

Matthew: 23:1–39

From Catena Aurea:

1. Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
2. Saying, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
3. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
4. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

ORIGEN. The disciples of Christ are better than the common herd; and you may find in the Church such as with more ardent affection come to the word of God; these are Christ's disciples, the rest are only His people. And sometimes He speaks to His disciples alone, sometimes to the multitudes and His disciples together, as here. The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, as professing his Law, and boasting that they can interpret it. Those that do not depart from the letter of the Law are the Scribes; those who make high professions, and separate themselves from the vulgar as better than they, are called Pharisees, which signifies 'separate.' Those who understand and expound Moses according to his spiritual meaning, these sit indeed on Moses' seat, but are neither Scribes nor Pharisees, but better than either, Christ's beloved disciples. Since His coming these have sat upon the seat of the Church, which is the seat of Christ.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxii.) But that none should say, For this cause am I slack to practise, because my instructor is evil, He removes every such plea, saying, All therefore whatsoever they say unto you, that observe and do, for they speak not their own, but God's, which things He taught through Moses in the Law. And look with how great honour He speaks of Moses, shewing again what harmony there is with the Old Testament.

ORIGEN. But if the Scribes and Pharisees who sit in Moses' seat are the teachers of the Jews, teaching the commandments of the Law according to the letter, how is this that the Lord bids us do after all things which they say; but the Apostles in the Acts forbid the believers to do according to the letter of the Law. (Acts 15:19.) These indeed taught after the letter, not understanding the Law spiritually. Whatsoever

they say to us out of the Law, with understanding of its sense, that we do and keep, not doing after their works, for they do not what the law enjoins, nor perceive the veil that is upon the letter of the Law. Or by all we are not to understand every thing in the Law, many things for example relating to the sacrifices, and the like, but such as concern our conduct. But why did He command this not of the Law of grace, but of the doctrine of Moses? Because truly it was not the time to publish the commandments of the New Law before the season of His passion. I think also that He had herein something further in view. He was about to bring many things against the Scribes and Pharisees in His discourse following, wherefore that vain men might not think that He coveted their place of authority, or spoke thus out of enmity to them, he first puts away from Himself this suspicion, and then begins to reprove them, that the people might not fall into their faults; and that, because they ought to hear them, they should not think that therefore they ought to imitate them in their works, He adds, But do ye not after their works. What can be more pitiable than such a teacher, whose life to imitate is ruin, to refuse to follow is salvation for his disciples?

CHRYSOSTOM. Look with what He begins His reproof of them, For they say, and do not. Every one who transgresses the Law is deserving of blame, but especially he who has the post of instruction. And this for a threefold cause; first, because he is a transgressor; secondly, because when he ought to set others right, be himself halts; thirdly, because, being in the rank of a teacher, his influence is more corrupting. Again, He brings a further charge against them, that they oppress those that are put under them; They bind heavy burdens; in this He shews a double evil in them; that they exacted without any allowance the utmost rigour of life from those that were put under them, while they allowed themselves large licence herein. But a good ruler should do the contrary of this, to be to himself a severe judge, to others a merciful one. Observe in what forcible words He utters His reproof; He says not they cannot, but they will not; and not, lift them, but touch them with one of their fingers.

GLOSS. (interlin.) Or, bind burdens, that is, gather traditions from all sides, not to aid, but to burden the conscience.

JEROME. But all these things, the shoulders, the finger, the burdens, and the bands with which they bind the burdens, have a spiritual meaning. Herein also the Lord speaks generally against all masters who enjoin high things, but do not even little things.

23:5–12

5. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

6. And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
7. And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
8. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.
9. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.
10. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.
11. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.
12. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

CHRYSOSTOM. The Lord had charged the Scribes and Pharisees with harshness and neglect; He now brings forward their vain-glory, which made them depart from God.

ORIGEN. And their works likewise they do to be seen of men, using outward circumcision, taking away actual leaven out of their houses, and doing such like things. But Christ's disciples fulfil the Law in things secret, being Jews inwardly, as the Apostle speaks. (Rom. 2:29.)

CHRYSOSTOM. Note the intensive force of the words of His reproofs. He says not merely that they do their works to be seen of men, but added, all their works. And not only in great things but in some things trivial they were vainglorious, They make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments.

JEROME. For the Lord, when He had given the commandments of the Law through Moses, added at the end, And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be ever before thine eyes; (Deut. 6:8.) the meaning of which is, Let my precepts be in thine hand so as to be fulfilled in thy works; let them be before thine eyes so as that thou shalt meditate upon them day and night. This the Pharisees misinterpreting, wrote on parchments the Decalogue of Moses, that is, the Ten Commandments, and folding them up, tied them on their forehead, so making them a crown for their head, that they should be always before their eyes. Moses had in another place given command that they should make fringes of blue in the borders of their garments, to distinguish the people of Israel (Numb. 15:39.); that as in their bodies circumcision, so in their garments the fringe, might discriminate the Jewish nation. But these superstitious teachers, catching at popular favour, and making gain of silly women, made broad hems, and fastened them with sharp pins, that as they walked or sat they might be pricked, and by such monitors

be recalled to the duties of God's ministry. This embroidery then of the Decalogue they called phylacteries, that is, conservatories, because those who wore them, wore them for their own protection and security. So little did the Pharisees understand that they were to be worn on the heart and not on the body; for in equal degree may cases and chests be said to have books, which assuredly have not the knowledge of God.

JEROME. Seeing they thus make broad their phylacteries, and make them broad fringes, desiring to have glory of men, they are convicted also in other things; For they love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.

CHRYSOSTOM. Observe where vain glory governed them, to wit, in the synagogues, whither they entered to guide others. It had been tolerable to have felt thus at feasts, notwithstanding that a doctor ought to be had in honour in all places alike, and not in the Churches only. But if it be blameworthy to love such things, how wrong is it to seek to attain them?

ORIGEN. And in the Church of Christ are found some who take to themselves the uppermost places, that is, become deacons; next they aspire to the chief seats of those that are called presbyters; and some intrigue to be styled among men Bishop, that is, to be called Rabbi. But Christ's disciple loves the uppermost place indeed, but at the spiritual banquet, where he may feed on the choicer morsels of spiritual food, for, with the Apostles who sit upon twelve thrones, he loves the chief seats, and hastes by his good works to render himself worthy of such seats; and he also loves salutations made in the heavenly market-place, that is, in the heavenly congregations of the primitive. But the righteous man would be called Rabbi, neither by man, nor by any other, because there is One Master of all men.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or otherwise; Of the foregoing things with which He had charged the Pharisees, He now passes over many as of no weight, and such as His disciples needed not to be instructed in; but that which was the cause of all evils, namely, ambition of the master's seat, that He insists upon to instruct His disciples.

HILARY. And that the disciples may ever remember that they are the children of one parent, and that by their new birth they have passed the limits of their earthly origin.

JEROME. (cont. Helvid. 15.) All men may be called brethren in affection, which is of two kinds, general and particular. Particular, by which all Christians are brethren; general, by which all men being born of one Father are bound together by like tie of kindred.

ORIGEN. But who calls no man father upon earth? He who in every action done as before God, says, Our Father, which art in Heaven.

GLOSS. (non occ.) Because it was clear who was the Father of all, by this which was said, Which art in Heaven, He would teach them who was the Master of all, and therefore repeats the same command concerning a master, Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ.

CHRYSOSTOM. Not that when Christ is here said to be our Master, the Father is excluded, as neither when God is said to be our Father, is Christ excluded, Who is the Father of men.

JEROME. It is a difficulty that the Apostle against this command calls himself the teacher of the Gentiles; and that in monasteries in their common conversation, they call one another, Father. It is to be cleared thus. It is one thing to be father or master by nature, another by sufferance. Thus when we call any man our father, we do it to shew respect to his age, not as regarding him as the author of our being. We also call men 'Master,' from resemblance to a real master; and, not to use tedious repetition, as the One God and One Son, who are by nature, do not preclude us from calling others gods and sons by adoption, so the One Father and One Master, do not preclude us from speaking of other fathers and masters by an abuse of the terms.

CHRYSOSTOM. Not only does the Lord forbid us to seek supremacy, but would lead His hearer to the very opposite; He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

ORIGEN. Or otherwise; And if one minister the divine word, knowing that it is Christ that makes it to be fruitful, such a one professes himself a minister and not a master; whence it follows, He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant. As Christ Himself, who was in truth our Master, professed Himself a minister, saying, I am in the midst of you as one that ministers. (Luke 22:27.) And well does He conclude this prohibition of all vain-glory with the words, And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

23:13

13. But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

ORIGEN. Christ is truly the Son of that God Who gave the Law; after the example of the blessings pronounced in the Law, did Himself pronounce the blessings of them that are saved; and also after the

cursings of the Law, He now sets forth a woe against sinners; Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. They who allow that it is compatible with goodness to utter these denunciations against sinners, should understand that the purpose of God is the same in the cursings of the Law. Both the cursing there and the woe here fall upon the sinner not from Him who denounces, but from themselves who commit the sins which are denounced, and worthily bring upon themselves the inflictions of God's discipline, appointed for the turning of men to good. So a father rebuking a son utters words of cursing, but does not desire that he should become deserving of those curses, but rather that he should turn himself from them. He adds the cause of this woe, Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, nor suffer them that are entering to go in. These two commandments are by nature inseparable; because not to suffer others to enter in, is of itself enough to keep the hinderer out.

