom we do not despair.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 71. 8.) Yet is this enquiry very mysterious. Let us then seek the light of exposition from the Lord. I say unto you, beloved, that in all Holy Scripture there is not perhaps so great or so difficult a question as this. First then I request you to note that the Lord said not, Every blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven, nor, Whoso shall speak any word against—but, Whoso shall speak the word. Wherefore it is not necessary to think that every blasphemy and every word spoken against the Holy Spirit shall be without pardon; it is only necessary that there be some word which if spoken against the Holy Spirit shall be without pardon. For such is the manner of Scripture, that when any thing is so declared in it as that it is not declared whether it is said of the whole, or a part, it is not necessary that because it can apply to the whole, it therefore is not to be understood of the part. As when the Lord said to the Jews, If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, (John 15:22) this does not mean that the Jews would have been altogether without sin, but that there was a sin they would not have had, if Christ had not come. What then is this manner of speaking against the Holy Ghost, comes now to be explained. Now in the Father is represented to us the Author of all things, in the Son birth, in the Holy Spirit community of the Father and the Son. What then is common to the Father and the Son, through that they would have us have communion among ourselves and with them; The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which he hath given us, (Rom. 5:5) and because by our sins we were alienated, from the possession of true goods, Charity shall cover the multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8) And for that Christ forgives sins through the Holy Spirit, hence may be understood how, when He said to his disciples, Receive ye the Holy Spirit, (John 20:22) He subjoined straight, Whosoever sins ye forgive, they shall be forgiven them. The first benefit therefore of them that believe is forgiveness of sins in the Holy Spirit. Against this gift of free grace the impenitent heart speaks; impenitence itself therefore is the blasphemy against the Spirit which shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in that to come. For indeed he speaks the evil word against the Holy Spirit either in his thought, or with his tongue, who by his hard and impenitent heart treasures up for himself wrath against the day of wrath. Such impenitence truly has no forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the world to come, for penitence obtains forgiveness in this world which shall hold in the world to come. But that impenitence as long as any lives in the flesh may not be judged, for we must despair of none so long as the patience of God leads to repentance. For what if those whom you discover in any manner of sin, and condemn as most desperate, should before they close this life betake

themselves to penitence, and find true life in the world to come? But this kind of blasphemy though it be long, and comprised in many words, yet the Scripture is wont to speak of many words as one word. It was more than a single word which the Lord spoke with the prophet, and yet we read, The word which came unto this or that prophet. Here perhaps some may enquire whether the Holy Spirit only forgives sins, or the Father and the Son likewise. We answer the Father and the Son likewise; for the Son Himself saith of the Father, Your Father shall forgive you your sins, (Mat. 6:14) and He saith of Himself, The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins. (Mat. 9:6) Why then is that impenitence which is never forgiven, spoken of as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit only? Forasmuch as he who falls under this sin of impenitence seems to resist the gift of the Holy Spirit, because in that gift is conveyed remission of sin. But sins, because they are not remitted out of the Church, must be remitted in that Spirit by which the Church is gathered into one. Thus this remission of sins which is given by the whole Trinity is said to be the proper office of the Holy Spirit alone, for it is He, The Spirit of adoption, in which we cry, Abba Father, (Rom. 8:15) so that to Him we may pray, Forgive us our sins; And hereby we know, speaks John, that Christ abideth in us, by the Holy Spirit which He hath given unto us. (1 John 4:13) For to Him belongs that bond by which we are made one body of the only-begotten Son of God; for the Holy Spirit Himself is in a manner the bond of the Father and the Son. Whosoever then shall be found guilty of impenitence against the Holy Spirit, in whom the Church is gathered together in unity and one bond of communion, it is never remitted to him.

CHRYSOSTOM. Otherwise according to the first exposition. The Jews were indeed ignorant of Christ, but of the Holy Ghost they had had a sufficient communication, for the Prophets spake by Him. What He here saith then is this; Be it that ye have stumbled at Me because of the flesh which is around Me; but can ye in the same manner say of the Holy Spirit, We know Him not? Wherefore this blasphemy cannot be forgiven you, and ye shall be punished both here and hereafter, for since to cast out dæmons and to heal diseases are of the Holy Spirit, you do not speak evil against Me only, but also against Him; and so your condemnation is inevitable both here and hereafter. For there are who are punished in this life only; as they who among the Corinthians were unworthy partakers of the mysteries; others who are punished only in the life to come, as the rich man in hell; but those here spoken of are to be punished both in this world, and in the world to come, as were the Jews, who suffered horrible things in the taking of Jerusalem, and shall there undergo most heavy punishment.

33. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

34. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xlii.) After his former answers He here again refutes them in another manner. This He does not in order to do away their charges against Himself, but desiring to amend them, saying, Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt. As much as to say, None of you has said that it is an evil thing for a man to be delivered from dæmons. But because they did not speak evil of the works, but said that it was the Devil that wrought them, He shews that this charge is contrary to the common sense of things, and human conceptions. And to invent such charges can only proceed from unbounded impudence.

JEROME. Thus He holds them in a syllogism which the Greeks call 'Aphycton,' the unavoidable; which shuts in the person questioned on both sides, and presses him with either horn. If, He saith, the Devil be evil, he cannot do good works; so that if the works you see be good, it follows that the Devil was not the agent thereof. For it cannot be that good should come of evil, or evil of good.

CHRYSOSTOM. For the discerning of a tree is done by its fruits, not the fruits by the tree. A tree is known by its fruits. For though the tree is the cause of the fruit, yet the fruit is the evidence of the tree. But ye do the very contrary, having no fault to allege against the works, ye pass a sentence of evil against the tree, saying that I have a dæmon.

HILARY. Thus did He at that present refute the Jews, who seeing Christ's works to be of power more than human, would notwithstanding not allow the hand of God. And at the same time He convicts all future errors of the faith, such as that of those who taking away from the Lord His divinity, and communion of the Father's substance, have fallen into divers heresies; having their habitation neither under the plea of ignorance as the Gentiles, nor yet within the knowledge of the truth. He figures Himself as a tree set in the body, seeing that through the inward fruitfulness of His power sprung forth abundant richness of fruit. Therefore either must be made a good tree with good fruits, or an evil tree with evil fruits; not that a good tree is to be made a bad tree, or the reverse; but that in this metaphor we may understand that Christ is

either to be left in fruitlessness, or to be retained in the fruitfulness of good works. But to hold one's self neuter, to attribute some things to Christ, but to deny Him those things that are highest, to worship Him as God, and yet to deny Him a common substance with the Father, is blasphemy against the Spirit. In admiration of His so great works you dare not take away the name of God, yet through malevolence of soul you debase His high nature by denying His participation of the Father's substance.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 72. 1.) Or this is an admonition to ourselves that we should be good trees that we may be able to bring forth good fruit; Make the tree good, and its fruit good, is a precept of health to which obedience is necessary. But what He says, Make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt, is not a command to do, but a warning to take heed, spoken against those who being evil thought that they could speak good things, or have good works; this the Lord declares is impossible. The man must be changed first, that his works may be changed; for if the man remains in that wherein he is evil, he cannot have good works; if he remains in that wherein he is good, he cannot have evil works. Christ found us all corrupt trees, but gave power to become sons of God to them that believe on His name.

CHRYSOSTOM. But as speaking not for Himself but for the Holy Spirit, He accordingly rebukes them, saying, Generation of vipers, how can ye being evil speak good things? This is both a rebuke of them, and a proof in their own characters of those things which had been said. As though He had said, So ye being corrupt trees cannot bring forth good fruit. I do not wonder then that you thus speak, for you are ill nourished of ill parentage, and have an evil mind. And observe He said not, How can ye speak good things, seeing ye are a generation of vipers? for these two are not connected together; but He said, How can ye being evil speak good things? He calls them generation of vipers, because they made boast of their forefathers; in order therefore to cut off this their pride, He shuts them out of the race of Abraham, assigning them a parentage corresponding to their characters.

CHRYSOSTOM. Herein also He shews His Godhead as knowing the hidden things of the heart; for not for words only, yea but for evil thoughts also they shall receive punishment. For it is the order of nature that the store of the wickedness which abounds within should be poured forth in words through the mouth. Thus when you shall hear any speaking evil, you must infer that his wickedness is more than what his words express; for what is uttered without is but the overflowing of that within; which was a sharp rebuke to them. For if that which was spoken by them were so evil, consider how evil must be the root from whence it sprung. And this happens naturally; for oftentimes the hesitating tongue does not suddenly pour forth all its evil, while the heart, to which none other is privy, begets whatsoever evil it will, without fear; for it has little fear of God. But when the multitude of the evils which are within is increased, the

things which had been hidden then burst forth through the mouth. This is that He says, Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

JEROME. What He says, The good man out of the good treasure of his heart, & c. is either pointed against the Jews, that seeing they blasphemed God, what treasure in their heart must that be out of which such blasphemy proceeded; or it is connected with what had gone before, that like as a good man cannot bring forth evil things, nor an evil man good things, so Christ cannot do evil works, nor the Devil good works.

