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diseased mind are miserable, since they shall behold the face of God's enemy. If the divine image itself is stamped on a virtuous life, clearly the vicious life takes on the image and likeness of the devil. Indeed, if God is described under different aspects in various terms for the good—life, light, immortality, and so on—then the converse holds of his enemy, the originator of evil; he may be described as darkness, death, corruption, and whatever is like them.

Therefore, knowing by what means virtue and vice are formed, and since our free choice of the will enables us to choose either of these, let us flee from the image of the devil and put off that wicked mask. Instead, let us reassert the divine image, let us become pure in heart, that we may be blessed, the divine image being formed in us by pure conduct, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

IV.

Pelagius

LETTER TO DEMETRIAS

(1) If I were endowed with great intelligence and equal learning, I think I could easily discharge the responsibility of writing this letter. In fact, I cannot escape a great fear of the difficulty of this arduous task. The letter must be addressed to Demetrias, who is not only a virgin of Christ, rich and noble, but who despises her wealth and position in the earnestness of her faith. Whoever admires such singular virtue will find it as difficult to instruct as it is easy to praise. Who would be at a loss for words in which to sing her praises? She was born to the highest social station, reared in great wealth and luxury, ensnared by all the pleasures of this life as though she were bound by the strongest chains. Suddenly she broke free and by her soul's virtue set aside all these bodily goods at once. Like the sword of faith, her will clipped off the flower of the age she was just entering. She crucified her flesh with Christ; she dedicated a holy and living sacrifice to God; for love of virginity she rejected a posterity of the noblest blood. Such a speech would be easy and pleasant; the very richness of the subject would carry it along. We have been asked not to praise this virgin, however, but to instruct her; this task is far more difficult. We must describe the virtues she has yet to attain, not those she has already acquired. We must guide her future course, not praise her past life. The job is all the more difficult because otherwise perfect teaching is barely adequate for a person with such desire to learn and such
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eagerness for perfection. She remembers—as well she should—the worldly wealth and reputation she left behind, the pleasures she gave up, the attractions of this life she rejected. Consequently, she is not satisfied with the ordinary way, with a way of life that loses its value in being shared with many companions. She searches for something new and untried; she demands something singular and outstanding. She wants her way of life to be no less extraordinary than her conversion. Noble in the world, she wants to be noble before God. The precious things she gave up as possessions she now seeks in the way she lives. What flood of insight will ever satisfy such a thirst for perfection, the eagerness of so devout a mind? What skill in speaking, what outpouring of mere words could ever describe what this virgin is prepared to accomplish in deeds? We must beg indulgence as we present what gifts we can to adorn the dwelling place of the Lord. Yet we are not afraid that we will further expose ourselves to the attacks of ill will by daring to write to such a noble virgin. Her holy mother has asked us to write. Indeed, with a truly burning desire she sent overseas letters commanding us to do so. The care and diligence with which she originally planted this heavenly seed in her daughter are evident in her solicitude to have others water it. Free of ambition and protected from indiscretion, therefore, we will labor at this project. We are not discouraged, for we trust that our poor ability is aided by the mother’s faith and the virgin’s merit.

(2) When I have to discuss the principles of right conduct and the leading of a holy life, I usually begin by showing the strength and characteristics of human nature. By explaining what it can accomplish, I encourage the soul of my hearer to the different virtues. To call a person to something he considers impossible does him no good. Hope must serve as guide and companion if we are to set out on the way to virtue; otherwise, despair of success will kill every effort to acquire the impossible. The procedure I have followed in other exhortations should, I believe, be especially observed in this one. Where a more perfect form of life is to be established, the explanation of nature’s goodness should be correspondingly fuller. With a lower estimation of its capacity, a soul will be less diligent and inconsistent in pursuing virtue. Not realizing what is within, it will assume that it lacks the capacity. A power that is to be exercised must therefore be brought out into full attention, and the good of which nature is capable must be clearly explained. Once something has been shown possible, it ought to be accomplished. The first foundation to be laid for a pure and spiritual life, therefore, is that the virgin recognize her strengths. She will be able to exercise them well once she realizes she has them. Showing a person that he can actually achieve what he desires provides the most effective incentives for the soul. Even in warfare, the best way to influence and encourage a soldier is to remind him of his own power.