ORIGEN. The Pharisees and the Scribes then would neither enter in, nor hear Him who said, By me if any man enter in he shall be saved; (John 10:9.) nor would they suffer those to enter in, who were able to have believed through the things which had been spoken before by the Law and the Prophets concerning Christ, but shut up the door with every kind of device to deter men from entering. Also they detracted from His teaching, denied all prophecy concerning Him, and blasphemed every miracle as deceitful, or wrought by the Devil. All who in their evil conversation set an example of sinning to the people, and who commit injustice, offending the weak, seem to shut up the kingdom of heaven before men. And this sin is found among the people, and chiefly among the doctors, when they teach men what the Gospel righteousness requires of them, but do not what they teach. But those who both teach and live well open to men the kingdom of heaven, and both enter in themselves, and invite others to enter in. Many also will not suffer those who are willing to enter into the kingdom of heaven, when they without reason excommunicate out of jealousy others who are better than themselves; thus they refuse them entrance, but these of sober spirit, overcoming by their patience this tyranny, although forbidden, yet enter in and inherit the kingdom. Also they who with much rashness have set themselves to the profession of teaching before they have learned, and following Jewish fables, detract from those who search out the higher things of Scripture; these do, as far as in them lies, shut out men from the kingdom of heaven.

23:14

14. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxiii.) Next the Lord rebukes them for their gluttony, and what was the worst, that not from the rich but from widows they took wherewith to fill their bellies, thus burdening the poverty of those whom they should have relieved.

GLOSS. (interlin.) Devour widows' houses, that is, your superstitions have this only aim, namely, to make a gain of the people that is put under you.

CHRYSOSTOM. The manner of this plundering is grievous, for they make long prayers. Every one who does evil deserves punishment; but he who takes occasion for his offence from religion, deserves more severe punishment; Therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

HILARY. Or, because their observance of the kingdom of heaven proceeds hence, that they may keep up their practice of going about to widows' houses, they shall therefore receive the heavier judgment, as having their own sin and the ignorance of others to answer for.

GLOSS. (interlin. Luke 12:47.) Or, because the servant that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall he beaten with many stripes.

23:15

15. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him two fold more the child of hell than yourselves.

CHRYSOSTOM. This the next charge against them is, that they are unequal to the salvation of many, seeing they need so much labour to bring one to salvation; and not only are they slack in conversion, but destroy even those whom they do convert, by corrupting them by example of evil life.

HILARY. That they compass sea and land signifies that throughout the whole world they shall be enemies of Christ's Gospel, and shall bring men under the yoke of the Law against the justification of faith. There were proselytes made into the Synagogue from among the Gentiles, the small number of whom is here denoted by what is said one proselyte. For after the preaching of Christ there was no faith left in their doctrine, but whoever was gained to the faith of the Jews became a child of hell.

ORIGEN. For all who Judaize since the coming of the Saviour, are taught to follow the temper of those who cried at that time, Crucify, crucify him.

HILARY. And he becomes the child of a twofold punishment, because he has not obtained remission of his Gentile sins, and because he has joined the society of those who persecuted Christ.

JEROME. Or otherwise; The Scribes and Pharisees compassed the whole world to make proselytes of the Gentiles, that is, to mix the uncircumcised stranger with the people of God.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Faust. xvi. 29. et cf. cont. Adimant. 16.) This He said not because proselytes were circumcised, but because they imitated the lives of those from following whom He had prohibited His disciples, saying, Do ye not after their works. Two things are observable in this command; first, the honour shewn to Moses' teaching, (Matt. 23:3.) that even wicked men when sitting in his seat are compelled to teach good things; and that the proselyte is made a child of hell, not by hearing the words of the Law, but by following their doings. And twofold more than they for this reason, that he neglects to fulfil what he had undertaken of his own choice, having been not born a Jew, but of free will become a Jew.

JEROME. Or, because before while he was a Gentile he erred in ignorance, and was only a child of hell; but seeing the vices of his masters, and understanding that they destroyed in their actions what they taught in words, he returns to his vomit, and becoming a Gentile, he is worthy of greater punishment as one that has deserted his cause.

CHRYSOSTOM. For a disciple imitates a virtuous master, but goes beyond a vicious one.

JEROME. He is called a child of hell in the same way as one is said to be a child of perdition, and a child of this world; every man is called the son of him whose works he does.

ORIGEN. From this place we learn that there will be a difference of torment in hell, seeing one is here said to be singly a child of hell, another twofold. And we ought to consider here whether it is possible that a man should be generally a child of hell, as a Jew, suppose, or a Gentile, or whether specially so in consequence of some particular sins; that as a righteous man is increased in glory by the abundance of his righteousnesses, so a sinner's punishment is increased manifold by the number of his sins.

23:16–22

16. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

17. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18. And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

20. Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

JEROME. As by making broad phylacteries and fringes they sought after the reputation of sanctity, and made this again a means of gain, so now He charges them with being teachers of wickedness by their fraudulent pretence of tradition. For when in any dispute or quarrel, or ambiguous cause, one swore by the temple, and was afterwards convicted of falsehood, he was not held guilty. This is what is meant by that, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing, that is, he owes nothing, But if he had sworn by the gold, or by the money which was offered to the Priests in the temple, he was immediately compelled to pay down that by which he had sworn.

JEROME. Again, if one swore by the altar, none held him guilty of perjury; but if he swore by the gift or the victims or the other things which are offered to God upon the altar, this they exacted most rigorously. And all this they did not out of fear of God, but out of covetousness. Thus the Lord charges them with both folly and fraud, inasmuch as the altar is much greater than the victims which are sanctified by the altar.

GLOSS. (non occ.) And lest their infatuation should go so far, that they should affirm that the gold was more holy than the temple, and the gift than the altar, He argues on another ground, that in the oath which is sworn by the temple and the altar is contained the oath by the gold or by the gift.

ORIGEN. In like manner the custom which the Jews had of swearing by the Heaven He reprobates. For they did not, as they supposed, avoid the danger of taking an oath by God, because, Whoso sweareth by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

GLOSS. (ord.) For whoso swears by the creature that is subject, swears by the Divinity that rules over the creation.

ORIGEN. Now an oath is in confirmation of somewhat that has been spoken. The oath here then may signify testimony of Scripture which we produce in confirmation of that word which we speak. So that Divine Scripture is the temple of God, the gold is the meaning which it contains. As the gold which is outside the Temple is not sanctified, so all thoughts which are without divine Scripture, however admirable they may seem, are not hallowed. We ought not therefore to bring any speculations of our own for the confirmation of doctrine, unless such as we can shew are hallowed by being contained in divine Scripture. The altar is the human heart, which is the chief thing in man. The offerings and gifts that are hid upon the altar, are every thing which are done in the heart, as to pray, to sing, to do alms, to fast. Every offering of a man then is sanctified by his heart, by which the offering is made. There cannot therefore be a more honourable offering than the heart of man, out of which the offering proceeds. If then one's conscience does not smite him, he has confidence towards God, not by reason of his gifts, but so to speak because he has rightly ordered the altar of his heart. Thirdly, we may say that over the temple, that is over every Scripture, and over the altar, that is over every heart, there is a certain meaning which is called the Heaven, the throne of God Himself, in which we shall be able to see the things that are revealed face to face, when that which is perfect is come.

HILARY. For since Christ is come, reliance upon the Law is vain; for not Christ by the Law, but the Law by Christ, is sanctified, in whom it rests as on a seat or throne; so are they fools and blind, who, overlooking the sanctifier, pay honour to the things sanctified.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 34.) The temple and altar we may also understand of Christ Himself; the gold and the gifts, of the praise and sacrifice of prayer which we offer in Him and through Him. For not He by them, but they by Him, are sanctified.

23:23–24

23. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

CHRYSOSTOM. The Lord had said above that they bound heavy burdens upon others, which they themselves would not touch; He now again shews how they aimed at being correct in little things, but neglected weighty matters.

JEROME. The Lord had commanded, that for the maintenance of the Priests and Levites, whose portion was the Lord, tithes of every thing should be offered in the temple. Accordingly, the Pharisees (to dismiss mystical expositions) concerned themselves about this alone, that these trifling things should be paid in, but lightly esteemed other things which were weighty. He charges them then with covetousness in exacting carefully the tithes of worthless herbs, while they neglected justice in their transactions of business, mercy to the poor, and faith toward God, which are weighty things.

ORIGEN. But because it was possible that some, hearing the Lord speak thus, might thereupon neglect paying tithes of small things, He prudently adds, These things ought ye to have done, (i. e. justice, mercy, and faith,) and not to leave the others undone, i. e. the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin.

HILARY. And because it was much less guilt to omit the tithing of herbs than a duty of benevolence, the Lord derides them, Ye blind guides, which strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel.

