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A translation of passage 23

From

One hundred sacred claims in which difficult passages of
Scripture, Old and New Testament are made clear, and are
vindicated from false interpretations
with study and work

By
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Passage 23
Mathew 5:22

However I say to you, because whoever is angry with his brother will be guilty in the court. However whoever will have said "Racha" will be guilty in the council.

However whoever will have said "fool" will be guilty in the fires of Gehenna.

1.) The Pontifical Priests abuse this text with a twofold reasoning. The first reason they abuse this text is to establish a difference between mortal and venial sin. They believe this difference has been selected from the nature of the sin itself. "Truly if the angers in this passage are divided into three sins, at least a third of them is worthy of eternal death, and therefore are mortal sin. If the remaining two are not mortal sins, than how could these two not be pardonable by their own nature?" Becanus Theological Lectures 2:2 Question 1 page 136.

2.) The second reason they abuse this text is to maintain Purgatory. They claim that some punishments can be construed from this passage to cleanse sin after this life. For in this verse we have certain sins which only merit temporary punishment such as may be inflicted either in a court or a council that do not make decisions about eternal matters. "But these punishments can be made, because a person could die suddenly or while sleeping. And in such an unexpected death, he would have no hope of repentance for his sins. Therefore he will be cleansed of his sins in the next life. If his sins were not cleansed he would either walk in heaven with some defilement, or he would be unjustly condemned to eternal punishment while his sin only deserved temporal punishment." Bellarmine Volume 2 disputes about purgatory 8:589.

3.) My response: First: Christ's main point is a refutation, because he is refuting the Pharisees who were imitating their ancestors. Their ancestors used to hand over only the person suspected

of murdering another to be accused in a court. This person may not have actually killed, although murder is animated by evil desires against the neighbor. Even so *they considered*¹ him able to purify this sin of evil desire against the neighbor without a trial before God and before men. In this passage Christ is correcting this teaching because it was a snare. He was exposing the doors that are open to corrupt emotions against the neighbor. Christ is obviously also teaching something else in this verse. All sins against the fifth commandment, whether they may have been internal or external, are equally worthy of damnation in every court. The sins and the courts are determined as follows:

- 1.) He who flies into rage can be summoned into court.
- 2.) He who verbally abuses is able to be drug into the Sanhedrin. (*For more information* about these two courts among the Hebrews in the Tribunals see Sigonius Book 6 concerning the republic of Judea Ch. 5& 6. Pages 32 & 321)
- 3.) He who is aroused to *inflict* a more serious injury can be taken away to eternal punishment.
- 4.) By *using* the refutation *found in Mathew 5:22*, along with other correct teachings, men can teach others to extinguish feelings of murder. The result of this will be that in the future men will stop perceiving these feelings of anger as trivial. Men may also diligently guard against murder itself by arguing, "If these sins, which used to seem trivial to us, arouse such great guilt that they deserve a trial that is both private and public, human and divine, then how much more does the actual killing of the neighbor deserve in the presence of God and men!" Also, by arguing this point with care, a man may be restrained from the evil desires and bloody murders of our ancestors.

¹ Italicized words are words that I have added based on context, in order to simplify comprehension of this text.

5.) The previous arguments will be your guide. However, the *argument* follows from there that sins are not equal, and also punishments will be unequal before the court by reasoning that there are degrees of sins *in this verse*.

I respond first. This is true, but not because of the following argument. "The third sin is sentenced to Gehenna's instruments of torture. Therefore the remaining two must be either exempt from Gehenna's instruments of torture, or they are not mortal sins." This statement is not true because, as has been previously said, Christ is giving a refutation *in Matthew 5:22*. The refuter is occupied in an examination of *his* adversaries' ways of thinking, and he directs his own response to those ways of thinking. However, he does not always bind his thoughts with conclusions. He recognizes and knows his thoughts are perfect in every way. Accordingly, conclusions must be made in an assertion or even a position, but not in a refutation or a denial. The opinion cannot be held that by the third sin itself Christ wanted to remove the remaining two from the guilt of eternal condemnation, because Christ is refuting in this passage. Christ even distinctly removes Jewish axioms, but he does not distinctly limit his own axioms, indeed by the NT συναθροισμὸν (to gather together, assemble) Christ pronounces these sins to be worthy of condemnation in every trial. Therefore nothing necessary will be established from the above statement, which I have shown to be false statement.

6.) We have a similar example of a refutation in Mathew 22:43.

He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, ⁴⁴"The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' ⁴⁵If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

In this passage Christ is refuting the Pharisees. They were neither believing in nor understanding anything higher than the human nature in the Messiah. The Messiah is truly an unadorned man, and this exceedingly constrains them. They are not able to believe that he is the son of David, although David said that famous line about his Lord. If David calls him Lord than how would he be David's son? Mathew 22:45. Yet in the same place and at the same time Christ doesn't distinctly declare his meaning. Specifically by what reason David would be able to call him "Messiah," "son," and "Lord."

