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“...every careless word you utter...”: Is Matthew 12:36 a Derivative of the Second Commandment of the Decalogue?

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Introduction

Jesus' words in Matt 12:36–37 have caused many a Bible reader's heart to sink – “la fameuse menace,” in the words of Louis-Marie Dewailly.¹

I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.²

My attention in this article is in particular on v. 36. I shall not question whether Jesus has said something like this, or whether it is a saying from the Matthean tradition, but try to throw light on how the saying should be understood, and especially on whether this verse might relate to the second commandment of the Decalogue:

You shall not make wrongful use of (לֹא תִשָּׂא לְשׁוֹן) the name of the LORD your God (Exod 20:7 // Deut 5:11).

Matthew 12:36 is a *logion*, a saying attributed to Jesus, which in itself might have a general address. It is not found in Mark and Luke. In Matthew the addressees are the Pharisees (vv. 1, 24 and 38). Matthew's pre-context concerns Jesus and the evil spirits and the question of blaspheming the Holy Spirit (vv. 22–32). Jesus talks about the tree and the fruit (vv.

¹ Louise-Marie Dewailly, “La parole sans oeuvre (Mt 12,36),” in André Duval (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à M-D Chenu* (Bibliothèque Thomiste, 37; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J Vrin, 1967), 203–219.

² Matt 12:36–37. Quotations in this article are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

33–37), underlining that “the tree is known by its fruit” (v. 33).³ The “careless word”-saying is part of what he says about “the abundance of the heart”:

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you (λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν), on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word (πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργόν) you utter; for by your words you will be justified (δικαιωθήσῃ), and by your words you will be condemned (καταδικασθήσῃ) (Matt 12:34–37).

From their words people are recognized as righteous or sentenced as guilty. The “careless word” causes guilt and judgment. Similar sayings about how one uses mouth and words are found a series of places in the Bible and Jewish tradition,⁴ not least documented from rabbinic sources, which talk very concretely about, for example, careless words in general, colloquial language in home and family.⁵

Research History

Already Adam Clarke in his commentary on Matt 12:36 claimed that this verse should be read against the background of both Deut 5:11 (second commandment) and 5:20 (eighth commandment), arguing that ἀργός corresponds to אַשׁוּ.⁶ But that Matt 12:36 should refer or allude to Exod 20:7 // Deut 5:11 is not, as far as I have seen, discussed in modern biblical scholarship on Matthew or the Decalogue. In general the “careless words” are not much commented on in the commentaries or in individual articles. The only scholarly article I have found on Matt 12:36 is Louise-Marie

³ There is a parallel pericope in Luke 6:43–45, from Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, which says nothing about any “careless word.” Mark and John have no parallel to this pericope.

⁴ See Gen 43:3ff., 38; Exod 25:33; Job 37:7; Job 15:5–6; Pss 51:6; 139:4; Sir 4:29; 20:18; 23:7–15; Qoh 12:14; Jer 2:25; Amos 4:13; Matt 15:8–9, 18–20; Eph 5:4; Jas 1:26. On swearing falsely, see Ps 24:4; Jer 5:2; 7:9; Hos 10:4; Mal 3:5.

⁵ For references to Jewish, Christian and classic tradition, see C. S. Keener: *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1999), 366; H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Erster Band* (München: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1978), 639–640.

⁶ Adam Clarke (1760 or 1762–1832) was a British Methodist theologian and biblical scholar who wrote verse-by-verse commentaries on each book of the Bible. His commentaries are found in full text on www.study.org/com/acc/ (March 18, 2013).

Dewailly (1967). But she is not interested in tracing any background in the Decalogue; she concentrates mainly on understanding the phrase *πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργόν*.

But I owe the reader a review of what I have found – and not found.

Whether there is any relation or connection between Matt 12:36 and Exod 20:7 // Deut 5:11 can be traced from two different angles: either whether Old Testament scholars trace the reception of the Decalogue into the New Testament, or whether New Testament scholars trace Old Testament roots for New Testament sayings. The latter is generally more usual than the former.