The first way to form a judgment of the goodness of human nature is from God, its creator. He made the whole world and all the extremely good things in it. How much more excellent, then, did he make the human beings, for whose sake he established everything else. The goodness of humanity was indicated even before it was created when God prepared to form it in his image and likeness. Then he subjected all the animals to human beings. He established the human beings as masters over beasts which were much more powerful in their size, strength, or armament. In this he clearly declared how much more wonderfully he had made humanity. God wanted human beings to be surprised by the subjection of these more powerful animals to themselves and thereby understand the excellence of their own nature. Still, he did not leave human beings naked and defenseless, did not expose them to evil like weaklings. Though he was made without external armament, the human person was given the better interior weapons of reason and judgment. Thus, through the understanding and the force of mind in which he excelled the other animals, he alone was to acknowledge the creator of all. He was to use the same faculty to dominate the beasts and to serve God. The Lord wanted him to accomplish
justice voluntarily rather than by coercion. He left him in the
hand of his own counsel, therefore, and placed before him
life and death, good and evil [Ecclus. 15:14-16]. Whichever
he chose would be given to him. Thus we read in Deut-
eronomy: “I have set life and death before your face, blessing
and a curse. Choose life that you may live” [Deut. 30:19].

(3) We must be careful here that you are not disturbed by
what tends to upset the ignorant crowd. You should not
think that humanity was not created truly good because it is
capable of evil and the impetuousity of nature is not bound by
necessity to unchangeable good. If you consider the matter
more carefully and force your mind to a deeper understand-
ing of it, you will realize that what seems to count against it
actually makes the human condition better and superior. The
glory of the reasonable soul is located precisely in its having to
face a parting of the ways, in its freedom to follow either
path. I contend that the dignity of our nature consists entirely
in this: this is the source of honor, of reward, of the praise
merited by the best people. If a person could not go over to
evil, he would not practice virtue in holding to the good. God
decided to give rational creatures the gift of good will and the
power of free choice. By making a person naturally capable of
good and evil, so that he could do both and would direct his
own will to either, God arranged that what an individual actu-
ally chose would be properly his own. The good could be
done voluntarily only by a creature which was also capable of
evil. Therefore the most excellent creator decided to make us
capable of both.

Actually, of course, he intended and commanded that we
should do what is good. His only purpose in giving the capac-
ity for evil was that we accomplish his will by our own will.
Our ability to do evil is, therefore, itself a good. I claim it is
good because it makes its counterpart, the capacity for doing
good, better. It removes the bonds of necessity and makes the
person free to decide, makes the will voluntary in its own
right. Thus we have the freedom to choose or oppose, to ac-
cept or reject. Every other creature has only the goodness

which comes from its nature and condition; the reasonable
being excels them all in having the goodness of its own will.

Still, many people consider the human condition and criti-
cize the Lord’s work by asserting with no less stupidity than
irreverence that humanity should have been made incapable
of doing evil. Thus the product says to his producer, “Why
did you make me like this?” [Rom. 9:20]. These wicked peo-
ple pretend that they do a good job of using what they were
given and complain that they were not created differently.
Instead of amending their lives, they want an improvement
of their nature. Yet the goodness of nature was so univers-
ally established that it sometimes manifests itself even among
the Gentiles who do not worship God. How many philosophers
have we read or heard about or even seen ourselves who are
chaste, patient, temperate, generous, restrained, and kind,
who reject the honors as well as the pleasures of this world,
who love justice as much as wisdom? Why are these virtues at-
tractive to people who are themselves separated from God?
Where did they get these good qualities if not from the good-
ness of nature? These values can be found either all together
in the same person or singly in different individuals. Since all
these people have the same nature their examples show that
not only what occurs in the whole group, but whatever occurs
in any individual, could actually all be found, each and all, in
every one. If, then, even apart from God, these people
demonstrate how God made them, we should recognize what
can be accomplished by Christians whose nature has been re-
stored to a better condition by Christ and who are assisted by
divine grace.

(4) Let us turn now to the secret depths of our souls and
each reflect carefully on ourselves. What do our own feelings
reveal to us? Let us attend to the testimony of a good con-
science and be instructed by the authority within us. Indeed,
we should learn its goodness from the mind itself rather than
from somewhere else. What do we fear, what makes us
ashamed whenever we sin? We give away our guilt by blush-
ing or paleness. Our own conscience torments us even when
our anxious mind escapes detection for some little fault. When we do good, in contrast, we are joyful, at ease, and untroubled. If the good deed is secret, we wish people knew about it. Our nature reveals itself in these reactions: it manifests its goodness in turning away from evil deeds; it indicates what is appropriate for it when it relies on good works alone. The torments of a guilty conscience rage even in an undiscovered assassin; the mind’s secret punishment tracks down the hidden criminal. The sinner cannot escape the penalty of his own guilt. Even if he is tortured, however, the innocent enjoys the security of a clear conscience. Although he fears the punishment itself, he is proud of his innocence.