12:36–37

36. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

CHRYSOSTOM. The Lord follows up what He had said before by moving their fears, shewing that they that have thus sinned shall receive the most extreme punishment, I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.

JEROME. And the meaning is; If every idle word which does not edify the hearers is not without danger to him that speaks it, and if each man shall render an account of his words in the day of judgment, how much more shall you, who have spoken falsely against the works of the Holy Spirit, saying that I cast out dæmons through Beelzebub, render an account of your false charge?

CHRYSOSTOM. He said not 'which ye have spoken,' but makes His teaching of universal application to the whole race of mankind, and at the same time His words less grievous to them that heard them. By an idle word is meant one that is false, that accuses any falsely. Some indeed say that it includes all light talk, all such as stirs immoderate laughter, or shameful and immodest words.

JEROME. being spoken without the profit of either the speaker or hearer; as if laying aside weighty matters we should speak of frivolous trifles, or relate old fables. For he that deals in buffoon jests to create laughter, or brings forth any thing shameful, he will be held guilty not of an idle, but of a sinful word.

CHRYSOSTOM. See that this sentence is not a burdensome one. The Judge will pass sentence not according to what any other has said concerning you, but according to what you have yourself spoken. They that are accused then have no need to fear, but they that accuse; for those are not charged of those evil things that have been spoken of them, but these of those evil things that they have spoken.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

12:22 A Blind, Mute Demoniac Healed

Reprise.

Hilary: The healing of the blind, mute, demon-possessed man follows. It was not without reason that, although he had said that all the multitudes were healed together, now a blind, mute man possessed by a demon was offered to him so that the same order of understanding might follow without any ambiguity. The Pharisees accused the apostles of plucking ears of corn, that is, of prematurely gathering the people of their age. But in his presence mercy was praised over sacrifice. A man with a withered hand was offered up in a synagogue and was cured. Yet not only were these deeds not useful in converting Israel, but the Pharisees even entered into a plan of murder. So it was necessary that the salvation of the Gentiles happen after these events in the dramatic definitive form of a single person. A blind, mute man who was the dwelling place of a demon was being prepared as one fit for God, that he might behold God in Christ and might praise the works of Christ by his acknowledgment of God. The crowd was stunned at the accomplishment of this deed. But the Pharisees' envy grew worse. These great deeds of his surpassed their human weakness. Shamefully they escaped any acknowledgment of this deed of God, covering it over with the greater crime of their own treachery. They did this so that they could say that all this power of his against demons came from Beelzebub, prince of demons. They could not suppose that these were the achievements of a man. On Matthew 12.11.

The Man Neither Saw Nor Spoke. Anonymous: When Jesus left the synagogue ... then the whole world was offered to him in one man. He was a blind, mute man who neither saw nor spoke. Symbolically he neither recognized his Maker nor gave thanks to him. What was visibly done in the case of one man therefore could be understood to have significance for everyone. For really, if the Lord had not turned Judea aside, all the Gentiles would still be blind and mute in the power of the devil. Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 29.

Christ Healed His Sight and Speech.

Epiphanius the Latin: The entire population of the Gentiles was blind, sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. They could not see Christ with the eyes of their hearts blinded. This was because they did not know the law and could not praise God. They were possessed by a demon, because after such great

idolatry and hunger for the demonic, they were led captive as it were by an unclean spirit. “Then a blind and dumb demoniac was brought to him.” By whom was he offered if not by the apostles, who quickly brought all the Gentiles who were attacked by the devil to bring offering to God? Jesus cured him in their presence, “in such a way that he might speak and might see.” He spoke because he praised God through his faith. He saw Christ because light shined on the eyes of his heart. He was healed because, now by leaving behind his mad idolatry and his various mistakes, he was faithfully serving the Lord. Interpretation of the Gospels 24.

12:23–24 By Whose Power Was the Man Healed?

12:25 A Kingdom Divided

The Destructive Division Is Within Jerusalem.