David Flusser has investigated how the Decalogue is mirrored in the New Testament, but has no reference to Matt 12:36, and has evidently not seen any connection between this verse and the Decalogue. Neither has Tryggve Kronholm in his Swedish book on the Ten Commandments commented on such a connection, even though he surveys the New Testament interpretation of Exod 20:7 // Deut 5:11. Anders Jørgen Bjørndalen, Helge Kvanvig, Werner Schmidt, David Noel Freedman or Patrick Miller⁷ have not followed the use of the Decalogue into the New Testament.⁸

Among New Testament scholars, Walter Grundmann connects Matt 12:36 to the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate Hagigah (2,77a, 22): "Auch die Worte, in denen keine Sünde ist, werden dem Menschen auf seine Tafel geschrieben."⁹ He argues that it is an open question whether the saying refers to "das unwirksame, zwecklose Wort," or to the "abusive (√ בטל) language" in Sir 23:15: "The man that is accustomed to opprobrious words will never be reformed all the days of his life." In the first case he

⁷ After an extensive study of OT texts related to the second commandment (63–111), Miller has a short sub-chapter on "The Name of Jesus," without commenting on Matthew 12:36; P. D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 111–114.

⁸ D. Flusser, "The Ten Commandments and the New Testament," in B.-Z. Segal (ed.), *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1990), 219–246; A. J. Bjørndalen, *Eksegese av hebraiske tekster fra GT I* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973); D. N. Freedman, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering the Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); T. Kronholm, *De Tio Orden* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1992), esp. 127–134; H. S. Kvanvig, *Et ord har slått ned i Israel* (Oslo: Skrivestua, Menighetsfakultetet, 1981); W. H. Schmidt, *Die zehn Gebote im Rahmen alttestamentlicher Ethik* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1993); Miller, *The Ten Commandments*.

⁹ W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Berlin, DDR: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968/1986), 331.

sees a conclusion *a minore ad majus*: “Wenn schon das leere Wort Schuld ist, wie viel mehr das Wort der Verleumdung.”

Donald Hagner argues that “the point is not the danger of bad words but even of useless or worthless words.”¹⁰ This he finds to be in line with Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, and is a sharpening of the call to righteousness. It is not only a warning against direct “bad words,” but also against seemingly neutral words, which might imply, presuppose or in a direct way encourage something “bad.” People are responsible for all kinds of utterances, also those that are not unconditionally good.

John Nolland discusses the meaning of what he calls “the surprising use of *argos*.”¹¹ With reference to Aristophanes (*Frogs*, 949–959), he argues that “possibly what is meant is a word of the kind that is produced by an idle or lazy person.” In his opinion, “it does not lend itself easily to describing the Pharisaic verdict on Jesus’ exorcism. ... it takes quite a jump to get from their words to the general principle offered in v. 36.” When the term ῥῆμα is followed up by the phrase ἀποδώσουσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον, he sees this as an idiom from accounting, “perhaps representing the responsibility of a steward to the owner of a business or estate (cf. Luke 16:2).”

Craig Keener underlines, with references to a series of biblical and extra-biblical Jewish sources, that Jesus’ words “represent conventional wisdom.”¹² Jewish sources admonished regularly to right use of the tongue,¹³ and Jewish teachers recognized that one was responsible for both words and acts on the day of judgment.¹⁴ Some Jewish groups even considered careless words as something inappropriate on holidays,¹⁵ while others considered empty words as a contrast to studying the Torah.¹⁶ On this background, Keener claims: “Jesus here indicates that even such careless words spoken without thought will testify concerning one’s character on the judgment day.”

¹⁰ D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC, 33a; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 350.

¹¹ J Nolland: *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), 507.

¹² Keener, *Matthew*, 366–367.

¹³ See Sir 4:29; 20:18; *Syr. Men.* 301–303; Ps.-Phoc. 20; *m. ’Abot* 1:15,17; 3:13; *’Abot R. Nat.* 1, 26A; Philo, *Conf.* 90a.

¹⁴ See *I En.* 10:9, MSS; *b. Sanh.* 90a.