JEROME. The camel I suppose to mean the weighty precepts, judgment, mercy, and faith; the gnat, the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, and other valueless herbs. The greater of God's commands we swallow and overlook, but shew our carelessness by a religious scrupulousness in little things which bring profit with them.

ORIGEN. Or, straining out a gnat, that is, putting from them small sins; swallowing a camel, that is, committing great sins, which He calls camels, from the size and distorted shape of that animal. Morally, The Scribes are those who think nothing else contained in Scripture than the bare letter exhibits; the Pharisees are all those who esteem themselves righteous, and separate themselves from others, saying, 'Come not nigh me, for I am clean.' Mint, anise, and cummin, are the seasoning, not the substantial part of food; as in our life and conversation there are some things necessary to justification, as judgment, mercy, and faith; and others which are like the seasoning of our actions, giving them a flavour and sweetness, as abstinence from laughter, fasting, bending the knee, and such like. How shall they not be judged blind who see not that it is of little avail to be a careful dispenser in the least things, if things of chief moment are neglected? These His present discourse overthrows; not forbidding to observe the little things, but bidding to keep more carefully the chief things.

23:25–26

25. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

JEROME. In different words, but to the same purport as before, He reproves the hypocrisy and dissimulation of the Pharisees, that they shewed one face to men abroad, but wore another at home. He means not here, that their scrupulousness respecting the cup and the platter was of any importance, but that they affected it to pass off their sanctity upon men; which is clear from His adding, but inwardly ye are full of ravening and uncleanness.

HILARY. He therefore is reproving those who, pursuing an ostentation of useless scrupulosity, neglected the discharge of useful morality. For it is the inside of the cup that is used; if that be foul, what profit is it to cleanse the outside? And therefore what is needed is purity of the inner conscience, that those things which are of the body may be clean without.

CHRYSOSTOM. Note, that speaking of tithes He said, These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone: for tithes are a kind of alms, and what wrong is it to give alms? Yet said He it not to enforce a legal superstition. But here, discoursing of things clean and unclean, He does not add this, but distinguishes and shews that external purity of necessity follows internal; the outside of the cup and platter signifying the body, the inside the soul.

ORIGEN. This discourse instructs us that we should hasten to become righteous, not to seem so. For whoso seeks to be thought so, cleanses the outside, and has care of the things that are seen, but neglects the heart and conscience. But he who seeks to cleanse that which is within, that is, the thoughts, makes by that means the things without clean also. All professors of false doctrine are cups cleansed on the outside, because of that show of religion which they affect, but within they are full of extortion and guile, hurrying men into error. The cup is a vessel for liquids, the platter for meat. Every discourse then of which we spiritually drink, and all speech by which we are fed, are vessels for meat and drink. They who study to set forth well wrought discourse rather than such as is full of healthful meaning, are cups cleansed without; but within full of the defilement of vanity. Also the letter of the Law and the Prophets is a cup of spiritual drink, and a platter of necessary food. The Scribes and Pharisees seek to make plain the outward sense; Christ's disciples labour to exhibit the spiritual sense.

23:27–28

27. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

ORIGEN. As above they are said to be full of extortion and excess, so here they are full of hypocrisy and iniquity, and are likened to dead men's bones, and all uncleanness.

JEROME. Sepulchres are whitened with lime without, and decorated with marble painted in gold and various colours, but within are full of dead men's bones. Thus crooked teachers who teach one thing and do another, affect purity in their dress, and humility in their speech, but within are full of all uncleanness, covetousness, and lust.

ORIGEN. For all feigned righteousness is dead, forasmuch as it is not done for God's sake; yea, rather it is no righteousness at all, any more than a dead man is a man, or an actor who represents any character is the man whom he represents. There is therefore within them so much of bones and uncleanness as are the good things that they wickedly pretend to. And they seem righteous outwardly, not in the eyes of such as the Scripture calls Gods, (Ps. 82:6.) but of such only as die like men.

23:29–31

29. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

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

31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

JEROME. By a most subtle syllogism He proves them to be the sons of murderers, while to gain good character and reputation with the people, they build the sepulchres of the Prophets whom their fathers put to death.

ORIGEN. Without just cause He seems to utter denunciations against those who build the sepulchres of the Prophets; for so far what they did was praiseworthy; how then do they deserve this woe?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxiv.) He does not blame them for building the sepulchres, but discovers the design with which they built them; which was not to honour the slain, but to erect to themselves a triumphal

monument of the murder, as fearing that in process of time the memory of this their audacious wickedness should perish.

JEROME. Though they speak not this in words, they proclaim it by their actions, in ambitious and magnificent structures to their memory.

CHRYSOSTOM. What kind of accusation is this, to Call one the son of a murderer, who partakes not in his father's disposition? Clearly there is no guilt in being so; wherefore this must be said in proof of their resemblance in wickedness.

ORIGEN. And in the prophetic writings, the historical sense is the body, the spiritual meaning is the soul; the sepulchres are the letter and books themselves of Scripture. They then who attend only to the historical meaning, honour the bodies of the Prophets, and set in the letter as in a sepulchre; and are called Pharisees, i. e. 'cut off,' as it were cutting off the soul of the Prophets from their body.

23:32–36

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

33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

34. Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and Scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

CHRYSOSTOM. He had said against the Scribes and Pharisees, that they were the children of those who killed the Prophets; now therefore He shews that they were like them in wickedness, and that that was false that they said, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the Prophets. Wherefore He now says, Fill ye up the measure of your fathers. This is not a command, but a prophecy of what is to be.

ORIGEN. They fill up the measure of their fathers' sins by their not believing in Christ. And the cause of their unbelief was, that they looked only to the letter and the body, and would understand nothing spiritual in them.

HILARY. Because then they will fill up the measure of their fathers' purposes, therefore are they serpents, and an offspring of vipers.

JEROME. The same had been said by John the Baptist. Wherefore as of vipers are born vipers, so of your fathers who were murderers are you born murderers.

HILARY. That is, the Apostles, who, as foretelling things to come, are Prophets; as having knowledge of Christ, are wise men; as understanding the Law, are Scribes.

JEROME. Or, as the Apostle writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12.) that there are various gifts among Christ's disciples; some Prophets, who foretel things to come; some wise men, who know when they ought to speak; others Scribes taught in the Law; of whom Stephen was stoned, Paul killed, Peter crucified, and the disciples of the Apostles beaten, in the Acts; and they persecuted them from city to city, driving them out of Judæa, that they might go to the Gentiles.

ORIGEN. Or the Scribes who are sent by Christ, are Scribes according to the Gospel, whom the spirit quickens and the letter does not kill, as did the letter of the Law, which whoso followed ran into vain superstitions. The simple words of the Gospel are sufficient for salvation. But the Scribes of the Law do yet scourge the Scribes of the New Testament, by detracting from them in their synagogues; and the heretics also, who are spiritual Pharisees, with their tongues murder the Christians, and persecute them from city to city, sometimes in the body, sometimes also in the spirit, seeking to drive them from their own city of the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, into another Gospel.

CHRYSOSTOM. Then to shew them that they should not do this without punishment, He holds out an unspeakable terror over them, That upon you may come all the righteous blood.

JEROME. Concerning the Abel here spoken of, there is no doubt that it is he whom his brother Cain murdered. He is proved to have been righteous, not only by this judgment of the Lord, but by the passage in Genesis, which says that his offerings were accepted by God. But we must enquire who is this Zacharias, son of Barachias, because we read of many Zachariases; and that we might not mistake, here it is added, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Some say that it is that Zacharias who is the eleventh among the twelve Prophets, and his father's name agrees to this, but when he was slain between

the temple and the altar, Scripture does not mention; but above all, in his time there were scarce 'even the ruins of the temple. Others will have it to be Zacharias the father of John.

ORIGEN. A tradition has come down to us, that there was one place in the temple in which virgins were allowed to worship God, married women being forbidden to stand there. And Mary, after the Saviour's birth, going into the temple, stood to pray in this place of the virgins. And when they who knew that she had borne a Son were hindering her, Zacharias said, that forasmuch as she was still a virgin, she was worthy of the place of the virgins. Whereupon, as though he manifestly were contravening the Law, he was slain there between the temple and the altar by the men of that generation; and thus this word of Christ is true which He spake to those who were standing there, whom ye slew.a

JEROME. But as this has no Scripture authority, it is as readily despised as offered. Others will have it to be that Zacharias who was killed by Joas, king of Judah, between the temple and the altar, that is, in the court of the temple. (2 Chron. 24:21.) But that Zacharias was not the son of Barachias, but of Jehoiada the Priest. But Barachias in our language is interpreted 'Blessed of the Lord,' so that the righteousness of Joiada the Priest is expressed by this Hebrew word. But in the Gospel which the Nazarenes use, we find written 'son of Joiada' instead of son of Barachias.

CHRYSOSTOM. Moreover, He names Abel, to shew that it would be out of envy that they would kill Christ and His disciples. He names Zacharias, because there was a twofold resemblance in his case, the sacred place, as well as the sacred person.

