

Letter 52: To Nepotian, On the Life of Clergy and Monks

Jerome

Early Church (pre-Nicene) · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Letter

STROMATA 192

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INTRODUCTION

Jerome wrote this letter around 394 to Nepotian, a young priest and nephew of his old friend Heliodorus, who had asked for a rule of life for the clergy. What follows is less a private letter than a manual: on money, dress, fasting, visiting the sick, avoiding gossip, keeping company with women, and reading scripture. Jerome writes as an old man now, correcting the fire of his younger polemics with something closer to practical wisdom, though his tongue stays sharp throughout. The letter caused controversy in its own time for how bluntly it named clerical vices. Read it as a working document - advice meant to be followed, not admired from a distance.

Nepotian, the nephew of Heliodorus (for whom see Letter 14), had, like his uncle, abandoned the military for the clerical calling, and was now a presbyter at Altinum, where Heliodorus was bishop. The letter is a systematic treatise on the duties of the clergy and on the rule of life which they ought to adopt. It had a great vogue, and called forth much indignation against Jerome. Its date is 394 A.D.

- Again and again you ask me, my dear Nepotian, in your letters from over the sea, to draw for you a few rules of life, showing how one who has renounced the service of the world to become a monk or a clergyman may keep the straight path of Christ, and not be drawn aside into the haunts of vice. As a young man, or rather as a boy, and while I was curbing by the hard life of the desert the first onslaughts of youthful passion, I sent a letter of remonstrance to your reverend uncle, Heliodorus, which, by the tears and complainings with which it was filled, showed him the feelings of the friend whom he had deserted. In it I acted the part suited to my age, and as I was still aglow with the methods and maxims of the rhetoricians, I decked it out a good deal with the flourishes of the schools. Now, however, my head is gray, my brow is furrowed, a dewlap like that of an ox hangs from my chin, and, as Virgil says,

The chilly blood stands still around my heart.

Elsewhere he sings:

Old age bears all, even the mind, away. And a little further on: So many of my songs are gone from me, And even my very voice has left me now.

- But that I may not seem to quote only profane literature, listen to the mystical teaching of the sacred writings. Once David had been a man of war, but at seventy age had chilled him so that nothing would make him warm. A girl is accordingly sought from the coasts of Israel— Abishag the Shunamite — to sleep with the king and warm his aged frame. 1 Kings 1:1-4 Does it not seem to you — if you keep to the letter that kills 2 Corinthians 3:6 — like some farcical story or some broad jest from an Atellan play? A chilly old man is wrapped up in blankets, and only grows warm in a girl's embrace. Bathsheba was still living, Abigail was still left, and the remainder of those wives and concubines whose names the Scripture mentions. Yet they are all rejected as cold, and only in the one young girl's embrace does the old man become warm. Abraham was far older than David; still, so long as Sarah lived he sought no other wife. Isaac counted twice the years of David, yet never felt cold with Rebekah, old though she was. I say nothing of the antediluvians, who, although after nine hundred years their limbs must have been not old merely, but decayed with age, had no recourse to girls' embraces. Moses, the leader of the Israelites, counted one hundred and twenty years, yet sought no change from Zipporah.
- Who, then, is this Shunamite, this wife and maid, so glowing as to warm the cold, yet so holy as not to arouse passion in him whom she warmed? 1 Kings 1:4 Let Solomon, wisest of men, tell us of his father's favorite; let the man of peace recount to us the embraces of the man of war. 1 Chronicles 28:3 Get wisdom, he writes, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not and she shall preserve you: love her and she shall keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all your getting get understanding. Exalt her and she shall promote you. She shall bring you to honor when you embrace her. She shall give to your head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to you. Proverbs 4:5-9

Almost all bodily excellences alter with age, and while wisdom alone increases all things else decay. Fasts and vigils and almsdeeds become harder. So also do sleeping on the ground, moving from place to place, hospitality to travellers, pleading for the poor, earnestness and steadfastness in prayer, the visitation of the sick, manual labor to supply money for almsgiving. All acts, in short, of which the body is the medium decrease with its decay.