Our souls possess what might be called a sort of natural integrity which presides in the depths of the soul and passes judgments of good and evil. As it approves upright and proper actions, so it condemns perverse works. According to the testimony of the conscience, by a kind of interior law, it distinguishes between the different deeds. It does not deceive us by contrived or clever rationalizations; rather, it uses the most faithful and incorruptible testimony of our own feelings to accuse or defend us. In writing to the Romans, the Apostle refers to this law and asserts that it is implanted in every person, written on the tablet of the heart. “The nations who do not have the law do what the law commands naturally. Although they do not possess this kind of law, they are a law unto themselves. They show that the book of the law is written on their hearts. Their conscience gives testimony, and their feelings either accuse or defend them” [Rom. 2:14–15]. Everyone who lived well and pleased God between the time of Adam and that of Moses actually made use of this law. I think it would be good for you to reflect on some of these holy people as examples. Once you realize how nature itself taught justice in place of the law, you will easily understand how good it is.

5. Abel was the first to follow this teaching. He was deserving in God’s eyes, so that the sacrifice he offered was pleasing to God. Its acceptance incited his brother to envy [Gen. 4:4–7]. In the gospel, the Lord himself called him a just man and spoke of his perfection [Matt. 23:35]. This term “justice” includes all the forms of virtue. Similarly, we read that the Lord was so pleased with the blessed Enoch that he spirited him off from this mortal world. He was removed from this world once he had been perfected in it [Gen. 5:24]. Noah is also described as just and perfect in his generation. His holiness is all the more outstanding because when the whole world had deserted justice he alone remained upright. Rather than looking to anyone else, he provided an example of holiness. Thus, as the world approached shipwreck, he alone deserved to be told, “Enter the ark with your whole family because in this generation I have seen that you are just in my sight” [Gen. 7:1]. To be just in God’s sight, a person must be pure in both body and heart. Melchizedek is called a priest of God [Gen. 14:18]. We can judge his merit by his foreshadowing the Lord’s sacrament, which was to follow much later: he represented the mystery of the body and blood of Christ by the sacrifice of bread and wine. In the type of his priesthood, he symbolized that of Christ, to whom the Father said, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek” [Ps. 110:4]. When he blessed the chief of the patriarchs, Abraham, who is father of the Jews through circumcision and of the Gentiles through faith, he clearly portrayed the figure of the one who blessed both Jew and Gentile through his faith. The blessed Noah’s virtue was also imitated by Lot: faced with the examples of so many sinners, he did not abandon justice. The example of the whole world did not overcome Noah; similarly, when his whole region was sinning, Lot maintained his integrity against the vices of the mob. As blessed Peter says, “He was upright in what he saw and heard” [2 Pet. 2:8]. Although he lived among the most wicked people, he shut his eyes and ears to their evil deeds. Thus God rescued Lot from the fire just as he had saved Noah from the flood.

What can I say about Abraham, the friend of God, or about Isaac or Jacob? God bestowed on them the extraor-
ordinary honor of naming himself their God, thus making himself part of their family. “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. This is my name forever, a memorial from generation to generation” [Exod. 3:15]. Thence we can judge how completely they did God’s will. Joseph was the Lord’s faithful servant from his youth, and each of his trials proved him more perfect and just. First his brothers handed him over to the Ishmaelites; those he had dreamed would honor him actually sold him [Gen. 37:5–10, 28]. He preserved the natural dignity of his spirit even when an Egyptian master acquired him. His example taught that slavery or freedom is a matter of sin or righteousness, that a person’s own mind rather than his station counts against him. I ask you, virgin, to stop for a moment and carefully consider this chaste soul. When his master’s wife desired the young Joseph, he remained unmoved. She approached and he fled. In everything else she simply commanded, but now she coaxed and pleaded. Neither his own youth nor the status of his lover prevailed on this chaste spirit. After he had often refused her, his mistress devised a trap for him. In secret and in private, she took his hand; with shameless entreaties she drew him to the adultery. He was not conquered. As he had met her words with words, he replied to her action with his own. When she asked, he refused; when she took hold of him, he ran away [Gen. 39:6–12]. Before the pronouncing of the gospel statement, “Whoever looks upon a woman with desire has already committed adultery with her in his heart” [Matt. 5:28], Joseph was challenged, not simply by a woman’s figure, but practically by her very embrace; and still he did not desire her. You have been amazed by his chastity; you should also notice his kindness. Before the prophet had said, “No one shall hold malice against his neighbor in his heart” [Lev. 19:18], he answered hatred with love. When he saw those brothers who were actually more like enemies, he let his sorrow manifest his love and thus identify him to them. “He kissed each of them and threw himself upon their terrified necks. He wet them with his weeping. The tears of his love washed away his brother’s hatred” [Gen. 45:15]. He always showed them a brotherly love, both while his father was alive and even after his death. He did not mention the pit into which they had thrown him to die. Nor did he brood over the brotherhood they had sold for a price. He responded to evil with good, thus fulfilling the Apostle’s precept even when he was still under the law of nature [Rom. 12:17].