¹⁵ See CD 10:18, cf. Isa 58:18.

¹⁶ Keener refers to *’Abot R. Nat.* 31, 66B; *b. Ber.* 28b; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 91:10 and *Qoh. Rab.* 1:8.

Ulrich Luz tries to get behind the actual words of the Greek text to a broader cultural context.¹⁷ He points out that the saying is spoken to the Pharisees, but that v. 36 is uttered as a generally valid saying. He distinguishes between the terms *ῥῆμα* and *λόγος*,¹⁸ pointing out that *ῥῆμα* (spoken word) is used, not *λόγος* (written word). In his opinion it is only complicating to seek for a Semitic origin for this saying. He argues that "the meaning of the Greek text is extremely precise." Luz sees a tension between Matt 12:36 and Matt 7:15–20, where the tree shall be recognized by its fruit, i.e. the deeds, whereas in 12:36 a man shall be recognized by his words; spoken words should be followed by acts, otherwise they are worthless (cf. Jas 2:20). Against this background he argues that "only superficially is our saying [12:36] the kind of general warning against talkativeness that is also found in wisdom and Hellenistic literature." In Matthew the saying has a more specific meaning, he emphasizes; it refers to the Day of Judgment, when the question will be asked whether spoken words have produced love.

Günther Schwarz goes the opposite way of Luz, and translates the words of Jesus back to Aramaic.¹⁹ As for Matt 12:36, his attention is on *ῥῆμα ἀργόν*. He joins with Joachim Jeremias,²⁰ who has argued that a translation back to Aramaic or Syriac indicates that the adjective *ἀργός* builds on Aramaic *בטיל*, which Schwarz finds confirmed in Exod 5:9 and 32:25. Exodus 32:25 says that "Moses saw that the people were running wild (*פָּרַעַ*) (for Aaron had let them run wild [*פָּרַעַה*]), to the derision of their enemies)." In Targum Onkelos this is rendered with *בטיל*, which is equivalent to Hebrew *פָּרַע*. Something similar is the case in Exod 5:9, which refers to "deceptive words" (*דברי־שקר*). Here *שקר* is rendered in Targum Onkelos with *בטיל*. In these two cases Schwarz translates with *demoralisiert* and *demoralisierende*, in accordance with Onkelos. On this basis he translates Matt 12:36 first back into Aramaic²¹ and then into German:

¹⁷ U. Luz, *Matthew 8–20* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 211.

¹⁸ Cf. Dewailly, "La parole," 206.

¹⁹ G. Schwarz, *Und Jesus sprach: Untersuchungen zur aramäischen Urgestalt der Worte Jesu* (BWANT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985), 270–273.

²⁰ J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, vol. 1 (Gütersloh: Verlag Mohn, 1971), 212, n. 65.

²¹ In the Aramaic version he finds the rhythm of lamentations.

Amen, ich sage euch:

Jedes demoralisierende Wort, das die Menschen reden –
sie müssen Rechenschaft darüber ablegen am Tage des Gerichtes.

Schwarz argues that the introductory phrase, *Amen, ich sage euch*, documents that Jesus talked these words to his disciples. His message is a sharpening of their responsibility for any demoralizing speech, “etwa dafür also, wenn einer den anderen beschämte, beleidigte, entmutigte, erniedrigte, verleumdete oder irreführte,” Schwarz emphasizes at the end.

There is direct opposition between Luz and Schwarz, even though they do not polemicize against each other. Whereas Luz holds that we should not search for a Semitic origin to Jesus’ saying, that is actually what Schwarz does. Whereas Luz argues generally, Schwarz goes directly to Matt 12:36, with documentation from Targum Onkelos. We cannot escape the impression that Schwarz probably is on the track of something important, even if he has not pointed out any root for it in the Decalogue. Other scholars referred to above may have seen important aspects of the text, but Schwarz seems to come closer to a possible solution to the question: What did Jesus actually say? Answer: Jesus referred to demoralizing speech.