Now, there are young men still full of life and vigor who, by toil and burning zeal, as well as by holiness of life and constant prayer to the Lord Jesus, have obtained knowledge. I do not speak of these, or say that in them the love of wisdom is cold, for this withers in many of the old by reason of age. What I mean is that youth, as such, has to cope with the assaults of passion, and amid the allurements of vice and the tinglings of the flesh is stifled like a fire among green boughs, and cannot develop its proper brightness. But when men have employed their youth in commendable pursuits and have meditated on the law of the Lord day and night, they learn with the lapse of time, fresh experience and wisdom come as the years go by, and so from the pursuits of the past their old age reaps a harvest of delight. Hence that wise man of Greece, Themistocles, perceiving, after the expiration of one hundred and seven years, that he was on the verge of the grave, is reported to have said that he regretted extremely having to leave

life just when he was beginning to grow wise. Plato died in his eighty-first year, his pen still in his hand. Isocrates completed ninety years and nine in the midst of literary and scholastic work. I say nothing of other philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Democritus, Xenocrates, Zeno, and Cleanthes, who in extreme old age displayed the vigor of youth in the pursuit of wisdom. I pass on to the poets, Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, Stesichorus, who all lived to a great age, yet at the approach of death sang each of them a swan song sweeter than their wont. Sophocles, when charged by his sons with dotage on account of his advanced years and his neglect of his property, read out to his judges his recently composed play of *Œdipus*, and made so great a display of wisdom — in spite of the inroads of time — that he changed the decorous silence of the law court into the applause of the theatre. And no wonder, when Cato the censor, that most eloquent of Romans, in his old age neither blushed at the thought of learning Greek nor despaired of succeeding. Homer, for his part, relates that from the tongue of Nestor, even when quite aged and helpless, there flowed speech sweeter than honey.

Even the very name Abishag in its mystic meaning points to the greater wisdom of old men. For the translation of it is, My father is over and above, or my father's roaring. The term over and above is obscure, but in this passage is indicative of excellence, and implies that the old have a larger stock of wisdom, and that it even overflows by reason of its abundance. In another passage over and above forms an antithesis to necessary. Moreover, Abishag, that is, roaring, is properly used of the sound which the waves make, and of the murmur which we hear coming from the sea. From which it is plain that the thunder of the divine voice dwells in old men's ears with a volume of sound beyond the voices of men. Again, in our tongue Shunamite means scarlet, a hint that the love of wisdom becomes warm and glowing through religious study. For though the color may point to the mystery of the Lord's blood, it also sets forth the warm glow of wisdom. Hence it is a scarlet thread that in Genesis the midwife binds upon the hand of Pharez — Pharez the divider, so called because he divided the partition which had before separated two peoples. Genesis 38:28-29 So, too, with a mystic reference to the shedding of blood, it was a scarlet cord which the harlot Rahab (a type of the church) hung in her window to preserve her house in the destruction of Jericho. Joshua 2:18 Hence, in another place Scripture says of holy men: These are they which came from the warmth of the house of the father of Rechab. And in the gospel the Lord says: I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and fain am I to see it kindled. Luke 12:49 This was the fire which, when it was kindled in the disciples' hearts, constrained them to say: Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures? Luke 24:32

- To what end, you ask, these recondite references? To show that you need not expect from me boyish declamation, flowery sentiments, a meretricious style, and at the close of every paragraph the terse and pointed aphorisms which call forth approving shouts from those who hear them. Let Wisdom alone embrace me; let her nestle in my bosom, my Abishag who grows not old. Undeiled truly is she, and a virgin forever for although she daily conceives and unceasingly brings to the birth, like Mary she remains undeflowered. When the apostle says be fervent in spirit, Romans 12:11 he means be true to wisdom. And when our Lord in the gospel declares that in the end of the world — when the shepherd shall grow foolish, according to the prophecy of Zechariah Zechariah 11:15 — the love of many shall wax cold, Matthew 24:12 He means that wisdom shall