ORIGEN. Zacharias is interpreted 'The memory of God.' Whosoever then hastes to obliterate the memory of God, seems to those to whom he gives offence to shed the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias. For it is by the blessing of God that we retain the memory of God. Also the memory of God is slain by the wicked, when the Temple of God is polluted by the lustful, and His altar defiled by the carelessness of prayers. Abel is interpreted 'mourning.' He then who does not receive that, Blessed are they that mourn, sheds the blood of Abel, that is, puts away the truth of wholesome mourning. Some also shed, as it were, the blood of the Scriptures by putting aside their truth, for all Scripture, if it is not understood according to its truth, is dead.

CHRYSOSTOM. And to take away all excuse from them that they might not say, Because you sent them to the Gentiles thereat were we offended, He foretels that His disciples should be sent to them, and it is of their punishment that He adds, Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation.

GLOSS. (ord.) He means not only those there present, but the whole generation before and after, for all were one city and one body of the Devil.

JEROME. The rule of the Scriptures is only to know two generations, one of good the other of bad. Of the generation of the good it is said, The generation of the righteous shall be blessed. (Ps. 112:2.) And of the bad it is said in the present passage, Generation of vipers. These then, because they did against the Apostles like things as Cain and Joas, are described as of one generation.

CHRYSOSTOM. Otherwise; Because He delayed the punishment of hell which He had threatened them with, He pronounces against them threats of present evil, saying, All these things shall come upon this generation.

CHRYSOSTOM. For he who having seen many sinning yet remains uncorrected, but rather does the same or worse, is obnoxious to heavier punishment.

23:37–39

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

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

CHRYSOSTOM. The Lord next turns to address the city, desiring to instruct His hearers thereby. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem: this repetition of the name is a mark of compassion and intense love.

JEROME. By Jerusalem He means not the stones and buildings, but the dwellers there, over whom He laments with the feeling of a Father.

CHRYSOSTOM. Having thus addressed her, and spoken of her cruel murders, He said, as justifying Himself, How often would I have gathered thy children together? as much as to say, Notwithstanding, these thy murders have not alienated Me from thee, but I would have taken thee to Me, not once or twice, but many times. The strength of His affection He shews by the comparison of a hen.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 36.) This species has the greatest affection for its brood, insomuch that when they are sick the mother sickens also; and what you will hardly find in any other animal, it will fight against the kite, protecting its young with its wings. In like manner our mother, the Wisdom of God, sickened as it were in the putting on the flesh, according to that of the Apostle, The weakness of God is stronger than men, (1 Cor. 1:25.) protects our weakness, and resists the Devil that he should not make us his prey.

ORIGEN. He calls them children of Jerusalem, just as we call each generation of citizens the sons of the preceding generation. And He says, How often, though it is well known that once only did He teach the Jews in the body, because Christ was ever present in Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Angels, ministering to human salvation in every generation. Whosoever shall not have been gathered in by Him shall be judged, as though he had refused to be gathered in.

AUGUSTINE. (Ench. 97.) Where is that omnipotence, by the which He did whatsoever pleased Him both in heaven and in earth, if He would have gathered the children of Jerusalem and did not? Was it not that she would not that her children should be gathered by Him, and yet He did, notwithstanding, gather those of her children whom He would?

CHRYSOSTOM. Then He threatens the punishment of which they were ever in fear, to wit, the overthrow of the city and temple, saying, Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

ORIGEN. In like manner to all such as would not be gathered under His wings Christ speaks this threat; Behold, your house is left unto you desolate; i. e. your soul and your body. But if any one of you will not be gathered under the wings of Christ, from the very time when he shall have refused to be so gathered, (by a mental rather than a bodily act,) he shall no more see the beauty of the word, till repenting of his evil purpose he shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. And the word of the Lord then comes with a blessing upon a man's heart, when one is turned to God.

JEROME. I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me, &c. That is to say, Unless ye shall do penitence, and shall confess that I am He of whom the Prophets have spoken, the Son of the Almighty Father, ye shall not see My face. Thus the Jews have a time allowed for their repentance. Let them confess Him blessed who cometh in the name of the Lord, and they shall then behold Christ's face.

CHRYSOSTOM. Otherwise; In this He covertly alludes to His second coming, when surely they shall worship Him. Henceforth, means from the time of His crucifixion.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

23:1 Jesus Speaks to the Crowds and His Disciples

23:2 Sitting on Moses' Seat

Distinguishing Priests and Scribes.

Origen: Therefore when he speaks “to the crowds and his disciples” he talks about “the scribes and Pharisees who sit upon the throne of Moses.” I judge these statements to be referring to the following groups. Those who profess that they interpret the law of Moses and glory in this, or who know the law well and seek to profit by this knowledge—these sit upon the throne of Moses. Those who do not depart from the letter of the law are called scribes. Then there are those who profess to know even more, setting themselves apart because they think they are better than the masses. That is why they are called Pharisees, which interpreted means “to divide or segregate” (for Phares translated means “division”). Commentary on Matthew 9.

23:3 Practice Whatever They Tell You

Not What They Do.

Jerome: He is tempted by the Pharisees and surrounded by their lies. According to the psalmist, “The arrows of children are their snares.” Nevertheless, on account of the dignity of the priests and their reputation, he encourages the people to obey them, considering not their works but their teaching. What he says is this: “The scribes and Pharisees sit upon the throne of Moses,” showing this as a throne of teaching about the law. And we ought to accept this because of what is said in the psalms: “He does not sit in the seat of scoffers” and “He overturned the seats of those who sold pigeons.” Commentary on Matthew 4.23.3.

23:4 Binding Heavy Burdens on Others

They Bind Heavy Burdens.

Origen: Therefore up until now the scribes and Pharisees among the Jews have been sitting on the throne of Moses. I am not saying this because only scribes and Pharisees will sit on the seat of Moses. They speak

but do not do anything, laying heavy and unsupportable burdens on the shoulders of men. Yet they are not even willing to lift a finger to lighten those burdens. For I judge that those who rightly understand and explain Moses according to his spiritual power are the ones who will indeed sit on the throne of Moses. But these are not the scribes and Pharisees. They are much better. They are the beloved disciples of Christ who interpret his word through the grace of God. They are able to sort out different meanings in different words. Indeed, therefore, before the coming of Christ they sat well on the throne of Moses who interpreted the sayings of Moses well and according to reason. However, after the coming of Christ, they sit on the throne of the church, which is the seat and throne of Christ. Commentary on Matthew 9.

Not Wishing to Move a Finger.

Origen: Just as the scribes and Pharisees wickedly sat upon the throne of Moses, so do some in the church who sit upon the ecclesiastical throne. There are some in the church who have the right understanding of the law and pass it on correctly. They say what each person needs to do, but they themselves do not do it. Some of them lay heavy burdens upon the shoulders of men, but they won't even lift a finger to help. These are the ones the Savior is talking about when he says, "Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of God." There are others, however, who sit on the throne, who act before they speak and speak wisely, restraining those who are disordered. They place merciful burdens on the shoulders of others. They themselves are the first to lift the heavy burden, for the exhortation of other listeners. It is these of whom the Lord speaks when he says, "He who does so and teaches others to do so, this man will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Commentary on Matthew 9.

They Allow Themselves Privilege.

Chrysostom: He mentions here a twofold wickedness. First they require great and extreme strictness of life, without any indulgence, from those over whom they rule. Yet they are much less stringent with themselves. This is opposite from what the truly good pastor ought to hold. He ought to be a rigorous and severe judge in things that concern himself. But in the matters of those whom he rules, he ought to be gentle and ready to make allowances. What these men do is just the opposite.

For such are all they who practice self-restraint in mere words while being unforgiving and grievous to bear when they have had no experience of the difficulty in actions. This is no small fault. In no small way does Jesus increase the former charge. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 72.2.

23:5 Doing Works to Be Seen by Others

They Make Their Fringes Long.

Chrysostom: He then accused them of vanity, from which came their ruin. His previous charges concerned signs of harshness and laziness, but these charges accuse them of a mad desire for glory. This desire drew them away from God. It caused them to make a show in front of others who were watching and corrupted them.

Now that it has become the priest's special interest to please those who are watching, he exhibits whatever they want. If they are noble, he makes a spectacle of confronting conflicts. If they are lacking in enthusiasm and lazy, he also becomes more lackadaisical. If they delight in ridicule, he delights in ridicule, in order to please those watching. If they are earnest and practice self-restraint, he tries to be the same way, since this is the disposition of the one from whom he seeks praise.

It is not that he does some things one way and some things in another way. No, he is far more predictable. He always acts with the spectator in mind, in all things absolutely. Then, having laid bare their vanity, Jesus shows that it is not even about great and necessary things that they are vainglorious. They are vain about things without warmth or worth. These are the proofs of their baseness: the phylacteries and the fringes of their garments. "For they make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments." The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 72.2.

They Make Their Phylacteries Broad.