None of the scholars referred to above have found, or even indicated, any trace leading back to the Decalogue and the second commandment – except for Adam Clarke. The Decalogue is not at all mentioned by any of them in their comments on Matt 12:36, nor is Matt 12:36 mentioned in any commentary on the Decalogue. None of them comment on Adam Clarke’s claim that there is such a relation between Matt 12:36 and the Decalogue. On the other hand, none of them has said anything that excludes the possibility that Matt 12:36 could in some way relate or allude to the Decalogue or to the second commandment. This opens for further exegetical investigation of the question.

Exegesis

The Syriac *Peshitta* translates $\rho\eta\mu\alpha\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\gamma\acute{o}\nu$ in Matt 12:36 with *milla battala*, “careless words,” which does not mirror the second commandment directly in its terminology.²² The $\sqrt{\text{בטל}}$, which is the basis for Peshitta’s *battala* and similar usage in rabbinic sources referred to by Strack and

²² This is close to *Ivrit*, which in Matth 12:36 has the phrase *מלה בטלה*. See ברית חדש, United Bible Societies, 1976.

cause ἀργός does not occur in the LXX, except for 1 Kings 6:7, where it refers to stone used to building the temple, and three cases from the Apocrypha.³⁰

If we one-sidedly lay as basis the Greek vocabulary in Matt 12:36 and the second commandment of the LXX, any interconnection with the second commandment is not directly self-evident; Matthew's ἀργόν, translated by NRSV as "careless," is different from the LXX's ματαίω, "in vain," in the second commandment.

Nevertheless, there is reason for investigating more closely the semantic relation between these two Greek terms and their background in Semitic terminology, to see whether they have a semantic common denominator or any other relation.

First, some words about the occurrences. The term ἀργός in Matt 12:36 also occurs in Matt 20:3, 6, where it is used of workers "standing idle (ἀργός) in the market-place." Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used only in the epistles, where it refers to inactivity or some kind of loss.³¹

The term μάταιος does not occur in the gospels, but in Acts 14:15 and the epistles, as do the derivatives ματαιότης (Rom 8:20; Eph 4:17 and 2 Pet 2:18) and ἐματαιώθησαν (Rom 1:21).³²

A survey of ἀργός and μάταιος reveals that they are particularly frequent in the epistles, and they do not demonstrate significant semantic

with κισ (p. 146a), but that is wrong. Muraoka has confused ἀργός with ἀρχών in Hatch-Redpath (p. 168c).

³⁰ It does occur also in Wis 14:5; 15:15 and Sir 37:11, which is not paralleled in the Hebrew Bible.

³¹ In 1 Tim 5:13 ἀργός is used of women "gadding about from house to house." In Tit 1:12 the term characterizes the Cretans. Jas 2:20 says that faith without works is barren. In 2 Pet 1:8 ἀργός is used together with ἄκαρπος about those who are "ineffective and unfruitful."

³² In Acts 14:15 μάταιος is used of idols, in opposition to the living God. 1 Corinthians 3:20 says that "the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile (μάταιοι). 1 Corinthians 15:17 says that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile (ματαιά)." Titus 3:9 reels off a series of controversial questions, and claims that they are "unprofitable and worthless" (ἀνωφελεῖς καὶ μάταιοι). James 1:26 claims that if anybody worships God "and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless (μάταιος). 1 Peter 1:18 talks about being "ransomed from the futile ways inherited (ἐκ τῆς ματαιίας) from your ancestors." The noun ματαιότης is used to describe the character of creation in Rom 8:20, that it was "subjected to futility." In Eph 4:17 this term is used to say that the Gentiles' minds are futile, "in the futility of their minds." In 2 Pet 2:18 the text speaks about "bombastic nonsense" (ματαιότητος). In Rom 1:21 we find the only occurrence in the New Testament of ματαιοῦσθαι, people "became futile in their thinking." In addition are ματαιίως, ματαιότης, μάταιος and ματαιώ used a number of times in the LXX, while ἀργός occurs in 1 Kings 6:7 LXX (as commented on above); Sir 37:11; Wis 14:5 and 15:15.

differences. These two terms are semantically closely related, as they are used in the New Testament, even though *μάταιος* possibly is a stronger term than *ἀργός*.³³ We should therefore not write off the possibility of some relation between Matt 12:36 and Exod 20:7 // Deut 5:11, even though the Greek texts use *ἀργός* and *μάταιος* respectively.