Hilary: The law comes from God. The promise of the kingdom of Israel comes from the law, and the announcement of Christ’s birth and arrival come from the law. If the kingdom of the law is divided against itself, it will of necessity be abandoned. Every power is pulled down by division, and the strength of a kingdom separated from itself is destroyed. Thus the kingdom of Israel has fallen from the law when the people of the law oppose the fulfillment of the law in Christ. “But both a city and a house divided against themselves will not stand.” The dwelling of a city is the same principle as that of a kingdom. But this city of Jerusalem is always viewed in contrast to the boastful tyranny of the nations. Now after Jerusalem had been inflamed against the Lord by the madness of its people and after the crowd of the faithful had put his apostles to flight, then it will not stand because of the division of those who are leaving. And so, what directly follows this division is the order for that city’s destruction. On Matthew 12.13–14.

The House Divided.

Chromatius: The Lord declared that a kingdom or city or house divided against itself could not stand. This was said in reference to the kingdom that the Jews themselves occupied under the rule of Jeroboam, the servant of Solomon, which was judged as abandoned before being divided. The Jews would lose entirely the city of Jerusalem, to which Samaria had been hostile. They would lose the dwelling place of God’s temple against which golden calves and the house of idols had been erected. He showed them that they ought rather to follow that kingdom that cannot be divided—that is, the heavenly and eternal one. The spiritual city of Jerusalem always remains fixed and immovable. No hostile power ever has been or will be

able to overcome the true house of God. That house which is protected by the Son of God is quite safe. Tractate on Matthew 49.5.

12:26 How Will Satan Stand?

The Devil's Kingdom Cannot Stand Divided.

Augustine: In saying this, he wanted it to be understood from their confession that they had chosen to live in him by not believing in the kingdom of the devil and that the devil could not stand divided against himself. So let the Pharisees choose what they want. If Satan could not cast out Satan, they could find nothing to say against the Lord. But if Satan can cast out Satan, let them look out for themselves all the more and let them abandon his kingdom because it cannot stand divided against itself. Sermon 71.1.

The Inconsistency Implied.

Chrysostom: The wars abroad are not so ruinous as the civil wars. As with civil wars, so wars happen inside the body. In all things it is the same, but in this case Jesus takes his illustration from the public sphere, for what is more powerful on earth than a kingdom? Nothing. But nevertheless it perishes if divided against itself. And what would you say of a city, similarly, if it were to break down by its own weight? What great blame would fall on those who carry the burden of its affairs! And what of a house? Whether it is a small matter or a great one, it perishes when it revolts against itself. Furthermore, if I am possessed by a demon and through it cast out demons, there is dissent and strife between demons, and they rise up against one another. And if they rise up against one another, their strength is destroyed. "For if Satan casts out Satan"—note that he did not say "demons," implying that there was a great deal of harmony in them toward each other. Rather, he said hierarchically, "If Satan casts out Satan, he is then divided against himself." But if he is divided, he is becoming weaker and being ruined. And if he is ruined, how can he cast out another? Do you see how great is the joke of the accusation, how great the folly, the inconsistency? It is not plausible that one would be said to stand by that which was likely to cause one to fall. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 41.1.

12:27 They Shall Judge You

A Matter of Attribution.

Jerome: If they were exorcists casting out devils by invoking God's name, he intimates by clever questioning that they should declare the work to be of the Holy Spirit. He goes on to say, "If the casting out of devils by your [the Pharisees'] children is attributed to God and not to devils, how come the same work does not have the same cause?" Therefore "they shall be your judges," not by authority but by comparison. While they attribute to God the casting out of devils, you attribute it to Beelzebub the prince of devils. But it was said about the apostles (and this we should bear in mind), they will be the judges of those children, for they will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Commentary on Matthew 2.12.27.

12:28 The Kingdom of God Has Come on You

Personally to You.