Jerome: They called those phylacteries "little pictures" of the Decalogue, because whoever had them had his own fortification and defense. But the knowledgeable Pharisees did not have them, because these things must be carried in the heart, not the body. They may have children and treasure boxes and granaries, but they do not have knowledge of God. Even today there are those superstitious ladies who have their "little Gospels." In the absence of the true cross and other such things, they indeed have the zeal of God but no true knowledge of him. Even today, they too do these same kinds of things in front of us by liquefying gnats for drinking and gulping down honey. This is what some see as the small, short fringe mandated by the law. But a better case is the woman with the bloody flow who touched the fringe of the Lord's garment. She was not motivated by the superstitious sentiments of the Pharisees. And what is more, she was healed at his touch. And so when they widened their phylacteries and lengthened their

fringes, attracting the honor of the people, they were exposed in their hypocrisies, showing why they seek the first seats at dinners and the front chairs in synagogues. They point out gluttony and glory in public and are hailed by men as rabbi, which in colloquial Latin means “teacher.” Commentary on Matthew 4.23.5.

They Do All Their Deeds to Be Seen.

Origen: Further, therefore, to the reprehensible Pharisees and scribes who were so concerned about their body and appearance, the Lord said, “They do everything to be seen by other men. For they widen their phylacteries and enlarge the tassels of their clothing.” The disciples of Jesus did everything to be seen by God alone. The only ornaments they had bound to their hands were good works. Meditating on divine teaching, they observed the divine commands, always applying them fittingly before the eyes of their souls. Their only tassel was the virtue of Jesus whom they imitated. Commentary on Matthew 11.

23:6–7 Loving the Place of Honor

Deacons and Bishops Who Love the Place of Honor.

Origen: What are we to say about those who “love the places of honor at banquets and the front seats in synagogues and the highest respect in public places and to be called rabbi by everyone”? We must first admit that this kind of delight is found not only among the scribes and Pharisees but also in the church of Christ, and not only at dinner, while taking places at the table, but also the front seats in church. These are the deacons, or those who wish to become deacons, yet who “squander the savings of widows, praying for a good opportunity” and yet “will receive a greater judgment.” They covet even more avidly the highly visible “first seats” of those called priests. Indeed, however, even they do not put as much effort into their scheming as those who are called bishops, the ones who love “being called rabbi by men.” It is they who ought most clearly to understand that a bishop is to be “above reproach” and so on, so that he would be called “bishop” not by men [only] but rather before God. Commentary on Matthew 12.

The Best Seats.

Chrysostom: Everything he accused them of was small and trifling. Yet he was dealing with the cause of all the evils: ambition, the violent seizing of the teacher’s chair, and so on. These he brings forward and

corrects with diligence, confronting this strongly and earnestly charging them. His own disciples needed to be warned about these matters. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 72.3.

23:8 One Teacher, Many Brothers

You Have One Teacher.

Origen: You are not “to be called rabbi” and especially “not by men,” nor are you to love to be called righteous by someone else. “For you have one teacher, and you are all brothers” to each other. For you have been born anew, not only from water but also from the spirit, and you have received the “spirit of adoption,” so that it might be said of you that you were “born not of the flesh, nor of the will of man” but from God. It is hard to imagine this being said of anyone or any son until now. You do not call anyone on earth “Father” in the sense that you say “our Father” of the one who gives all things through all ages and according to the divine plan. Whoever ministers with the divine word does not put himself forward to be called “teacher,” for he knows that when he performs well it is Christ who is within him. He should only call himself “servant” according to the command of Christ, saying, “Whoever is greater among you, let him be the servant of all.” Commentary on Matthew 12.

Not to Be Called Rabbi.

Chrysostom: “You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.” One has nothing more than another. For in respect to his knowledge he knows nothing from himself. This is why Paul says, “For who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers?”—not masters. Again, “call no man your father.” This is said in order that they may know whom they ought to call Father in the highest sense. It is not said frivolously as if no one should ever be called father. Just as the human master is not the divine Master, so neither is the father the Father who is the cause of all, both of all masters and of all fathers. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 72.3.

23:9 One Father, Who is in Heaven

Call No Man Your Father on Earth.

Jerome: No one should be called teacher or father except God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Father, because all things are from him. He alone is the teacher, because through him are made all things and through him all things are reconciled to God.

But one might ask, "Is it against this precept when the apostle calls himself the teacher of the Gentiles? Or when, as in colloquial speech widely found in the monasteries of Egypt and Palestine, they call each other Father?" Remember this distinction. It is one thing to be a father or a teacher by nature, another to be so by generosity. For when we call a man father and reserve the honor of his age, we may thereby be failing to honor the Author of our own lives. One is rightly called a teacher only from his association with the true Teacher. I repeat: The fact that we have one God and one Son of God through nature does not prevent others from being understood as sons of God by adoption. Similarly this does not make the terms father and teacher useless or prevent others from being called father. Commentary on Matthew 4.23.10.

23:10 One Master, the Christ

You Have One Master.

Chrysostom: Previously when he had asked, "What do you think of the Christ?" it is worth noting that he did not say, "What do you think of me?" So it is here that he says you have one master, and he does not make this subjective by saying "me" but "the Christ."

Yet note that this passage repeatedly speaks of the one master, the one teacher, repeatedly applying the term one. Does this term apply to the Father alone so as to reject the only begotten Son? Is the Father guide? All would agree, and none would challenge it. And yet "one," he says, "is your guide, even Christ." For just as Christ, being called the one guide, does not cast out the Father from being guide, even so the Father, being called Master, does not cast out the Son from being Master. For the expression one is spoken in contradistinction to the human way of speaking and within the rest of the creation. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 72.3.

23:11 Humbled and Exalted

Whoever Humbles Oneself Will Be Exalted.

Chrysostom: For nothing is as crucial as the practice of modesty. This is why he is continually reminding them of this virtue, both when he brought the children into the midst and now. Even when he was preaching on the mount, beginning the Beatitudes, this is where he began. And in this passage he plucks up pride by the roots, saying, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

See how he draws off the hearer right over to the contrary thing. For not only does he forbid him to set his heart upon the first place but also requires him to follow after the last. For so shall you obtain your desire, he says. So one who pursues his own desire for the first must follow after in the last place: "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

And where will we find this humility? Go to the city of virtue, to the tents of the holy men, to the mountains, to the groves. There you may see this height of humility.

For these persons, some illustrious from their rank in the world, some having had wealth, in every way put themselves down, by their vesture, by their dwelling, by those to whom they minister. As if they were written characters, they throughout all things are writing the story of humility. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 72.3.

Cultivate Humility.

Cyril of Alexandria: Since those who have arrived teaching new beliefs for the most part do so from conceit and arrogance, I will say something concerning the value of the teaching. The Lord cuts short this opinion and way as leading to destruction. He says, "You love glory and the places of first importance." Meanwhile he desires the servant's role and cultivates humility. Fragment 255.

One Who Exalts Will Be Humbled.

Origen: I wish everyone might hear this, and most of all deacons, priests and bishops, especially those who think to themselves that these were not the words written: "He who exalts himself will be humbled." On this basis, they then act as if they do not know that he said, "He who has humbled himself will be exalted." They do not hear him who said, "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly of heart." They

thought themselves to be self-inspired and through this inspiration fell “into the judgment of the devil.” They had not thought of critically examining their false humility. They would have done better to have remembered the word of wisdom that says, “The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself, and you will find grace before God.” It was the Lord who provided the pattern for this process. No matter how great he was, he humbled himself. For “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.” Commentary on Matthew 12.

23:13 Shutting the Kingdom of Heaven Against Humanity

Curses and Blessings.

Origen: There are those who dare to say that God is not good because of the curses in his law that he places against their sin. And yet the one who is truly the Son of God who gave that same law is also the same one who put blessings into the law. The same God who provides blessings for those who are saved in a similar way applies curses which he placed in the law against sinners. “Woe,” he says. Woe to you and to those hearing these things who plead the God of the law and yet do not understand that these words were spoken by God in a kindly way. So we understand why Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees.” They believe that it is in fact a good thing to pronounce these curses against sinners. They consider the arrangement of the law’s curses to be a part of God’s design. The chiding father frequently urges his advice on his son for his improvement—advice that may seem to be a curse. He does not wish the curses to be actualized, however, but rather he desires to avert him from even more such curses. Commentary on Matthew 13.

Woe to You Scribes.

Hilary of Poitiers: “Woe” is a voice of sorrowing. For this reason he says that they close the kingdom of heaven, because they hide in the law the consolation of his truth. They lost sight of the advent expected by the prophets. Through deceptive teachings, they do not allow others to go to heaven either. They do not adorn the way of eternity. On Matthew 24.3.

You Neither Enter nor Allow Others.

Jerome: The scribes and Pharisees have the knowledge of the prophets and of the law. They know that Christ is the Son of God. They are not ignorant that he was born of the Virgin. Yet they did not seek to serve the people to whom they were accountable. They themselves were not entering the kingdom of heaven, nor did they permit others who were able to do so. Hosea the prophet declares of them, "The priests have stolen the way, they have killed the [people of] Shechem," and again, "The priests did not ask where the Lord is." Surely every teacher who misleads his students shuts the gate of the kingdom of heaven before them. Commentary on Matthew 4.23.13.

23:14 Receiving Greater Condemnation

Called to Account.