decay. Hear, therefore — to quote the sainted Cyprian — words forcible rather than elegant. Hear one who, though he is your brother in orders, is in years your father; who can conduct you from the cradle of faith to spiritual manhood; and who, while he builds up stage by stage the rules of holy living, can instruct others in instructing you. I know, of course, that from your reverend uncle, Heliodorus, now a bishop of Christ, you have learned and are daily learning all that is holy; and that in him you have before you a rule of life and a pattern of virtue. Take, then, my suggestions for what they are worth, and compare my precepts with his. He will teach you the perfection of a monk, and I shall show you the whole duty of a clergyman.

- A clergyman, then, as he serves Christ's church, must first understand what his name means; and then, when he realizes this, must endeavor to be that which he is called. For since the Greek word *κλήρ*, or inheritance, the clergy are so called either because they are the lot of the Lord, or else because the Lord Himself is their lot and portion. Now, he who in his own person is the Lord's portion, or has the Lord for his portion, must so bear himself as to possess the Lord and to be possessed by Him. He who possesses the Lord, and who says with the prophet, The Lord is my portion, can hold to nothing beside the Lord. For if he hold to something beside the Lord, the Lord will not be his portion. Suppose, for instance, that he holds to gold or silver, or possessions or inlaid furniture; with such portions as these the Lord will not deign to be his portion. I, if I am the portion of the Lord, and the line of His heritage, receive no portion among the remaining tribes; but, like the Priest and the Levite, I live on the tithe, Numbers 18:24 and serving the altar, am supported by its offerings. 1 Corinthians 9:13 Having food and raiment, I shall be content with these, 1 Timothy 6:8 and as a disciple of the Cross shall share its poverty. I beseech you, therefore, and again and yet again admonish you;

do not look to your military experience for a standard of clerical obligation. Under Christ's banner seek for no worldly gain, lest having more than when you first became a clergyman, you hear men say, to your shame, Their portion shall not profit them. Welcome poor men and strangers to your homely board, that with them Christ may be your . A clergyman who engages in business, and who rises from poverty to wealth, and from obscurity to a high position, avoid as you would the plague. For evil communications corrupt good manners. 1 Corinthians 15:33 You despise gold; he loves it. You spurn wealth; he eagerly pursues it. You love silence, meekness, privacy; he takes delight in talking and effrontery, in squares, and streets, and apothecaries' shops. What unity of feeling can there be where there is so wide a divergency of manners?

A woman's foot should seldom, if ever, cross the threshold of your home. To all who are Christ's virgins show the same regard or the same disregard. Do not linger under the same roof with them, and do not rely on your past continence. You cannot be holier than David or wiser than Solomon. Always bear in mind that it was a woman who expelled the tiller of paradise from his heritage. In case you are sick one of the brethren may attend you; your sister also or your mother or some woman whose faith is approved with all. But if you have no persons so connected with you or so marked out by chaste behaviour, the Church maintains many elderly women who by their ministrations may oblige you and benefit themselves so that even your sickness may bear fruit in the shape of almsdeeds. I know of cases where the recovery of the body has but preluded the sickness of the soul. There is danger for you in the service of one for whose face you constantly watch. If in the course of your clerical duty you have to visit a widow or a virgin, never enter the house alone. Let your companions be persons association with whom will not disgrace you. If you take a reader with you or an acolyte or a psalm-singer, let their character not their garb be their adornment; let them use no tongs to curl their hair; rather let their mien be an index of their chastity. You must not sit alone with a woman or see one without witnesses. If she has anything confidential to disclose, she is sure to have some nurse or housekeeper, some virgin, some widow, some married woman. She cannot be so friendless as to have none save you to whom she can venture to confide her secret. Beware of all that gives occasion for suspicion; and, to avoid scandal, shun every act that may give color to it. Frequent gifts of handkerchiefs and garters, of face-cloths and dishes first tasted by the giver — to say nothing of notes full of fond expressions — of such things as these a holy love knows nothing. Such endearing and alluring expressions as 'my honey' and 'my darling,' 'you who are all my charm and my delight' the ridiculous courtesies of lovers and their foolish doings, we blush for on the stage and abhor in men of the world. How much more do we loathe them in monks and clergymen who adorn the priesthood by their vows while their vows are adorned by the priesthood. I speak thus not because I dread such evils for you or for men of saintly life, but because in all ranks and callings and among both men and women there are found both good and bad and in condemning the bad I commend the good.