Chrysostom: To cast out demons is a work of the highest power and not of any ordinary power. For Matthew said, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons," just as Luke said, "If I by the finger of God cast out the demons." The inference then might seem to be that if this is so, then quite obviously the Son of God has appeared. This, however, he did not quite say directly but in a reserved way so as not to provoke them. He dimly intimates it by saying "then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Do you grasp this wisdom? His presence was quietly shining forth precisely through the very things to which they were assigning blame. Then, to conciliate them, Jesus said not simply "the kingdom is come" but in a personal sense "to you." It is as though he had said, "Good things have come specifically to you, so why then do you feel so displeased that you are being wonderfully blessed? Why do you make war against your own salvation? This is that very time which the prophets long ago foretold. This is the sign of that advent which was expected by them. Even these things now are being accomplished by divine power. You yourselves know that they are happening. That is a fact. But that they are being accomplished by divine power, you do not realize, so the deeds themselves cry out. It is impossible that Satan should be the stronger power now, for he must of necessity be weaker. For it cannot be that one who is weak can, as though strong, cast out the strong man, the devil." In speaking thus Jesus at the same time pointed to the power of charity and the vulnerability of contentious divisiveness. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 41.2.

12:29 Binding the Strong Man

Christ Prevails over Satan.

Chrysostom: See how the reverse is confirmed contrary to what his adversaries were trying to establish. They wanted to show that it was not by his own power that Jesus cast out demons. But he instead proved that he held in bondage with all authority not only the demonic powers but even their foremost leader. Christ prevails over Satan by his own power, and thus over the demonic forces. This is evident from the events reported. Satan is the prince of demons and they only subjects. If so, how could they have been plundered unless he were first overcome and made to bow down?

And here Jesus' saying seems to me to encompass a prophecy. For not only, I suppose, are the evil spirits the possessions of the devil but also the human beings that are doing Satan's works. Therefore he intends not only to cast out devils but also to drive away error from the world. He is putting down all sorceries and making the devil's arts useless. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 41.3.

Entering the Strong Man's House.

Cyril of Alexandria: He calls the devil strong, not as though he were so by his created nature but as signifying his tyranny over us, which he has obtained through our own indolence. The Son says, in effect, "I will despoil him, not by allowing him to have human beings as worshipers but by changing their belief so that they might come to acknowledge God. In that case, how then could he become my ally? For is he fighting against himself." Fragment 155.

12:30 One Not with Jesus Is Against Him

One Who Does Not Gather with Me Scatters.

Chromatius: And rightly Jesus adds, "He who is not with me is against me. And he who does not gather with me scatters." By this he meant that his work is one thing and the devil's work another. For the devil is the enemy of human well being. It is proper for the devil to scatter to utter destruction and for Christ to gather to salvation. Hence it is clear that one who is against the Lord cannot be with the Lord. Therefore, although the Lord seems to be repudiating those Pharisees who, unwilling to gather with Christ, have remained the Lord's enemies and adversaries, he speaks also of all heretics and schismatics. Drawing

impious conclusions against the church or the Lord by way of unorthodox teachings or schismatic beliefs, they aim to tear asunder and ravage the incorrupt body of the church and the unity of peace and faith. They are oblivious to Solomon's words: "He who splits a log is endangered by it." Clearly those who cause separation in the church shall run the risk of eternal death. Tractate on Matthew 50.2.

12:31 All Sins Forgiven but One

Every Blasphemy Will Be Forgiven—Except.

Hilary: He condemns in no uncertain terms the thinking of the Pharisees and their intellectual bedfellows. He promises forgiveness of all sins and denies pardon for blasphemy against the Spirit. For although other words and deeds may be treated with liberal forgiveness, there is no mercy if God is denied in Christ. For whatever sins one may commit, he extends the benevolence of his repeated admonition. All kinds of sins are to be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven. For what is so beyond the pale of forgiveness as to deny Christ since he is of God? To forsake Christ is to forsake the nature of the Spirit of the Father residing in him. For Jesus fulfills every work in the Spirit of God, is himself the kingdom of heaven, and in him God is reconciling the world to himself. Therefore any blasphemy aimed at Christ is aimed at God, because God is in Christ and Christ is in God. On Matthew 12.17.

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit.

Chrysostom: What is Jesus saying at this point? He is saying, "You have spoken many things against me. You have called me a deceiver and an adversary of God. These things I forgive you upon your repentance. There will be no penalty exacted. But blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven, not even to those who repent." But how could this be right? For even this was forgiven upon repentance. Many at least of those who said these words believed afterward, and all was forgiven them. What is it then that Christ was implying? That this sin is above all things inexcusable. Why so? Because they might have been ignorant of Jesus and who he might be, but of the Spirit they could not be ignorant due to their own previous experience. For the prophets had spoken by the Spirit. The Old Testament as a whole had an exalted understanding of the Holy Spirit. What he says, then, is this: "So be it—you may be offended at me, because of the humanity I have assumed. But you cannot say the same of the Holy Spirit. You cannot claim not to know the Spirit. Therefore your blasphemy has no excuse, and you will suffer the consequences both here and hereafter." The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 41.3.