As for Hebrew terminology, *μάταιος* is particularly used to translate $\sqrt{\text{הבל}}$, as demonstrated above.³⁴ This is interesting, because $\sqrt{\text{הבל}}$ is several times used in close proximity and direct parallel to $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$. A coupling of $\sqrt{\text{הבל}}$ and $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$ is found in Ps 31:7 and Jonah 2:9, in the construct connection $\sqrt{\text{הבל-שוא}}$, which is translated by NRSV as "worthless idols" and "vain idols" respectively.³⁵ Also in Zech 10:2 these two terms are closely related: "... the dreamers tell false dreams ($\sqrt{\text{חלמות השוא}}$), and give empty consolation ($\sqrt{\text{הבל ינחמון}}$)." In Ps 31:7 and Jonah 2:9 the two concepts are used almost synonymously in construct connections. In Zech 10:2 there is more contextual distance, but they are scarcely less synonymous.

Then we have the following semantic coupling: The Greek term *ἀργός* in Matt 12:36 is semantically closely related to *μάταιος* in New Testament Greek. Further, *μάταιος*, *ματαιότης* and *ματαιώς* are frequently used to translate Hebrew $\sqrt{\text{הבל}}$ and $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$, which are three times used synonymously; $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$ is the key term in the second commandment. Put in a formula: *ἀργός* equals *μάταιος*, whereas *μάταιος* equals $\sqrt{\text{הבל}}$ and $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$; via *μάταιος* and $\sqrt{\text{הבל}}$ it seems possible to establish an interconnection, or a "bridge," between *ἀργός* in Matt 12:36 and $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$ in the second commandment.

The possible interconnection between Matt 12:36 and the second commandment can be underlined even stronger. As we have seen above, Targum Onkelos renders Hebrew $\sqrt{\text{שקר}}$ with Aramaic $\sqrt{\text{בתיל}}$, which demonstrates the semantically close connection between these two concepts. There are cases where $\sqrt{\text{שקר}}$ is closely connected to $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$. We have both concepts in the Decalogue (Exod 20:11 // Deut 5:20), where $\sqrt{\text{שקר}}$ is replaced by $\sqrt{\text{שוא}}$, demonstrating their synonymy). We have $\sqrt{\text{שקר}}$ in Lev

³³ In G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Abridged in one volume by G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 76–77. G. Delling defines the basic meaning of *ἀργός* as a) *indolent, useless, unemployed*, and b) *incapable of action* (p. 76), while O. Bauernfeind defines the basic meaning of *μάταιος* as *vain, deceptive, pointless, futile* (p. 571).

³⁴ See O. Bauernfeind in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 519–524, here 521, n. 4.

³⁵ The complete phrase is: The $\sqrt{\text{שמר}}$ (in participle, here used about worshipping gods) with $\sqrt{\text{הבל-שוא}}$, which could be translated as, e.g., "empty emptinesses." According to the context it refers to foreign gods.

placed by אשׁו, demonstrating their synonymy). We have שׁקֶר in Lev 19:12, which is theologically closely connected to Exod 20:7, 11 // Deut 5:11, 20. The two terms are also found in a common context in Isa 59:3–4 and Ezek 13:22–23. Dewailly argues that “[I]’équivalence d’ἀργός et de *btl* en Mt. 12, 36 est donc vraisemblable, elle n’est pas certaine.”³⁶

There is a similar case in the Book of Wisdom (1:11), even though the terminology itself is different from both Matt 12:36 and the second commandment: “Beware then of useless grumbling, and keep your tongue from slander; because no secret word is without result (ὅτι φθέγμα λαθραῖον κενὸν οὐ πορεύσεται), and a lying mouth destroys the soul (στόμα δὲ καταψευδόμενον ἀναιρεῖ ψυχὴν).” Both parallel lines marked out here, concern blameworthy speech (“secret word” and “lying mouth”), which is quite in line with Matt 12:36, while the characterization of this speech as *κενός*, is equivalent with אשׁו in the second commandment. Both lines concern gossip and lie, unreliable speech.