- Shameful to say, idol-priests, play-actors, jockeys, and prostitutes can inherit property: clergymen and monks alone lie under a legal disability, a disability enacted not by persecutors but by Christian emperors. I do not complain of the law, but I grieve that we have deserved a statute so harsh. Cauterizing is a good thing, no doubt; but how is it that I have a wound which makes me need it? The law is strict and far-seeing, yet even so rapacity goes on unchecked. By a fiction

of trusteeship we set the statute at defiance; and, as if imperial decrees outweigh the mandates of Christ, we fear the laws and despise the Gospels. If heir there must be, the mother has first claim upon her children, the Church upon her flock — the members of which she has borne and reared and nourished. Why do we thrust ourselves in between mother and children?

It is the glory of a bishop to make provision for the wants of the poor; but it is the shame of all priests to amass private fortunes. I who was born (suppose) in a poor man's house, in a country cottage, and who could scarcely get of common millet and household bread enough to fill an empty stomach, am now come to disdain the finest wheat flour and honey. I know the several kinds of fish by name. I can tell unerringly on what coast a mussel has been picked. I can distinguish by the flavour the province from which a bird comes. Dainty dishes delight me because their ingredients are scarce and I end by finding pleasure in their ruinous cost.

I hear also of servile attention shown by some towards old men and women when these are childless. They fetch the basin, beset the bed and perform with their own hands the most revolting offices. They anxiously await the advent of the doctor and with trembling lips they ask whether the patient is better. If for a little while the old fellow shows signs of returning vigour, they are in agonies. They pretend to be delighted, but their covetous hearts undergo secret torture. For they are afraid that their labours may go for nothing and compare an old man with a clinging to life to the patriarch Methuselah. How great a reward might they have with God if their hearts were not set on a temporal prize! With what great exertions do they pursue an empty heritage! Less labour might have purchased for them the pearl of Christ.

- Read the divine scriptures constantly; never, indeed, let the sacred volume be out of your hand. Learn what you have to teach. Hold fast the faithful word as you have been taught that you may be able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers. Continue in the things that you have learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope and faith that are in you. 1 Peter 3:15 Do not let your deeds belie your words; lest when you speak in church someone may mentally reply Why do you not practise what you profess? Here is a lover of dainties turned censor! His stomach is full and he reads us a homily on fasting. As well might a robber accuse others of covetousness. In a priest of Christ mouth, mind, and hand should be at one.

Be obedient to your bishop and welcome him as the parent of your soul. Sons love their fathers and slaves fear their masters. If I be a father, He says, where is mine honour? And if I am a master where is my fear? Malachi 1:6 In your case the bishop combines in himself many titles to your respect. He is at once a monk, a prelate, and an uncle who has before now instructed you in all holy things. This also I say that the bishops should know themselves to be priests not lords. Let them render to the clergy the honour which is their due that the clergy may offer to them the respect which belongs to bishops. There is a witty saying of the orator Domitius which is here to the point: Why am I to recognize you as leader of the Senate when you will not recognize my rights as a private member? We should realize that a bishop and his presbyters are like Aaron and his sons. As there is but one Lord and one Temple; so also should there be but one ministry. Let us ever bear in mind the charge which the apostle Peter gives to priests: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint

but willingly as God would have you; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage but being ensamples to the flock, and that gladly; that when the chief-shepherd shall appear ye may receive a crown of glory that fades not away. 1 Peter 5:4 It is a bad custom which prevails in certain churches for presbyters to be silent when bishops are present on the ground that they would be jealous or impatient hearers. If anything, writes the apostle Paul, be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace. For you may all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be comforted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace. 1 Corinthians 14:30-33 A wise son makes a glad father; Proverbs 10:1 and a bishop should rejoice in the discrimination which has led him to choose such for the priests of Christ.

