

John: 12:35–50

From Catena Aurea:

34. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?

35. Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.

36. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. lii. 12) The Jews when they understood that our Lord spoke of His own death, asked how that could be: The people answered Him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest Thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man? Though our Lord did not call Himself the Son of man here, they remembered that He often called Himself so; as He had just before: The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. They remember this, and ask, If Christ abideth for ever, how will He be lifted up from the earth; i. e. how will He die upon the cross?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) Hence we see, that they understood many of the things that He spake in parables. As He had talked about death a little time before, they saw now what was meant by His being lifted up.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. lii. 12) Or they interpreted the word by their own intended act. It was not wisdom imparted, but conscience disturbed, which disclosed its meaning to them.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) And see how maliciously they put the question. They do not say, We have heard out of the law, that Christ doth not suffer; for in many places of Scripture His passion and resurrection are spoken of together, but, abideth for ever. And yet His immortality was not inconsistent with the fact of His suffering. They thought this proved however that He was not Christ. Then they ask, Who is this Son of man? another malicious question; as if to say, Do not charge us with putting this question out of hatred to Thee; for we simply ask for information. Christ shews them in His answer that

His passion does not prevent Him from abiding for ever: Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you: as if His death were but going away for a time, as the sun's light only sets to rise again.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. lii. 13) Yet a little while is the light with you. Hence it is that ye understand¹ that Christ abideth for ever. Wherefore walk while ye have the light, approach, understand the whole, that Christ will both die, and live for ever: do this while ye have the light.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) He does not mean only the time before His crucifixion, but the whole of their lives. For many believed on Him after His crucifixion. Lest darkness come upon you.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. lii. 13) i. e. if ye so believe in the eternity of Christ, as to deny His humiliation and death. For he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) What things do the Jews now, and know not what they do; thinking, like men in the dark, that they are going the right road, while they are taking directly the wrong one. Wherefore He adds, While ye have the light, believe in the light.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. lii) i. e. While ye have any truth, believe in the truth, that ye may be born again of the truth: That ye may be the children of the light.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii) i. e. My children. In the beginning of the Gospel it is said, Born of God, (c. 1:13) i. e. of the Father. But here He Himself is the Begetter. The same act is the act both of Father and Son.

These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide Himself from them.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. lii) Not from those which began to believe in and love Him, but from those who saw and envied Him. When He hid Himself, He consulted our weakness, He did not derogate from His own power.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) But why did He hide Himself, when they neither took up stones to cast at Him, nor blasphemed? Because He saw into their hearts, and knew the fury they were in; and therefore did not wait till they broke out into act, but retired to give their envy time to subside.

12:37–43

37. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:

38. That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?

39. Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,

40. He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

41. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

42. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:

43. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 1) And thusb the Evangelist tacitly explains it, when he adds, But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him.

THEOPHYLACT. He means the miracles related above. It was no small wickedness to disbelieve against such miracles as those.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 2) But why then did Christ come? Did He not know that they would not believe in Him? Yes: the Prophets had prohibited this very unbelief, and He came that it might be made manifest, to their confusion and condemnation; That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which He spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liiii. 2) It is evident here that the arm of the Lord is the Son of God Himself. Not that the Father has a human fleshly form; He is called the arm of the Lord, because all things were made by Him. If a man had power of such a kind, as that without any motion of his body, what he said was forthwith done, the word of that man would be his arm. Here is no ground to justify, however, the error of those who say that the Godhead is one Person only, because the Son is the arm of the Father, and a man and his arm are not two persons, but one. These men do not understand, that the commonest things require to be explained often by applying language to them taken from other things in which there happens to be a likeness, [and that, when we are upon things incomprehensible, and which cannot be described as they actually are, this is much more necessary. Thus one man calls another man, whom he makes great use of, his arm; and talks of having lost his arm, of having his arm taken away from him.] But some mutter, and ask, What fault was it of the Jews, if it was necessary that the sayings of Esaias should be fulfilled? We