In other words, even though Matt 12:36 says nothing explicitly about abusing the name of God, we are nevertheless in a semantic field that, in spite of different terms in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and Greek, connects a series of biblical, apocryphal and rabbinic sayings semantically closely together, among them Matt 12:36 and the second commandment. While Matt 12:36 is general, referring to everyday speech, the second commandment is more specific, referring to how God is spoken about. The relation between the two can possibly be seen as derivative; from the second commandment there can be derived more general implications, for example, warnings about generally careless speech.

It is possible to see Matt 12:36 as the second part of an antithesis, like the antitheses in Matt 5:21–48. In the antitheses, Jesus begins with a citation from the law.³⁷ After citing the law he introduces his counter argument with ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, “but I say to you,” impressing on the law. Three of the antitheses are from the Decalogue (fifth, sixth and second commandment). Except for the second commandment, the antitheses concern relations to fellow people: Not killing, not breaking marriage, not being violent and loving enemies. But the antithesis to the second commandment also comes close to the eighth commandment: “You shall not

³⁶ Dewailly, “La parole,” 211.

³⁷ Matthew 5:21 is from Exod 20:13; 5:27 from Exod 20:14; 5:33 from Exod 20:7; 5:38 from Exod 21:14 and 5:43 from Lev 19:18.

bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exod 20:16 // Deut 5:20).³⁸ Matthew 12:36 can be adapted to the second commandment according to the same pattern: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God," "I tell you (λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν), on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter" This also concerns attitudes to fellow people, and fits nicely into the themes of the antitheses, and generally draws Matt 12:36 closer to the Decalogue.

The Decalogue is never far away in Matthew, as the evangelist pictures Jesus as another "Moses," talking the law to his people from the mountain (the Sermon on the Mount).

Contextual and Editorial Considerations

Because the term *ἄνω* occurs both in second and eighth commandment, there is reason to see a relation between Matt 12:36 and both commandments. But there are also some more subtle contextual, editorial and exegetical matters to consider, which draw Matt 12:36 closer to the second commandment than to the eighth commandment.

1) If we assume that the saying about unforgivable "blasphemy (βλασφημία) against the Spirit" (Matt 12:31) contains authentic words from Jesus, it adds to the idea that Jesus had the second commandment in mind in Matt 12:36. Whereas the second commandment talks about wrongful use of "the name of the LORD your God," Matt 12:31 talks about blasphemy "against the Holy Spirit." Speaking wrongfully about God and blaspheming the Holy Spirit are both in essence sins against God. The "careless word"-saying is not explicitly theological, it has a more judicial character, but it is from the same context as the word about blaspheming the Holy Spirit, which gives a theological flavour to the "careless word"-saying.

2) Matthew 12:31 concerns how people talk about God, represented by the Holy Spirit and the Son of Man, while the "careless word"-saying in Matt 12:36 concerns how people talk in general towards fellow human beings. Focus is on speech toward God and human beings respectively. This alludes to the double commandment (Matt 22:36–40), where Jesus couples the command to love God (Deut 6:5) and to love the neighbour (Lev 19:18) as two aspects of the same commandment, with focus on God

³⁸ The terminology is different in Exod 20:16 (שקר עד) and Deut 5:20 (שווא עד).

and human beings. This underpins further the possibility that Jesus with his “careless word”-saying also had the relation to God in mind. The two commandments are so closely interrelated that one part should not be isolated from the other; they are two aspects of the same commandment. And we have seen how in particular Jesus’ impression on swearing (second antithesis) associates to both the second and the eighth commandment. The attitude to human beings and the attitude to God both demonstrate a basic attitude, where one cannot be separated from the other.

Therefore, there is reason to relate the “careless word”-saying in Matt 12:36 to both God and human beings, and see it as a possible derivative of the second commandment.