- When teaching in church seek to call forth not plaudits but groans. Let the tears of your hearers be your glory. A presbyter's words ought to be seasoned by his reading of scripture. Be not a declaimer or a ranter, one who gabbles without rhyme or reason; but show yourself skilled in the deep things and versed in the mysteries of God. To mouth your words and by your quickness of utterance astonish the unlettered crowd is a mark of ignorance. Assurance often explains that of which it knows nothing; and when it has convinced others imposes on itself. My teacher, Gregory of Nazianzus, when I once asked him to explain Luke's phrase *ἡ πρώτη αἰὶν πρώτη* 'the first Sabbath', playfully evaded my request saying: I will tell you about it in church, and there, when all the people applaud me, you will be forced against your will to know what you do not know at all. For, if you alone remain silent, every one will put you down for a fool. There is nothing so easy as by sheer volubility to deceive a common crowd or an uneducated congregation: such most admire what they fail to understand. Hear Marcus Tullius, the subject of that noble eulogy: You would have been the first of orators but for Demosthenes: he would have been the only one but for you. Hear what in his speech for Quintus Gallius he has to say about unskilled speakers and popular applause and then you will not be the sport of such illusions. What I am telling you, said he, is a recent experience of my own. One who has the name of a poet and a man of culture has written a book entitled *Conversations of Poets and Philosophers*. In this he represents Euripides as conversing with Menander and Socrates with Epicurus—men whose lives we know to be separated not by years but by centuries. Nevertheless he calls forth limitless applause and endless acclamations. For the theatre contains many who belong to the same school as he: like him they have never learned letters.
- In dress avoid sombre colors as much as bright ones. Showiness and slovenliness are alike to be shunned; for the one savours of vanity and the other of pride. To go about without a linen scarf on is nothing: what is praiseworthy is to be without money to buy one. It is disgraceful and absurd to boast of having neither napkin nor handkerchief and yet to carry a well-filled purse.

Some bestow a trifle on the poor to receive a larger sum themselves and under the cloak of almsgiving do but seek for riches. Such are almshunters rather than almsgivers. Their methods are those by which birds, beasts, and fishes are taken. A morsel of bait is put on the hook — to land a married lady's purse! The church is committed to the bishop; let him take heed whom he appoints to be his almoner. It is better for me to have no money to give away than shamelessly to beg what I mean to hoard. It is arrogance too to wish to seem more liberal than he who is Christ's bishop. All things are not open to us all. In the church one is the eye, another is the tongue, another the hand, another the foot, others ears, belly, and so on. Read Paul's epistle to the Corinthians and learn how the one body is made up of different members. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 The rude and simple brother must not suppose himself a saint just because he knows nothing; and he who is educated and eloquent must not measure his saintliness merely by his fluency. Of two imperfect things holy rusticity is better than sinful eloquence.

- Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid. And let no one allege against me the wealth of the temple in Judæa, its table, its lamps, its censers, its dishes, its cups, its spoons, and the rest of its golden vessels. If these were approved by the Lord it was at a time when the priests had to offer victims and when the blood of sheep was the redemption of sins. They were figures typifying things still future and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world have come. 1 Corinthians 10:11 But now our Lord by His poverty has consecrated the poverty of His house. Let us, therefore, think of His cross and count riches to be but dirt. Why do we admire what Christ calls the mammon of unrighteousness? Luke 16:9 Why do we cherish and love what it is Peter's boast not to possess? Acts 3:6 Or if we insist on keeping to the letter and find the mention of gold and wealth so pleasing, let us keep to everything else as well as the gold. Let the bishops of Christ be bound to marry wives, who must be virgins. Leviticus 21:14 Let the best-intentioned priest be deprived of his office if he bear a scar and be disfigured. Leviticus 21:17-23 Let bodily leprosy be counted worse than spots upon the soul. Let us be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, Genesis 1:28 but let us slay no lamb and celebrate no mystic passover, for where there is no temple, Deuteronomy 16:5 the law forbids these acts. Let us pitch tents in the seventh month Leviticus 23:40-42 and noise abroad a solemn fast with the sound of a horn. Joel 2:15 But if we compare all these things as spiritual with things which are spiritual; 1 Corinthians 2:13 and if we allow with Paul that the Law is spiritual Romans 7:14 and call to mind David's words: open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law; and if on these grounds we interpret it as our Lord interprets it — He has explained the Sabbath in this way: Matthew 12:1-9 then, rejecting the superstitions of the Jews, we must also reject the gold; or, approving the gold, we must approve the Jews as well. For we must either accept them with the gold or condemn them with it.
- Avoid entertaining men of the world, especially those whose honours make them swell with pride. You are the priest of Christ — one poor and crucified who lived on the bread of strangers. It is a disgrace to you if the consul's lictors or soldiers keep watch before your door, and if the Judge of the province has a better dinner with you than in his own palace. If you plead as an excuse your wish to intercede for the unhappy and the oppressed, I reply that a worldly judge will defer more to a clergyman who is self-denying than to one who is rich; he will pay more regard to

your holiness than to your wealth. Or if he is a man who will not hear the clergy on behalf of the distressed except over the bowl, I will readily forego his aid and will appeal to Christ who can help more effectively and speedily than any judge. Truly it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

Let your breath never smell of wine lest the philosopher's words be said to you: instead of offering me a kiss you are giving me a taste of wine. Priests given to wine are both condemned by the apostle 1 Timothy 3:3 and forbidden by the old Law. Those who serve the altar, we are told, must drink neither wine nor shechar. Now every intoxicating drink is in Hebrew called shechar whether it is made of grain or of the juice of apples, whether you distil from the honeycomb a rude kind of mead or make a liquor by squeezing dates or strain a thick syrup from a decoction of grain. Whatever intoxicates and disturbs the balance of the mind avoid as you would wine. I do not say that we are to condemn what is a creature of God. The Lord Himself was called a wine-bibber and wine in moderation was allowed to Timothy because of his weak stomach. I only require that drinkers should observe that limit which their age, their health, or their constitution requires. But if without drinking wine at all I am aglow with youth and am inflamed by the heat of my blood and am of a strong and lusty habit of body, I will readily forego the cup in which I cannot but suspect poison. The Greeks have an excellent saying which will perhaps bear translation, fat bellies have no sentiments refined.

- Lay upon yourself only as much fasting as you can bear, and let your fasts be pure, chaste, simple, moderate, and not superstitious. What good is it to use no oil if you seek after the most troublesome and out-of-the-way kinds of food, dried figs, pepper, nuts, dates, fine flour, honey, pistachios? All the resources of gardening are strained to save us from eating household bread; and to pursue dainties we turn our backs on the kingdom of heaven. There are some, I am told, who reverse the laws of nature and the race; for they neither eat bread nor drink water but imbibe thin decoctions of crushed herbs and beet-juice — not from a cup but from a shell. Shame on us that we have no blushes for such follies and that we feel no disgust at such superstition! To crown all, in the midst of our dainties we seek a reputation for abstinence. The strictest fast is bread and water. But because it brings with it no glory and because we all of us live on bread and water, it is reckoned no fast at all but an ordinary and common matter.
- Do not angle for compliments, lest, while you win the popular applause, you do despite to God. If I yet pleased men, says the apostle, I should not be the servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10 He ceased to please men when he became Christ's servant. Christ's soldier marches on through good report and evil report, 2 Corinthians 6:8 the one on the right hand and the other on the left. No praise elates him, no reproaches crush him. He is not puffed up by riches, nor does he shrink into himself because of poverty. Joy and sorrow he alike despises. The sun does not burn him by day nor the moon by night. Do not pray at the corners of the streets, Matthew 6:5 lest the applause of men interrupt the straight course of your prayers. Do not broaden your fringes and for show wear phylacteries, Matthew 23:5 or, despite of conscience, wrap yourself in the self-seeking of the Pharisee. Would you know what mode of apparel the Lord requires? Have prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude. Let these be the four quarters of your horizon, let them be a four-horse team to bear you, Christ's charioteer, at full speed to your goal. No necklace can be more precious than

these; no gems can form a brighter galaxy. By them you are decorated, you are girt about, you are protected on every side. They are your defense as well as your glory; for every gem is turned into a shield.