(6) What can I say about that celebrated athlete of God, the blessed Job? After his wealth was plundered, after his family property was destroyed, after his sons and daughters were all suddenly killed, he finally struggled against the devil in his own body. Every piece of property he owned was taken away, and all his abundant possessions suddenly fell away so that those goods which were truly his own would be clearly manifest. Everything was stripped away like clothing so that he would be stronger and freer to gain his victory, so that by enduring these sufferings he could a second time defeat the enemy he had already overcome by bearing the losses. The Lord himself honored him: “Have you overlooked my servant Job? No one on earth is like him, blameless, a true worshiper of God who refrains from all evil” [Job 2:3]. Nor was such praise undeserved. As Job says himself, he always feared the Lord who was like a sea crashing over him, a presence whose might he could not bear [Job 31:23]. He never dared despise the Lord he believed was present always. He said, “I am secure; my heart does not accuse me because of anything in my life” [Job 27:6]. Before the Lord had commanded us to love our enemies, he could say, “If I have enjoyed my enemy’s misfortune, if I have said in my heart, ‘well done’” [Job 31:29]. The gospel had not yet proclaimed, “Give to whoever asks of you” [Matt. 5:42], but Job had already stated, “If I have allowed the destitute to leave my house empty-handed” [Job 31:32]. He had not read the Apostle’s direction “Masters, be just and fair to your slaves” [Col. 4:1]; yet he proclaimed to the Lord with assurance, “If I have injured a servant or harmed a maid, you know it Lord” [Job 31:13]. Before the same Apostle forbade the rich to be
haughty or to trust in uncertain riches [1 Tim. 6:17], he possessed his wealth in a way that showed his riches were elsewhere. “I did not trust in jewels or riches,” he said [Job 31:24]. He proved this in deeds, not just in words. He did not grieve when he lost everything; instead he repeated in each instance, “The Lord gave; the Lord has taken away. Everything has happened as the Lord decided; blessed be the Lord’s name forever. Naked I came forth from my mother’s womb; naked shall I return” [Job 1:21]. We discover our true attitude toward some possession when we lose it; the desire to enjoy results in the pain of loss. When a person suffers no pain in losing something, he shows how he possessed it. Job was a man of the gospel even before the gospel, an apostolic man before the apostolic teaching. This disciple of the apostles opened up the hidden riches of nature, bringing them out of his own person and showing what all of us can accomplish. He taught how great is that endowment of the soul which we have but do not use. We refuse to demonstrate this goodness ourselves and then think we do not have it.

(7) We have spoken much about nature, and through the examples of the saints have illustrated and proven its goodness. Someone might try to reverse the argument and assert that the wickedness of some people shows that the blame falls upon nature itself. To block such a response, I will use the scriptural evidence which holds sinners responsible for the evil actions of the will and does not excuse them through some natural determinism. We read in Genesis, “The brothers Simeon and Levi accomplished their evil by their own will” [Gen. 49:5–6]. The Lord addressed Jerusalem, “Therefore they abandoned my way which I set before them. They did not heed my voice but went off after the will of their evil heart” [Jer. 9:13–14]. Again the same prophet says, “You sinned against God and did not pay attention to his voice. You refused to walk in his commands, his precepts, and his directives” [Jer. 44:23]. The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, “If you decide to hear me, you will eat the good things of the earth. If you refuse and do not listen to me, the sword will eat you” [Isa. 1:19–20]. Similarly, “A slaughter will cut all of you down because I called you and you did not listen; I spoke to you and you did not pay attention. You did what was evil in my sight and chose what I forbade” [Isa. 63:12]. The Lord himself says in the Gospel, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have desired to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you refused” [Matt. 23:37]. Where we see willing and refusing, choosing and rejecting, we understand the functioning of freedom of the will, not the forces of nature. The books of both Testaments are full of similar passages which always describe good and evil as voluntary. For the sake of brevity we have to omit them. Since you are devoted to sacred reading, you will drink more deeply from the spring itself.