It Will Be Forgiven.

Severus: Therefore, no matter what they say in blasphemy—even against the Son of Man when they were scandalized under the economy of law according to the flesh, as I pointed out—our Lord makes it clear they will be forgiven on the excuse of their ignorance of the mystery, his self-abasement and humility shown as a man. That is why Jesus said, “It will be forgiven humans” and did not say “you.” What he was saying in effect was “It is to those who do not know the depth of my dispensation that I offer forgiveness.” But in their blasphemy they heaped insults against the divine signs he manifested and the many miracles he worked through the Spirit who was in him and who is of the same essence (ousia). They exclaimed, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.” Those insults—since they smack of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and (because of the facts themselves) what is proper of God, with no room for excuse—Christ says they shall not be forgiven. They could not use ignorance as a pretext for their defense. Cathedral Sermons, Homily 98.

12:32 Blasphemy against the Spirit

Continuing Impenitence after Baptism.

Augustine: Against this unmerited gift, against this free grace of God, the impenitent heart may continue to murmur. So it is unrepentance that is a blasphemy against the Spirit. It is not forgiven either in this world or in the next. Think of a person whose sins are entirely forgiven in faithful baptism and whom the church has welcomed. This is the very church commissioned to remit sin, in which whatever sins it remits are promised to be truly remitted. You are speaking a very evil, utterly graceless word against the Holy Spirit, you are speaking it in thought or out loud, if when the patience of God is beckoning you to repentance, you harden your impenitent heart. By doing so you store up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to us all according to our works. This is the impenitence that is called both by the name of blasphemy and speaking against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. This is the flagrant impenitence against which both the herald and the Judge cried out when they proclaimed: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” It is the same impenitence against which the Lord opened his mouth to preach the gospel. He preached against it when he foretold that the gospel itself was to be preached in the whole world; when he said to the disciples after rising from the dead that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead on the third day; and for repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be preached in his name throughout all

nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Yes, this refusal to repent has absolutely no forgiveness, neither in this age nor in the age to come, because repentance obtains forgiveness in this world in preparation for the next. Sermon 71.12.20.

12:33 Trees Are Known by Their Fruit

Either-Or.

Hilary: Though spoken in the present, Jesus' words would be borne out in the future. For in the present he refutes the Jews. They could see that the works of Christ were beyond human power, but they were unwilling to declare them as works of God. In saying this Jesus anticipates the future of numerous perversions of faith, especially of those who would divest the Lord of the dignity and union with the Father's nature and so plunge into heresy. They then wander aimlessly in the arena between those who act with the excuse of ignorance and those who live in the knowledge of truth....

Through a tree's inherent vitality, fruitfulness abounds. Therefore either the tree must be made good with good fruit or made bad with bad fruit, because by its fruit the tree is known. The meaning is not that a bad tree, according to the nature of trees, can constitute what is good or be good in its branches if it is bad. Rather, it is that Christ must either be left behind as useless or held onto as good because of the usefulness of good fruit. On Matthew 12.18.

Known by Its Fruit.

Chrysostom: This accusation is against common reason, straining against all the other congruities in these circumstances. They brought no direct charge against his deeds but only against the one who did them. It is shameless to interpret maliciously. Even more so it is shameless to make up charges contrary to what everyone could see was happening.

Yet note how free Jesus is from contentiousness. For he did not simply say "Make the tree good and its fruit good." Rather, he silenced them completely, demonstrating his own considerateness and their insolence, by saying in effect: So you are determined to find fault with my deeds. I do not quarrel with this. But I want you to be aware of how inconsistent and contradictory are your charges. For in this way your motives are transparent. You persist against what is all too clear to everyone else. In this way your malice is disclosed.

Truly the distinction between trees is shown by their fruit. It is not that the fruit is known by the tree, for one need only to examine the fruit alone to find what kind of tree it is. But what if it is argued that the tree is incongruous with the fruit? Nonetheless the fruit is what makes the tree known. His implication: It would be more consistent if you either found fault with my deeds or praised them, so that I could meet these charges openly. But having no fault to find with my works, the fruit, you pass the opposite judgment upon the tree, me. You call me a demoniac, which, as anyone can see, is self-evidently reckless. For a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 42.1.