answer, that God, foreseeing the future, predicted by the Prophet the unbelief of the Jews, but did not cause it. God does not compel men to sin, because He knows they will sin. He foreknows their sins, not His own. The Jews committed the sin, which He who knows all things foretold they would commit.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 2) That the saying of Esaias might be fulfilled: that here is expressive not of the cause, but of the event. They did not disbelieve because Esaias said they would; but because they would disbelieve, Esaias said they would.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liii. 5) But what follows involved a deeper question: Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. That they should not believe; but if so, what sin is there in a man doing what he cannot help doing? And what is a graver point still, the cause is assigned to God; since He it is who blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart. This is not said to be the devil's doing, but God's. Yet if any ask why they could not believe, I answer, Because they would not. For as it is to the praise of the Divine will that God cannot deny Himself, so is it the fault of the human will that they could not believe.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 2) This is a common form of speech among ourselves. I cannot love such a man, meaning by this necessity only a vehement will. The Evangelist says could not, to shew that it was impossible that the Prophet should lie, not that it was impossible that they should believe.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liii. 5) But the Prophet, you say, mentions another cause, not their will; viz. that God had blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart. But I answer, that they well deserved this. For God hardens and blinds a man, by forsaking and not supporting him; and this He may by a secret sentence, by an unjust one He cannot.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii) For He does not leave us, except we wish Him, as He saith in Hosea, Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hos. 4:6) Whereby it is plain that we begin to forsake first, and are the cause of our own perdition. For as it is not the fault of the sun, that it hurts weak eyes, so neither is God to blame for punishing those who do not attend to His words.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liii. 11) And be converted, and I should heal them. Is not to be understood here, from the beginning of the sentence—that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor be converted; conversion being the free gift of God? or, shall we suppose that a heavenly remedy is meant; whereby those who wished to establish their own righteousness, were so far deserted and

blinded, as to stumble on the stumbling stone, till, with confusion of face, they humbled themselves, and sought not their own righteousness which puffeth up the proud, but God's righteousness, which justifieth the ungodly. For many of those who put Christ to death, were afterward troubled with a sense of their guilt; which led to their believing in Him. (c. 12). These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him. He saw Him not really, but figuratively, in prophetic vision. Be not deceived by those who say that the Father is invisible, the Son visible, making the Son a creature. For in the form of God, in which He is equal to the Father, the Son also is invisible; though He took upon Him the form of a servant, that He might be seen by men. Before His incarnation too, He made Himself visible at times to human eyes; but visible through the medium of created matter, not visible as He is.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxviii. 2) His glory means the vision of Him sitting on His lofty throne: I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? (Is. 6:1)

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. liii. 13) As their faith grew, their love of human praise grew still more, and outstripped it.

12:44–50

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 on 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. lxxix. 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. 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. lxviii. 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, 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 spake to the Truth then, means that He begat the Truth.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

12:35 While You Have the Light

Living Enslaved to the Body.

Gregory of Nyssa: The one who is stupid looks downward and hands his soul over to pleasures of the body, as cattle to pasture, living only for the stomach and the organs nearby, being alienated from the life of God. He is a stranger to the promise of the covenants, considering nothing else to be good than pleasing the body. This one, and everyone like him, is the one making his way “in darkness,” as the Scripture says. On Virginité 4.

Christ Is the Light the Darkness Cannot Overcome.

Ambrose: [In the] form of a servant the fullness of true light was there. And when the form emptied itself, there was the light. Then he said, “Walk while you have the light.” Even when he was in death, he was not in the shadow.... The true light of wisdom shone there as well. It illumined hell but was not shut up in hell. On the Sacrament of the Incarnation of Our Lord 5.41.

We Will See the Light Again.

Chrysostom: He signifies that his death is a transition, for the light of the sun is not destroyed, but having withdrawn for a while appears again. Then he says, "While you have the light," but he does not say of what time he is talking about here. Is he speaking of the whole present life or of the time before the cross? I think both, for because of his ineffable love of humankind many even after the cross believed. He speaks these things to press them on to the faith. Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.1.

12:36a Believe in the Light and Become Sons of Light

The Son's Radiance Illumines Us.

Origen: Let us see what idea we are to form from the language of Paul regarding Christ where he says that he is the "brightness of the glory of God and the representation of his being." According to John, "God is light." The only-begotten Son, therefore, is the glory of this light, proceeding inseparably from God himself, just as brightness proceeds from light and illuminates the whole creation.... Through this brightness, human beings understand and experience what light itself is. And this splendor presents itself gently and softly to the frail and weak eyes of mortals and gradually trains and accustoms them, as it were, to bear the brightness of the light. It removes from them every hindrance and obstruction to their vision, according to the Lord's own command to cast out the beam from your own eye. In this way, it renders them capable of enduring the splendor of the light and becomes, in this respect, also a kind of mediator between human beings and the light. On First Principles 1.2.7.