(8) We do not defend the goodness of nature by maintaining that it can do no wrong. Certainly we acknowledge that it is capable of both good and evil. We do, however, refute the charge that nature’s inadequacy forces us to do evil. We do either good or evil only by our own will; since we always remain capable of both, we are always free to do either. Why should it be that some will judge and others be judged unless different choices occur in the same nature, unless we actually do different things when we could all do the same? Again, examples will clarify this point. Adam was driven from paradise; Enoch was delivered from this world. In each case the Lord showed the freedom of choice: as the sinner could have done well, so the saint could have done ill. Unless each could have done both, neither would the former have deserved to be punished nor the latter to be chosen by a just God. The cases of Cain and Abel, and of the twins Esau and Jacob, must be understood in the same way. We must realize that only the will causes different merits in the same nature. The world which was destroyed in the flood because of its sins was convicted by the upright Noah. Lot’s integrity condemned the impurity of the Sodomites.

The fact that these early people lived for so many years
without the guidance of the law provides a significant proof of the goodness of human nature. God did not neglect his creation; he knew that human nature as he had made it was quite adequate as a law for them to practice justice. Thus, as long as the exercise of the recently created nature continued to thrive and the long practice of sinning had not shrouded human reason like a fog, nature was left without a law. Once it had been covered over by vices and corroded by the rust of ignorance, the Lord applied the law like a file to polish nature by repeated correction and restore its original luster. Doing good has become difficult for us only because of the long custom of sinning, which begins to infect us even in our childhood. Over the years it gradually corrupts us, building an addiction and then holding us bound with what seems like the force of nature itself. All the years during which we were negligently reared and were trained in the vices, during which we even labored at evil, during which the attractions of wickedness made innocence seem foolish, all these years now rise up against us. They come out against us, and the old practice battles the new decision. After we have labored so long to learn wickedness, are we then surprised that sanctity is not mysteriously bestowed upon us while we remain idle and at ease without working to build good customs?

We have mentioned these points about the goodness of nature briefly, as we have in other writings. We repeated them here only in order to smooth the path to perfect righteousness, so that knowing that the road is neither rough nor impassable you could run along it more easily. If even before the law and long before the coming of our Lord and Savior, some people lived upright and holy lives, as we have said, we should believe all the more that we can do the same after his coming. Christ's grace has taught us and regenerated us as better persons. His blood has purged and cleansed us; his example spurred us to righteousness. We should be better than people who lived before the law, therefore, and better than people who lived under the law. As the Apostle says, "Sin will no longer rule in you. You are not under the law but under grace" [Rom. 6:14].

(13) If therefore you want your way of life to correspond to the magnificence of your resolution, if you want to be united to God in all things, if you want to make the light and easy yoke of Christ even lighter and easier for yourself, then you must at this point especially devote your attention to the blessed life. Apply yourself now so that the glowing faith of your recent conversion is always warmed by a new earnestness, so that pious practices may easily take root during your early years. What you establish in the beginning will last, and the rest of your life will follow the pattern you set at the start. Thus here at the beginning you must plan for the end. Think of what you want to have become by the last day and try to be that now.

Custom will nourish either vice or virtue, and its power is greatest when it develops in people from their early years. For establishing a way of life, therefore, the initial years are most important. Because they are tender and supple, they are easily formed and directed by free decisions, though people generally simply accustom themselves to worldly pursuits. Seedlings, which are young and not firmly rooted, follow any direction and are easily bent one way or another. Thus what nature curvies is easily straightened according to a gardener's judgment. Animals too are easy to tame at a young and tender age. The earlier they are broken from running around freely, the more easily their neck takes to the yoke and their mouth to the bit. Literary pursuits are better implanted in young minds. The first things established in the mind tend to be firmly embedded in a person's disposition. Now all this is of the utmost importance when it comes to leading a good life. As long as your age makes you flexible and your soul responds easily to guidance, good custom should be practiced and established by bearing the yoke. Your mind should be directed to the highest matters, and the practice of a holy life
should penetrate deep into your soul. Then the soul will climb to the very pinnacle of perfection and will exercise a facility in good living which is grounded in well-established custom. The soul will be amazed by its own virtue and even come to think that what it has actually learned was inborn in it.