- Beware also of a blabbing tongue and of itching ears. Neither detract from others nor listen to detractors. You sit, says the psalmist, and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things have you done and I kept silence; you thought wickedly that I was such an one as yourself, but I will reprove you and set them in order before your eyes. Keep your tongue from cavilling and watch over your words. Know that in judging others you are passing sentence on yourself and that you are yourself guilty of the faults which you blame in them. It is no excuse to say: if others tell me things I cannot be rude to them. No one cares to speak to an unwilling listener. An arrow never lodges in a stone: often it recoils upon the shooter of it. Let the detractor learn from your unwillingness to listen not to be so ready to detract. Solomon says:— meddle not with them that are given to detraction: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knows the destruction of them both? — of the detractor, that is, and of the person who lends an ear to his detraction.
- It is your duty to visit the sick, to know the homes and children of ladies who are married, and to guard the secrets of noblemen. Make it your object, therefore, to keep your tongue chaste as well as your eyes. Never discuss a woman's figure nor let one house know what is going on in another. Hippocrates, before he will teach his pupils, makes them take an oath and compels them to swear fealty to him. He binds them over to silence, and prescribes for them their language, their gait, their dress, their manners. How much more reason have we to whom the medicine of the soul has been committed to love the houses of all Christians as our own homes. Let them know us as comforters in sorrow rather than as guests in time of mirth. That clergyman soon becomes an object of contempt who being often asked out to dinner never refuses to go.
- Let us never seek for presents and rarely accept them when we are asked to do so. For it is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 Somehow or other the very man who begs leave to offer you a gift holds you the cheaper for your acceptance of it; while, if you refuse it, it is wonderful how much more he will come to respect you. The preacher of continence must not be a maker of marriages. Why does he who reads the apostle's words it remains that they that have wives be as though they had none 1 Corinthians 7:29 — why does he press a virgin to marry? Why does a priest, who must be a monogamist, 1 Timothy 3:2 urge a widow to marry again? How can the clergy be managers and stewards of other men's households, when they are bidden to disregard even their own interests? To wrest a thing from a friend is theft but to cheat the Church is sacrilege. When you have received money to be doled out to the poor, to be cautious or to hesitate while crowds are starving is to be worse than a robber; and to subtract a portion for yourself is to commit a crime of the deepest dye. I am tortured with hunger and are you to judge what will satisfy my cravings? Either divide immediately what you have received, or, if you are a timid almoner, send the donor to distribute his own gifts. Your purse ought not to remain full while I am in need. No one can look after what is mine better than I can. He is the best almoner who keeps nothing for himself.

- You have compelled me, my dear Nepotian, in spite of the castigation which my treatise on Virginité has had to endure — the one which I wrote for the saintly Eustochium at Rome: — you have compelled me after ten years have passed once more to open my mouth at Bethlehem and to expose myself to the stabs of every tongue. For I could only escape from criticism by writing nothing — a course made impossible by your request; and I knew when I took up my pen that the shafts of all gainsayers would be launched against me. I beg such to hold their peace and to desist from gainsaying: for I have written to them not as to opponents but as to friends. I have not inveighed against those who sin: I have but warned them to sin no more. My judgment of myself has been as strict as my judgment of them. When I have wished to remove the mote from my neighbour's eye, I have first cast out the beam in my own. Matthew 7:3-5 I have calumniated no one. Not a name has been hinted at. My words have not been aimed at individuals and my criticism of shortcomings has been quite general. If any one wishes to be angry with me he will have first to own that he himself suits my description.

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