Hilary of Poitiers: These are the poisoners of truth. They are reluctant to undertake the salvation of others. They bolt shut the kingdom of heaven. In their ambition they "devour widows' houses and for pretense make long prayers." By this acquaintance with heaven (achieved with those long prayers), they expect they will persevere in the merits of grace quietly, just as a rich person expects to receive the treasure stored up for him. However, they will receive ample judgment and punishment for their particular sins. They will be called to account for their strange and ignorant practices. On Matthew 24.4.

For a Pretense You Make Long Prayers.

Chrysostom: After this, he admonishes them for their gluttony. And it is most grievous that they indulged their own bellies not from rich men's houses but from the poor. Thereby they aggravated the poverty of the poor, which they should have relieved. They did not merely eat. They "devoured."

The manner of their false piety in overreaching was even yet more grievous: "for a pretense you make long prayers."

It is just for anyone who does evil to receive just retribution. But in this case we have one who is using prayers as a cloak for his own wickedness. And he is deriving even the reason for his avarice as godliness. Sure he is justly liable to a far more grievous punishment. So why did God not stop this and depose them? Because the time had not yet come. He leaves them time for repentance for a while. But by his sayings he

tries to avert his own disciples being similarly deceived or to be drawn to emulate these men because of the dignity of their positions. Earlier he said, "Observe whatever they tell you but not what they do." For they do many things amiss. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 73.1.

23:15 Making Proselytes

The Corruption of the Laity.

Chrysostom: The scribes and Pharisees have laid endless toil upon others. This should draw them toward being more empathic with others' burdens. But the things that we acquire easily we care less about. So even their unfair advantages do not render them more gentle. Here he lays to the charge of the priests two things. First, that they have been unprofitable for the salvation of many. They have forgotten that they need much toil in order to win over even one. And second, that they were remiss in the preservation of those whom they had won. Not only were they careless but traitors. We see this from the wickedness of their lives, corruption and making others worse. When a disciple sees his teacher to be corrupt, he becomes even more so. He does not stop at his teacher's corruption. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 73.1.

You Traverse Sea and Land.

Jerome: The scribes and the Pharisees were reviewing the whole world on account of the business and diverse profits taken by their disciples. These profits were taken under the pretense of sanctity. Commentary on Matthew 4.23.15.

23:16–17 You Blind Fools!

Which Is Greater?

Hilary of Poitiers: Jesus reproached those who by their inane observances detracted from the one who rightly should be honored in worship. He himself was the ground and source of the law. The law did not of itself suffice. The ornaments of the altar and temple were not the primary object of worship but were merely pointing the way for the future of true worship. Gold, silver, bronze, brass, pearl and crystal each embrace a particular meaning from their unique natures as metals. Jesus refuted the premise that the gold of the temple or the gifts of the altar could be venerated as if something in themselves rather than

the greater one whom they honor. With the coming of Christ the massive structure of legal obligations became futile. Christ was not in the law, but the law was made holy in Christ. He had placed his seat and throne on the law. One who seeks to be religious should anchor himself rightly in the truth. They were stupid and blind who venerated gifts that were sanctified while they allowed sanctity itself to pass by. On Matthew 24.6.

The Gold or the Temple.

Theodore of Heraclea: Jesus is saying that the gold in the temple, the gold objects dedicated in the temple to the glory of God, whether these be the gold cherubim or the gold jar containing the manna, were considered by the Jews to be worthy of much more honor than the temple. Therefore they were condemned by the Lord.... But the saying possesses a figurative meaning directed against them because they are not receiving the truth regarding Christ. Instead, they were judging Moses and the types given through him as more valuable than Christ.... They were rejecting the Christ who sanctifies Moses while simultaneously praising the law. Just as the law was praiseworthy, not because it possesses the types and the symbols but because it prefigures the true mystery of worship in Christ, in the same way the gold is precious because of the one who sanctifies the temple, and heaven is beautiful because of the God who sanctifies it and dwells within it. Fragment 115.

23:18 Bound by an Oath

The Temple of Scriptures and the Altar of the Heart.

Origen: Those who work in the fields of the gospel seek the hidden meaning of these passages of Scripture. We are not simply confiscating the higher parts of Scripture but rather looking toward its whole sense. As regards swearing, it is intended as a binding action, seeking to confirm the word concerning which something is sworn.

Consider this analogy. Think of the altar as the heart and the temple as the whole of Scripture. The temple of God's glory, spiritually understood, is the divinely inspired Scripture. The gold refers to the meanings it conveys. To swear is to witness to the Scriptures, as a validation and confirmation of the word we speak. Therefore we ought to profess the whole sense of Scripture as a confirmation of the sense which we invoke in all of our words.

Gold found outside the temple is not sanctified. Rather, that gold which is found in the temple is the measure of that which is outside it. Similarly the meaning which is found outside of the Scriptures is not holy, but it is contained in the meaning of the Scriptures. Only that sense of Scripture is sanctified which can be seen from within the temple itself, that is, within the whole of Scripture. The temple, that is, the reading of the Scriptures, makes a great and venerable sense, just as consecrated gold is valuable. So we ought not to swear by our own intellects to confirm our beliefs, as if we were creating witnesses that could judge according to the truth. But let us explore further the analogy of the temple, the gold and the altar. The altar is the place where a vow is sanctified. The altar in this passage is the heart of a man. What happens in the heart happens deeply within a person. Vows and gifts placed on the altar are clearly those placed upon the human heart. When you begin to pray, you place the vow of your prayer upon your heart, as if you had placed something upon the altar, so that you might offer your prayer to God.

Suppose you are ready to place an offering of psalms upon your heart, so as to offer to God an offering of psalms, accompanying yourself with a harp. Or suppose you are ready to give alms. You make an offering of alms upon your heart, just as if you had placed something on the altar, as you would offer your alms to God. Suppose you have proposed to fast in order to make an offering of your fasting upon your heart, as if you had placed something upon the altar.

In this way the heart of a man makes vows in a holy and venerable way. It is from the heart, that is, the altar, that the vow is offered to God. Therefore it is not possible for the offering of a man to be more honorable than his heart from which the offering is sent up. Commentary on Matthew 18.

23:19 Which is Greater?

Swearing by the Whole Sense of Scripture.

Origen: Anyone who thinks that his own almsgiving, his own fasting, his own psalms and prayers are in themselves great and who, without good judgment, blesses them and does not reflect that it is just from such a heart that his almsgiving or psalms or prayers or fasting are offered—such a man is blind. For indeed his heart is the altar that sanctifies his offering which is the heart of the world. The heart and the conscience of such a man “do not feel remorse but have trust in God,” because his own heart has been rightly formed. He does not rely on his gifts as such or the words of his prayers or of his psalms—although they may seem well composed and chosen from the Scriptures—but on the heart rightly formed. Whoever

places his own witness on the altar, that is, his own conscience and the center of his heart, such a man swears by the altar, embracing everything which is contained in it. One who swears according to what we attest to by the temple, that is, “through the whole sense of Scriptures,” such a man seems to swear according to the word and the will of God which is contained in it. Such a man in this sense swears upon the temple (upon all the Scriptures) and upon the altar (upon the whole heart), that is, an understanding of the sense of the whole of the Scriptures and upon the whole heart. The temple is the glory of God, which “we see as in a mirror darkly.” The heavens, however, are above the temple of God, in which sits the throne of God, on which we may look “with our face uncovered” when he comes. Commentary on Matthew 18.

23:20 Swearing by the Altar

The Tradition of Oath Taking.

Origen: One of the Pharisaical traditions regarded oath taking. Some were swearing by the temple, others by the gold of the temple; some by the altar, others by the gifts of the altar. The Pharisees were teaching that one who swore by the gold of the altar or by the gift of the altar was obligated, whereas one who swore by the temple or by the altar was not under obligation. Our Savior spoke against these traditions. He wished to call them back from human traditions to divine revelation. Those who hand on such traditions are blind and foolish. They do not see that what is placed in the temple is not sanctified through itself but through the Lord of the temple. That which is placed on the altar is judged already as a gift of God, which is why it is placed on the altar. It seems foolish to argue that one who swears in one way is bound and one who swears in another way is not bound. This assumes that what is sanctified is above the one who sanctifies. It seems foolish to argue that one who swears by heaven is less vulnerable than one who swears by God himself. Jesus showed them that it was equally as absurd to swear by heaven as to swear by the temple or by the altar. It is irrational to assume that one avoids punishment because he is not swearing by God but by the throne of God. Thus he spoke to the Jews prohibiting them to follow the Pharisaic tradition. Moreover, he clearly rejected the whole business of swearing at all, as if it were a superior way. Commentary on Matthew 17.

23:21–24 Neglecting Weighty Matters

You Tithe Mint, Dill and Cummin.