Jesus Begets Children Too.

Chrysostom: He tells them to become sons of light, that is, become my children. Yet in the beginning the Evangelist says these "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God," that is, of the Father, while here Christ himself is said to beget them so that you may understand that the operation of the Father and the Son is One. Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.1.

12:36b Jesus Withdraws and Hides

Steer Clear of Rage.

Chrysostom: Why does he now “hide himself”? They did not take up stones against him, nor did they blaspheme him in any way as before. Why then did he hide himself? Walking in people’s hearts, he knew that their wrath was fierce, although they said nothing. He knew their wrath was boiling and murderous and did not wait until it broke into action, but rather he hid himself to mitigate their ill will. Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.1.

Christ Withdraws.

Cyril of Alexandria: Jesus withdraws with a set purpose, his passion being close at hand, showing that it was not his will to be put to death by the Jews. Nevertheless, he willingly yielded himself up to suffer, giving himself as a ransom for our life and accepting death, which is cause for sadness. But he ends up changing sorrow into gladness. Commentary on the Gospel of John 8.

12:37 The Leaders Did Not Believe in Jesus

12:38 The Prophecy of Isaiah Fulfilled

Isaiah Prophesied They Were Incurable.

Chrysostom: Here again observe that the words “because” and “spoke” refer not to the cause of their unbelief but to the event. For it was not “because” Isaiah spoke that they did not believe. Rather, it was because they were not about to believe, which is why [Isaiah] spoke. Why then doesn’t the Evangelist express it this way instead of making the unbelief proceed from the prophecy, not the prophecy from the unbelief? And further on he puts this very thing more emphatically, saying, “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah had said.” He wants to establish by many proofs the unerring truth of Scripture, and that what Isaiah foretold happened in no other way than what he said would happen. For in case anyone should say, “Why did Christ come? Didn’t he know that they would not listen to him?” he introduces the prophets, who knew this also. But he came that they might have no excuse for their sin. For what the prophet foretold, he foretold that it would certainly happen. If they were not most certainly

going to happen, he could not have foretold them. And they were certainly going to happen because these people were incurable. Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.2.

The Arm of the Lord Is the Son of God.

Augustine: It is evident here that the arm of the Lord is the Son of God himself. Not that the Father has a human fleshly form. He is called the arm of the Lord because all things were made by him.... If someone had power like this so that, without any motion of his body, what he said was then done, the word of that person would be his arm.... There is no ground here to justify, however, the error of those who say that the Godhead is one person only, because the Son is the arm of the Father, and a person and his arm are not two persons, but one. These people do not understand that the most common things are required to be explained often by applying language to them taken from other things in which there happens to be a likeness.... But some mutter and ask, What fault was it of the Jews if it was necessary that the sayings of Isaiah should be fulfilled when he said, "Lord, who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" We answer that God, foreseeing the future, predicted by the prophet the unbelief of the Jews, but did not cause it. God does not compel people to sin, because he knows they will sin. He foreknows their sins, not his own.... The Jews committed the sin that he who knows all things foretold they would commit. Tractates on the Gospel of John 53.2–4.

12:39 Therefore They Could Not Believe

Because They Would Not, They Cannot Believe.

Chrysostom: And if, "on account of this, they could not [believe]" is put instead of "they were not willing [to believe]," do not be surprised.... He does not say that it is the doing of virtue that is impossible for them, but that because they would not practice virtue therefore they cannot practice it. And by what he says, the Evangelist means that it was impossible for the prophet to lie. And yet, this was not the reason why it was impossible for them to believe. Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.2.

Is God the Cause of Unbelief?

Augustine: But the words of the Gospel also that follow are still more pressing and start a question of more profound import. For he goes on to say, "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart so that they should not see with their eyes or

understand with their heart and be converted, and I should heal them.’ ” For it is almost as if he said, If they could not believe, what sin is it in a person not to do what he cannot do? And if they sinned in not believing, then they had the power to believe and did not use it. If, then, they had the power, how does the Gospel say, “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, ‘he has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart,’ ” so that (and this is very important) to God himself is referred the cause of their not believing, inasmuch as it is he who “has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart”? Tractates on the Gospel of John 53.5.

Mercy and Righteousness.