7.) Second. If by the third stage of anger Christ wanted to exclude the two previous stages from the appraisal of mortal sins, then he would have concluded that angers of contemplated revenge and verbal abuse (which in this passage are the two previous stages of anger) are venial sins. Venial sin is by no means subject to condemnation. On the other hand, in other passages he refers to anger as being:

- Among the works of the flesh Gal 5:19
- According to the old man Col 3:9
- And it may be pronounced about an angry person that he does not have life remaining in himself, because he does not love *his* brother 1 Jn 3:14

Since Christ refers to anger in this way, than how could it even be considered a venial sin if it has destroyed a friendship? Bellarmine denies this in Volume 4, Book 1 concerning the remission of grace 11 argument col. 86. "Therefore verbal abuse will not be this kind of sin, because Ecclesiasticus (a.k.a. Wisdom of Sirach) *infers* about such verbal abuse, "the person who verbally abuses a friend (*and not the sinful act of verbal abuse*) destroys the friendship." See 22:24.

8.) You may ask, "If all three sins make the sinner subject to the same punishment, why does Christ say that the third sin, unlike the other two sins, commits the guilty to Gehenna?"

First. Dr. Chemnitz answers, "This is done so that from that time on the guilty may be bound to whatever punishments may await him, to whatever punishments may have been secured by more atrocious insults and by the actual deed of murder. He will be bound to these punishments unless reconciliation has been made." *In Harm 51:730*. Dr. Chemnitz and I think that Gehenna can hardly be adduced as a sufficient reason *to exclude the other two sins*, because the same punishment may truly await those who are angry and those who are verbal abusers, unless they are absolved by and because of Christ.

9.) Secondly. Jansen seems to have arrived at the deeper issue. He asserts: "Christ has fitted his teaching according to a simple comprehension in relation to that third stage of anger and of guilt. Christ also wanted to show that even he who is only *harboring feelings of anger* has committed such a sin that he ought to fear condemnation. Although he should not utterly fear his condemnation until it seems certain and definite. Whoever may have truly attacked a brother with minor verbal abuse has committed such a sin that now he should not only fear, so that he may prevent being condemned. But, a relentless verbal abuser should fear any condemnation, just as it has already been shown about the condemnation *this sin* deserves. Certainly if he may assault another with any more grievous verbal abuse, then he may now surely expect the most grievous punishment of eternal torment owed to him." In Concord Evangelist Ch. 4 p. 277

10.) Consequently *Gehenna is not mentioned with the first two* because an excuse could have been attached to the two previous offenses, on the grounds that thoughts of injuring were not from the soul, although nobody could have escaped the divine court and council that are over these thoughts. However the third is so notorious, that it commits a fault in the eyes and hearing of men, and it convicts the offender of wickedness. It expresses legal liability to such a great measure of guilt (abandoning in the middle everything that could be offered as an excuse and restricted to the remaining two sins) that it may deserve Gehenna by its very nature. Although no further violence or murder itself may have approached *his thoughts*.

11.) Second. (Pertaining to Bellarmine.) Bellarmine is illogically adducing arguments from the undivided to the divided. For he reasons that in this passage Christ divides courts. He *argues that Christ* divides anger, and minor verbal abuse into earthly courts, however he assigns the insult of foolishness to a divine court. But Bellarmine goes astray because he doesn't realize that Christ wanted to expose anger, verbal abuse, and insult. If ἀκριβοδίκαλον (legal precision) is considered, than anger is condemned in every court both human and divine, both private and public. For whatever is unjust in one court will always be unjust in every court. Therefore what anger deserves may be deliberated in a human court concerning anger. In this way God is also the future judge of the same anger. Just as what verbal abuse deserves may be drawn out in a council concerning verbal abuse. In this way a serious court will uphold the same judgement in the presence of the entire heavenly assembly. In fact courts are not determined by the substance of the law, because the law is always and everywhere one and the same, but courts are only determined by order and circumstances.

12.) Second. It is a civil matter, because no more than temporal punishments were inflicted upon transgressors in a Jewish court or council. God's curse had been officially announced upon the same transgressors by the divine law, Lev 26:30, Deut 27:26. Therefore just as punishments were temporal, so the transgressors were submitting to eternal punishments unless led to repentance

13.) Third. If infernal punishments are *to be* understood by *the term* "Gehenna", and cleansing punishments are *to be* understood by *the terms* "court" or "council", than cleansing punishments must be properly understood by *using the terms* "court" and "council" synonymously. Yet cleansing punishments cannot be understood by either of the two *terms*, because they were separate courts. Augustine said that in lighter offenses the accused was tried in the court, and in greater offenses the accused was tried in the council. *If cleansing punishments are to be understood by the term "court" than the council will be superfluous. If cleansing punishments are to be understood by the term "council", than the court will be unnecessary.* Therefore either the Jesuit (Bellarmine) is misleading, or one of these two *terms* is unusual, and the third (Gehenna) will be the heaping furnace, where those who have been condemned in either court or council are clearly punished.