Origen: Not only among the Jews but among ourselves as well, we find people sinning in these ways. They are swallowing camels. People of this type frequently show off their religion even in the smallest of things. They are rightly called hypocrites for wanting to exploit their religiosity before men but being unwilling to undertake that very faith which God himself has justified. Therefore the imitators of the scribes and Pharisees must be dislodged and sent away from us, lest a woe touches us in the same way it touches them. The scribes could be described as those who valued nothing found in the Scriptures except its plain sense interpreted legalistically. Meanwhile they condemn those who look into the very depths of God himself. Mint and dill and cummin are only spices for food but are not themselves substantial food. What substantive food would mean in conversion would be that which is necessary for the justification of our souls—faith and love—unlike these legalisms, which are more like condiments and flavorings. It is as if a meal might be thought to consist more of condiments and flavorings than the food itself. The seriousness of judgment is neglected while great attention is given to minor matters. Spiritual exercises which in and of themselves are hardly justice are spoken of as justice and compassion and faith. It is lacking in justice to treat these small parts as the whole. When we do not offer to God the observance of all that is necessary for worship, we fail altogether. Commentary on Matthew 19–20.

What the Lord Requires.

Cyril of Alexandria: “O Pharisees, you demand,” Jesus says, “perhaps the tithes of herbs and the smallest coins while you neglect the commandments, concerning which the violation is greater.” And what kind of commandments are these? Justice, that is, to judge uprightly and blamelessly; mercy, that is, genuineness toward God. For justice and mercy and faith toward God are better than the tithe and firstfruits. Therefore the God of all things says through the prophet, “And now, Israel, what does the Lord require from you but to do justice and to love and seek mercy and to be prepared to follow the Lord your God.” For the genuine faith of those being saved is seen in their exceeding readiness to follow. Fragment 258.

You Neglect Weightier Matters of the Law.

Hilary of Poitiers: What is lost is the hidden dimension of the evil will. These hidden things of the mind bring about these distortions of the law. The law prescribes that a tenth be given, so they measure out a

tenth of a measure of mint and dill but only in order that they might be thought by other men to fulfill the law. They abandon mercy and justice, faith and every form of benevolence. Yet these are the true duties of man.... God laughs at the superficial diligence of those who measure cucumbers. God laughs at our attempts to swallow camels, as if the sins of avoidance were less serious than the sins of consumption. On Matthew 24.7.

23:25–26 Inner and Outer Cleansing

Congruence of Inner and Outer Life.

Origen: This passage teaches us that we should hasten to be righteous, not merely to appear so. Whoever strives only to appear righteous will cleanse his exterior and will take great care of what can be seen by others but will neglect his heart and his conscience. He fails to realize that the one who is eager to purify his interior life and his thoughts will also naturally want to give a healthy outward appearance as well. Whoever works hard on the externals but neglects his interior life, however, will inevitably be filled with avarice, lust, malice, and many other kinds of evil. For the one who is solicitous of his own interior salvation also takes care of his external, public reputation. But not everyone who cares first about his public reputation is also solicitous of his interior salvation. In this connection, it is written that “whoever sees a woman and lusts after her has committed adultery with her in his heart.” He who refrains from acts of fornication, therefore, but commits fornication by lusting in his heart is like the one who cleanses the outside of the cup and plate while the inside is left full of intemperance. Whoever performs acts of mercy for the purpose of earning human respect, doing his good deeds “to be seen by men,” also seems to cleanse only the exterior of the cup and plate but is full of intemperance and lust for vainglory within. Commentary on Matthew 21.

The Inward and Outward Cup.

Origen: If it is proper to regard everything in the gospel according to the moral sense ... we can say that it is a sort of spiritual food and spiritual drink that we receive when we read the law and the prophets in Scripture. Indeed, the language through which we take our spiritual drink and the biblical narratives on which we are nourished are the plates and cups for our food and drink. This is why we are warned not to take as much care for their outside as we do for their inside, so that our hearts might be filled with pure understanding, not merely adorned with fine rhetoric and grammar. For “the Kingdom of God does not

consist in words but in power.” Whoever strives harder to dress his speech in elegant composition than to fill it with saving doctrine has cleaned only the outside, but the inside remains stained with vanity....

We can also say that the very words of the law and the prophets are the cups of spiritual drink for souls and that the plates or bowls of nourishing food for the faithful are their wise authors. The scribes and Pharisees work diligently at discerning only the external, literal meaning of these prophetic cups and plates and bowls, eager to demonstrate that the vessels themselves are pure and holy. The disciples of Christ ... hasten to purify and sanctify the interior, spiritual meaning by means of knowledge and credible explanations, so that they might eat and drink the law and the prophets whose inside has been purified, desiring as they do to hear and understand the interior, mystical meaning and to go beyond the literal sense of the words. Commentary on Matthew 22–23.

23:27 Whitewashed Tombs

23:28 Full of Hypocrisy and Iniquity

Feigning Righteousness.

Origen: As the scribes and Pharisees were previously called “full of robbery and intemperance,” likewise here they are said to be “full of hypocrisy and iniquity” and are compared with “the bones of the dead and all uncleanness.” Hypocrisy, because it is a counterfeit of the good, possesses nothing vital of the good it simulates, but is only its dead bones, so to speak.... If we listen with wisdom to what the present passage wants to tell us, we will understand that every simulated righteousness is a dead righteousness, hence no righteousness at all. Just as a dead man can still have the appearance of a man, even though he is in fact no longer a man, so also a dead chastity is no chastity. For any virtue is dead when it is not practiced for God but feigned on account of men. He who feigns righteousness can give the appearance of being righteous even though what he has is not righteousness at all but only a figment of righteousness, much like impersonators who can take on the appearance of another individual without thereby actually becoming the other person. The same is true concerning chastity. Because of this, men who do such things are appropriately compared with “whitewashed tombs which look beautiful from the outside,” for they give every external appearance of righteousness, even though they are full of “the bones of the dead” within. Commentary on Matthew 24.

Like Whitewashed Tombs.

Chrysostom: You have been counted worthy to become temples of God. But you have instead suddenly become more like sepulchers, having the same sort of smell. This is dreadful. It is extreme wretchedness that one in whom Christ dwells and in whom the Holy Spirit has worked such great works should turn out to be a sepulcher, a place for death. What wretchedness is this? What mourning and lamentation does this call for! The members of the body of Christ have become a tomb of uncleanness? Remember your sonship and how you were born. Consider of what things you have been counted worthy. Recall what sort of garment you received in baptism. You were intended to be a temple without fault, beautiful, not adorned with gold or pearls but with the spirit that is more precious than these. You are hardly ready to appear in the city above if you remain a sepulcher below. For if here this is forbidden, much more there. Even here you are an object of scorn. You carry around a dead soul. You are shunned. Be honest. If anyone were to go around carrying about a dead body, wouldn't everyone else rush for cover! Wouldn't they all flee? But this is what you are like. You go about carrying a corpse far more grievous than this. It is a soul deadened by sins, a soul paralyzed. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 73.3.

23:29 Adorning the Monuments of the Righteous

You Build Tombs for the Prophets.

Chrysostom: Jesus did not pronounce woe upon them because they blamed others or because they build monuments. Rather, he pronounces woe because while pretending to condemn those who killed the prophets, they do worse. They witness against themselves. As for evidence that their adorning of monuments is a pretense, Luke says, "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you build their tombs." Their purpose was not to honor those that were slain but to make a show of the murders. They are afraid lest, when the tombs had perished by time, the proof of their daring should fade away. They set up these buildings as a kind of trophy, priding themselves in the daring deeds of those men and displaying them. This is what is reprov'd by the Lord. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 74.1.

23:30 We Would Not Have Shed the Prophets' Blood

Who Shed the Blood of the Prophets.

Origen: Once the prophets had departed this life, their bodies were in the tomb but their souls and spirits were in the "realm of the living." Accordingly, the historical narrative of the prophetic writings is to be regarded as the body but their spiritual meaning and the inner truth as the soul and spirit which inhabits history. It is not improper then for us to consider the "tombs of the prophets" to be the letters on the pages of their books, in which the narrative lays as though it were a body placed in a tomb. Those persons therefore who receive and understand the spiritual meaning of the prophetic writings and the truth hidden within them have the soul and spirit of the prophets and are themselves made into a sort of realm of the living prophets.... Those who neither seek nor accept the spiritual meaning but attend only to the simple, historical narrative study the bodies of the prophets in the letters and pages of the books, as though in so many tombs. Such persons were the Pharisees, who were rightly called Pharisees (that is, the "separated") because they separated the spiritual meaning of the prophets from their bodily history, as though expelling the prophets' souls from their bodies, killing them and rendering them devoid of soul and spirit. It was also right for the Pharisees to be called "hypocrites," because they built and adorned only the tombs of the prophets which contained their bodily history, which is to say that they studied only the letter of their writings and books. They did not understand that those who study dead bodies (the historical narrative) may seem to act with reverence toward the memory of the prophets but are in fact being most irreverent. Their attempts to defend themselves against the charge of being associated with "those who killed the prophets" and to prove themselves innocent only add to the crimes of "those who killed the prophets," thereby filling up the "measure" of the iniquity of their fathers by not believing in Christ, whom the prophets proclaimed not through the historical sense of their writings but through the spiritual sense. Commentary on Matthew 27.

Sons of Those Who Murdered the Prophets.