Augustine: But the prophet, you say, assigns another cause than that of their will. What cause does the prophet assign? That “God has given them the spirit of remorse, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear. And has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart.” This also, I reply, their will deserved. For God thus blinds and hardens, simply by letting alone and withdrawing his aid. And God can do this by a judgment that is hidden, although not by one that is unrighteous. This is a doctrine that the piety of the God-fearing ought to preserve unshaken and inviolable in all its integrity: even as the apostle, when treating of the same intricate question, says, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.” If, then, we must be far from thinking that there is unrighteousness with God, this only can it be, that, when he gives his aid, he acts mercifully. And when he withholds it, he acts righteously. For in all he does, he does not act rashly but in accordance with judgment. Tractates on the Gospel of John 53.6.

Blinded by Pride.

Augustine: It is no wonder, then, that they could not believe when such was their pride of will, that, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, they wished to establish their own [righteousness]. As the apostle says of them, “They have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.” For it was not by faith, but as it were by works, that they were puffed up. And blinded by this very self-elation, they stumbled against the stone of stumbling. And so it is said, “They could not,” by which we are to understand that they would not. This is the same as when it was said of the Lord our God, “If we do not believe, yet he remains faithful, he cannot deny himself.” It is said of the Omnipotent, “He cannot.” And so, just as it is a commendation of the divine will that the Lord “cannot deny himself,” that they “could not believe” is a fault chargeable against the will of humankind.

See, I also say, that those who have such lofty ideas of themselves as to suppose that so much must be attributed to the powers of their own will, that they deny their need of the divine assistance in order to attain to a righteous life, cannot believe on Christ. For the mere syllables of Christ's name and the Christian sacraments are of no profit where faith in Christ is itself resisted. For faith in Christ is to believe in him that justifies the ungodly. It means to believe in the Mediator, without whose intervention we cannot be reconciled to God. It means to believe in the Savior who came to seek and to save that which was lost, to believe in him who said, "Without me you can do nothing." Because, then—being ignorant of that righteousness of God that justifies the ungodly—he wishes to set up his own [righteousness] to satisfy the minds of the proud, such a person cannot believe on Christ. And so, those Jews "could not believe" [so to speak,] not that people cannot be changed for the better. But so long as their ideas run in such a direction, they cannot believe. And so they are blinded and hardened. For, denying the need of divine assistance, they are not assisted. God foreknew this regarding these Jews who were blinded and hardened, and the prophet by his Spirit foretold it. Tractates on the Gospel of John 53.9–10.

12:40 Blinded Eyes and Hardened Hearts

We Desert God and Cause Our Own Destruction.

Chrysostom: Just as the sun blinds the eyes of the weak ... this is also what happens to those who do not listen to the words of God. As so, in the case of Pharaoh, he is said to have hardened his heart, and so it is with those who are at all contentious against the words of God. This is a peculiar mode of speech of Scripture, as in, "He gave them over to a reprobate mind," ... that is, he allowed or permitted them to go. For the writer does not here introduce God as himself doing these things but shows that they took place through the wickedness of others. For when we are abandoned by God, we are given up to the devil.... It is to terrify the hearer that the writer says "he hardens" and "he gave over." For to show that he does not give us over or even leave us unless we want him to, listen to what he says, "Isn't it your iniquities that separate me and you." ... Isaiah also says, "I came, and there was no one; I called, and there was none who listened." He says these things, showing that we begin the desertion and become the causes of our destruction. For God not only desires not to leave or to punish us, but even when he punishes, he does it unwillingly. "I desire not," he says, "the death of the sinner but that he should turn and live." ... Knowing this, let us do everything we can so as not to remove ourselves from God. Let us instead be concerned about the care of our souls and about our love toward one another. Homilies on the Gospel of John 68.2–3.

Blinded by the Devil.

Cyril of Alexandria: In this instance the prophet Isaiah is not quoted as saying that “God” blinded the people.” However, it is likely that someone else did the blinding in order that the Jews should not convert and find healing. But, even though we should accept the supposition that God blinded them, it must be understood that God allowed them to suffer blinding at the hands of the devil as a result of their evil character. Commentary on the Gospel of John 8.

12:41 Isaiah Saw God’s Glory

12:42 Many Believed

12:43 Praise of People

Not Rulers but Slaves to Praise.

Chrysostom: See how these men were broken off from the faith through their love of honor. It says that many of the chief rulers believed on him, “but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” ... So then, they were not really rulers at all but slaves subject to the utmost slavery [of human opinion]. Homilies on the Gospel of John 69.1.

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.