Make the Tree Good.

Augustine: When he says, “Make the tree good and its fruit good,” this is not a friendly admonition but a clear command to be obeyed. And when Jesus says, “Make the tree bad and its fruit bad,” he does not command you to do so, but he warns you to guard against it. He is referring to those who think they are able, though they are bad, to speak good things or to do good works. This the Lord Jesus says they cannot do. For a person must first be changed in order for his works to be changed. But if a person remains in an evil state, that one cannot do good works. If he abides in what is good, he will not be found producing evil works. Sermons on New Testament Lessons 72.1.1.

12:34 One Speaks from the Abundance of the Heart

One Who Is Evil Cannot Speak Good.

Hilary: He taught that a corrupt outlook on life arises out of a corrupted nature. He taught that from an evil storehouse nothing can come but what is evil. An account must be rendered to God for every idle, careless and useless word. We are to be condemned or justified by the words we speak. The mercy or the judgment we receive shall depend on the inward conviction we have about the Lord of heavenly glory. On Matthew 12.19.

You Brood of Vipers.

Chrysostom: “If you are an evil tree, you cannot produce good fruit. I am not surprised at what you are saying. For being both ill bred and ill conceived, you have acquired an evil way of speaking.” See how precisely, and without any room for exception, Jesus defines their indictment. In a single phrase he uses their own arguments to demonstrate his point and to underscore his indictment. He calls them a “brood

of vipers” because they prided themselves on their forefathers. To signify that they had no advantage thereby, Christ first throws out their exalted claims about their relation to Abraham and then assigns them to forefathers of similar disposition. He thus stripped them of their illusions. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 42.1.

12:35 Good and Evil Treasures

The Fountain Behind Wicked Words.

Chrysostom: When wickedness is overflowing within, its words will pour out of one’s mouth. So when you hear someone speaking wicked words, do not suppose only so much wickedness to be in that one as the words display, but suspect the fountain to be much more abundant. For that which is spoken outwardly is the superabundance of that which is within. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 42.1.

Good or Bad by Choice.

Cyril of Alexandria: When he says “treasure,” Christ refers to the multitude of motives that lie in the soul. It is not by nature that people are good or bad but by their own choice. He makes this plain in his remark to the Pharisees: It is possible for one and the same person at one time to become good, at another time evil, for “a good man speaks out of the abundance of his heart,” and likewise for the bad. Fragment 158.

12:36 Rendering an Account

Every Careless Word.

Jerome: This, too, goes with what was said before, and the meaning is that on the day of judgment each person must render an account of his or her words. If an idle word which by no means edifies the listeners is not without harm to the speaker, how much more will you Pharisees, who criticize the works of the Holy Spirit and say that I cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils, have to render an account of your criticism? An idle word is what is spoken without benefit to the speaker and the listener. We overlook serious things and utter frivolous things and tell old wives’ tales. One who acts like a buffoon and makes mouths drop with boisterous laughter and who utters disgraceful things—that person shall be held to account, not for an idle word but a slanderous word. Commentary on Matthew 2.12.36.

12:37 Judged by One's Words

Condemned by Your Own Words.

Theodore of Heraclea: If we are called to account "for every careless word," how much more will those who have blasphemed against the Spirit of the only begotten Son receive a more bitter punishment on the day of judgment. And if, Christ says, someone merely utters a slander against someone else, that one will by no means escape judgment. If they will give an account concerning an idle word, how much more so concerning a work. Fragments 88–89.

Careful of Words.

Chrysostom: Do you see how far the Judge is from being vindictive? How favorable the account required? For it is not upon what someone else has spoken of you but from what you have yourself spoken. From this will the Judge give his sentence. This is the fairest of all procedures. It rests wholly with you to speak or not to speak.

So it is not those who are slandered but the slanderers who have cause to tremble and be anxious. Those slandered are not constrained to answer for themselves concerning the evil things said of them. But the slanderers will answer for the evil they have spoken. And over these words danger hangs. So persons censured should be without anxiety, not being required to give account of the evil others have said. But the censurers have cause to be in anxiety and to tremble, as being subject themselves to be dragged before the judgment seat. Hence slander is indeed a diabolical snare, and a sin containing no pleasure but only harm....

So the plotter first destroys himself. One who walks on fire burns himself up. One who smites others bruises himself. One who kicks against the goads draws blood from himself. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 42.2.