Chrysostom: And you yourselves continue to do these things in this spirit. Though you may speak to the contrary, you still do them. You say, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." Yet your own disposition is evident. Even as you are unfolding your intention, you are already expressing it, however disguised. So Jesus adds, "Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets." If you are the

son of a murderer but do not partake of the mind of your father, you yourself are not to blame. But if you do so partake, you have an affinity with his wickedness. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 74.1.

23:31 You Witness Against Yourselves

The Same Kinds of Evil.

Cyril of Alexandria: We will carefully investigate what the Savior says. The forefathers of the Jews killed the holy prophets who were transmitting the divine word to them in those times. They surely have become witnesses for some of them, because the prophets are now revered and honored. They have placed crowns on their heads or assign ... honor to their tombs as to holy things, for believing the prophets to be holy men, they have become the judges of those who have killed them. For by honoring them in this way, they have spoken against those who killed them, and through these things they accuse them of having acted wickedly. But though they agreed to condemn the murders committed by their own forefathers, they were about to become threshing floors for the same kind of evils, indeed, to things even worse. They “killed the author of life” and added to their impieties against him other murders, those of his holy apostles. For while one scrutinizes the sins of others, making a decision according to one’s innate reason, one sees the wickedness and censures it.... He who is led into similar passions is like a blind man carried away. Fragment 260.

Those Who Murdered the Prophets.

Hilary of Poitiers: The form of judgment is perfect; the understanding and idea of equity are instilled in each of us by nature so that the more fully the ideal of equity is known, the less need there is for the forgiveness of iniquity. The people of the law killed all the prophets. They had become inflamed with hatred toward them because of the harshness of their reproaches, since the prophets had publicly called them thieves, murderers, adulterers and sacrilegious. Moreover, because they had denounced the Jews as unworthy of the kingdom of heaven and because they taught that the Gentiles would be the heirs of the covenant of God, they afflicted the prophets with a variety of other punishments. The descendants, however, repudiated the deeds of their fathers, honoring the prophets’ books, decorating their tombs, restoring their sepulchers and attesting by these forms of respect that they were not culpable of the crimes of their fathers. On Matthew 24.8.

23:32 Fill the Measure of Your Ancestors: Just Piety.

23:33 You Serpents

Responsibility for Murder.

Cyril of Alexandria: The punishment of all the murders committed in the past will fall on the last generation of murderers according to a certain pattern, although God speaking through the prophet does say that “the fathers will not die for the sins of the children” ... and indeed, “each will die for his own sin.” What then should we think about this? How can a later generation be punished for the murders committed by others, concerning whom Christ says these things? Won’t Cain be punished for the murder of Abel?... How is it that these poor souls will be subjected to the punishment due to all these people? For God is not unjust but is the righteous judge, powerful and patient, according to the testimony of the Scripture. Therefore we think there is a certain intention contained within the things that have been spoken that applies to the present case and helps us to fit one thing to another. Let it be taken for granted then that this may be so in the present case. Let us say that they have become robbers in that land. These men were plundering the surrounding villages and killing their inhabitants. But the prince of the realm did not immediately strip them of the ruler’s sword. Rather, he was eager to teach them differently through the use of threats.... But I suppose someone of the last who have been cruelly punished will say that they have received the penalty due to all.... You will also understand something such as this concerning God. For God was extremely patient in the preceding times until he deemed it necessary to set a boundary on his longsuffering. For it was also necessary that the divine anger fall upon these. On the one hand, they continued to sin against people and their fellow servants. On the other hand, they killed the Lord of all. Not that it is for this reason that he harshly punished the last ones but that it is astonishing that he has borne patiently with them to the present time. Fragment 261.

23:34 Sending Prophets, Wise Men and Scribes

Tongues Like Whips.

Origen: The unfruitful scribes of the law are different from the scribes who were sent by Christ on account of the gospel, in whose work the spirit vivifies but the letter does not kill, as does the letter of the law. Those who follow the letter of the law incur faithlessness and vain superstitions. Those who follow the letter of the gospel (i.e., its simple narrative), however, are saved. For the literal story of the gospel itself

is sufficient for the salvation of the more simple among us. And if you see scribes of the law and Pharisees acting not only against “wise men” of the gospel and “prophets” of Christ but also against the “scribes” of the new covenant, you will see how (insofar as they are able) they kill the prophets of Christ and crucify the scribes and scourge them with slanderous speech in their synagogues. It is common to hear how the sects, the so-called spiritual men of the Pharisees, use their tongues like whips to scourge Christians with curses and to pursue them “from town to town,” sometimes bodily, sometimes spiritually, wanting to expel them from their own town, which is the law and prophets and the gospel and the apostles, and to drive them by deceitful means into another, foreign town, which is another gospel. Commentary on Matthew 27.

23:35 Righteous Blood

The Blood of Zechariah.

Jerome: Because we read about so many Zechariahs in Scripture, we need to inquire into the identity of this particular Zechariah, the son of Barachiah. Lest we mistake him for another, the Gospel specifies “whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar.” Yet there remains a variety of diverse opinions on this question, each of which ought to be considered. Some say that this Zechariah the son of Barachiah is the eleventh of the twelve minor prophets. Although their fathers share the same name, however, they cannot be the same persons because the prophet Zechariah was never said to have been killed between the sanctuary and the altar and especially because the temple had just recently been destroyed in the prophet’s time. Others want us to believe that this Zechariah is the father of John the Baptist, killed because he proclaimed the advent of the Savior on the basis of something he had dreamed. Because this theory doesn’t have the authority of Scripture, however, it can be disproven as easily as it can be proven. Still others maintain that this is the Zechariah who was killed between the sanctuary and the altar by Joash the king of Judah, as is chronicled in the book of Kings. But that Zechariah was the son of Jehoida the priest, not Barachiah, as the Scripture relates: “Joash did not remember the good which Jehoida, Zechariah’s father, had done for him.” Commentary on Matthew 4.23.35.

23:36 It Will Come on This Generation

Committing Grievous Acts.

Chrysostom: Mark how well he has forewarned them. Even after he has pointed out their hypocrisy, they claim that they would not have shed the blood of the prophets. Jesus shamed them thoroughly, saying, "While you condemn them, you do things worse. These things shall not be without punishment." He thus implants in them fear beyond words. He reminds them of hell. Then because that was to come, he brought home to them the terrors as even present. "Truly I say to you, all this will come upon this generation." He added also unspeakable severity to the vengeance, saying that they shall suffer more grievous things than all these. Yet in no way did this cause them to be corrected. But if anyone ask why they will suffer more grievously than all, we would say, Because they have first committed more grievous things than all, and by none of the things that have been done to correct them have they been brought to a sound mind. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 74.2.

23:37 As a Hen Gathers Her Brood

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

Chrysostom: Then he directs his speech at the city, yet with the intention of correcting his hearers. He says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" Why the repetition? This is the speech of one who at the same time pities, bemoans and greatly loves this city. The emotive quality is like a woman who is much beloved and forever loved, yet who had despised the one who loved her. Now on the point of her punishment, just as the punishment is about to be inflicted, he pleads for her. The prophets also had similar words when they said, "Turn to me, and she did not return."

Then having called her, he tells also her bloodstained deeds, she who has been "killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!" In this way Jesus is also pleading his own case. But even with all this you have turned me aside. Yet I have not withdrawn my great affection toward you. It was my desire often to draw you to myself, but you would not.

Jerusalem is defeating itself by its sins. Yet what affection remains. With what warmth is his affection expressed, as a mother for her brood. Everywhere in the prophets is this same image of the wings, both in the song of Moses and in the Psalms, indicating his great protection and care.

“But you would not,” he says, so “behold, your house is forsaken and desolate,” stripped of the protection which comes from me.

It surely was this same one who had been protecting the city, and holding it together and preserving it, who had found it necessary to chasten his beloved. So now a punishment is appointed, one that brings exceeding dread and implies the entire overthrow of the city. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 74.3.

23:38–39 A Forsaken and Desolate House

You Will Not See Me Again.

Chrysostom: “For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ” This is the language of one that loves earnestly. He is poignantly appealing to them in relation to the judgment that is to come. He is not merely warning them concerning their past follies. He is now speaking of the future day of his second coming.

So did this occur? Did they not see him from that time? He was speaking of the time up to his crucifixion.

They had been continually accusing him of being a foe to God. He can do nothing now but show them who he is, as Son of the Father, in full accord with the Father’s will. He indicates himself to be the very one expected by the prophets. This is why he uses the same words as did the prophets. In this way he intimated both his resurrection and his second coming. He made all this plain even to the utterly unbelieving but even more surely to all who would worship him. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 74.3.

The Vision of Faith.

Cyril of Alexandria: That which has been spoken possesses an interpretation that comes through the vision of faith. For when “the fullness of the nations come in” and they believe in Christ, then the Jews who believe after these things see the beauty of the divine nature of Christ. They behold the Father in the Son and declare him to be the Redeemer proclaimed through the prophets, whom the prophets previously mentioned as coming in the name of the Lord. For the other prophets did not come in the name of the

Lord. For they were saying, "The Lord says these things" and "I am the servant of the Lord, and I worship the God of heaven." Fragment 264.