If there is a relation between Matt 12:36 and the second commandment of the Decalogue, how should that relation be explained? So far my terminology has – intentionally – not been quite consistent on that matter. Is Matt 12:36 really rooted in the second commandment? Or should we just talk about some vague “connection”? Should we call it a “semantic coupling,” talk about an “intertextual frame,” or a direct derivation of Matt 12:36 from the second commandment? Matthew 12:36 is no citation from the second commandment. I have argued that the two verses belong to a common semantic field; we find different terminology and phraseology, but closely related meaning, describing how people should relate or not relate to God and human beings. I have also argued that the two verses belong to a common theological framework, where Matt 12:36 – even with a secular content – can be seen as related to Exod 20:7 // Deut 5:11; how one relates to God has consequences for how one relates to fellow people, compare the double commandment. In other words, an intertextual relation seems to be traceable.

Intertextuality can be defined in different ways, as 1) intended by an author, 2) editorial, that an editor gives attention to a literary interrelation, or 3), reader oriented, that a reader sees something in a text, which perhaps neither the author nor the editor have seen, or had in mind. Some will also say that any text in Scripture can illuminate any other text in Scripture, because Scripture is a kind of compendium or *thesaurus* of theology, terms, phraseology and associations, etc.³⁹ The first alternative seems out

³⁹ Cf. H. Hagelia, “The Holy Road as a Bridge: The Role of Chapter 35 in the Book of Isaiah, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 20:1 (2006): 38–57. See especially pp. 39–40, which build on Kirsten Nielsen, John Barton and Michael Fishbane, in *Vetus Testamentum, Congress Volume, Oslo 1998* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

of question here, perhaps also the second. Did the editor have an intertextual relation between Matt 12:36 and the second commandment in mind? Perhaps not openly. But the third alternative is generally valid and seems applicable here. Taken in this broad way, with the arguments set forth above, I will argue that it is possible to see an intertextual relation between Matt 12:36 and the second commandment, and possibly see Matt 12:36 as a derivative of the second commandment. This derivative or intertextual relation is subtle, but not more disguised than it can be observed by an observant reader.

In general, we should have in mind that New Testament citations from the Hebrew Bible are very frequently not literal. New Testament writers did not always have a scroll at hand for an exact citation. Scrolls were expensive and for the few, the temple and the synagogue. Therefore citations are regularly from memory and frequently not exact according to the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint. If they had a scroll, it was in Hebrew, and Matthew is written in Greek. And if they had a scroll, which textual version was it? After the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, we understand better than ever before that we should not too easily talk about *the* biblical text of the Old Testament. There was more than one text version in circulation. No wonder that citations from the Hebrew Bible often seem so arbitrary to a modern reader.

This implies that we should not be too concerned about different terminology in Matt 12:36 and the second commandment, if Jesus really had the second commandment in mind when talking about this "careless word."

Conclusion

Summing up, there are four different indications that open for reading an intertextual relation between Matt 12:36 and the second commandment. The first indication builds on the semantic coupling between the terms used in Matt 12:36 and the second commandment. The second indication builds on the possible relation between Matt 12:36 and the antitheses of Matthew 5 and the Decalogue. The third indication builds on the one hand on the coupling between "careless word" in general and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in particular, both sayings addressed to the Pharisees (Matt 12:31.36), and on the other hand on the "wrongful use" of God's name in the second commandment. The fourth indication builds on the analogy with the double commandment of love, the interconnection

between love of God and love of human beings, and how to talk to God and human beings. Loving God implies loving human beings, and *vice versa*.

Taken together, these four indications have significant argumentative power. They have individual value, but taken together they have something like a “stereo effect,” which strengthens the theory about an intertextual or derivative interrelation between the second commandment and Matt 12:36.

That Matt 12:36 derives from the second commandment is scarcely possible to prove, but that Matt 12:36 should be read with the second commandment in mind seems plausible. Adam Clarke is probably right, that Matt 12:36 should be read on the background of the Decalogue, the eighth commandment, but in particular the second commandment.