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(15) You should not fail to take seriously commands that involve lesser matters. God has commanded the least just as much as the greater. Thus you insult the lawgiver himself when you make light of his commands. Blessed Paul proclaims this, "Do everything without complaint or question so that you may be, without guilt or reproach, pure children of God in the midst of a depraved and perverse people, among whom you shine as lights in this world" [Phil. 2:14–15].

(16) We should linger here for a moment, virgin, and in each word of the Apostle examine the precious pearls that should adorn the bride of Christ. "Do everything," he says. We should fulfill all God's commands, not exercise our own judgment to select some of them. Nor should we look down on any of his precepts as insignificant or unimportant tokens. In all of them we should see the majesty of the Master himself. If without complaint or questioning we always consider its author, then no precept of God can possibly seem unimportant. We notice that ordinary and undistinguished supervisors are openly despised by their servants; their least orders are refused right to their faces. This does not happen, however, with noble personages. The more powerful the lord, the more quick his servants are to obey; the more difficult his orders, the more eagerly they are accepted. Thus, people are so anxious to be ruled by a king, and so ready to obey his directives, that they even desire to be commanded. They consider themselves fortunate not only when they accomplish the task but even when they are considered worthy of the command. Serving a person of great dignity is even regarded as a privilege.

God himself, of eternal majesty, of indescribable and incomparable power, bestows on us the sacred writings with the venerable points of his precepts. We do not, however, immediately receive them with reverence and joy. We do not consider it a wonderful privilege to be ruled over by such a great and honorable power, especially when the lawgiver's objective is the profit of the governed rather than his own advantage. In fact, we act like lazy and insolent servants, talking back to our Lord in a contemptuous and slovenly way: "That is too hard, too difficult! We cannot do that! We are only human; our flesh is weak!" What insane stupidity! What impious arrogance! We accuse the Lord of all knowledge of being doubly ignorant. We assert that he does not understand what he made and does not realize what he commands. We imply that the creator of humanity has forgotten its weakness and imposes precepts which a human being cannot bear. At the same time, moreover, we impiously charge the just God with wickedness and the loving God with cruelty. First we complain that he commands the impossible; then we assume that he condemns people for things they cannot avoid. We portray God as working to condemn rather than save us, something it is sacrilegious even to suggest.

The Apostle, therefore, realizing that the Lord of justice and majesty does not command the impossible, shields us from the complaining that tends to break out when orders are unfair or the commander is not respected. Why do we refuse to face the issue? Why do we complain to the lawgiver about the weakness of nature? No one knows the extent of our power better than the one who gave us our strength. No one understands what we can do better than the one who endowed us with the capacity for virtue. The just one did not choose to command the impossible; nor did the loving one plan to condemn a person for what he could not avoid.

(17) He continues, "That you may be without guile or reproach, perfect in your way of life" [Phil. 2:15]. A single term is adequate to express this, one which God specifies in the choosing of a bishop. A life that incurs no reproach must be very carefully protected, very integral indeed. Who could
have greater integrity than someone who practices true simplicity by never holding one thing in his heart and communicating another in word or expression. "As pure children of God," he says. This is the strongest exhortation possible, for Scripture to call us the children of God. Who would not be embarrassed and ashamed to do something unworthy of such a father, to turn someone called a child of God into a slave of vice? Hence he adds, "That we may be without blame." Since God is the source of all justice, the guilt of sin has no place in his children. "In the midst of a depraved and perverse people." This means that even if an infinite multitude of sinners surround you and innumerable examples of the vices press upon you, still you should so remember your heavenly birth that although you live among evil people, you conquer every evil. "Among whom you shine like lights in this world." Again we read in the Gospel, "Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" [Matt. 13:43]. A life corresponds to its reward. Thus those who will receive the splendor of the sun then should already radiate a like brightness of justice, their holy deeds should illumine the blindness of unbelievers. This connects with the same Apostle's idea in writing to the Corinthians: "The splendor of the sun differs from the splendor of the moon, and from the splendor of the stars. Moreover, each star differs in splendor from the others. So will it be in the resurrection of the dead" [1 Cor. 15:41–42]. The many mansions in the kingdom of heaven differ according to the merits of individuals. As good works differ, so do their rewards. Thus a person will shine there in glory as he has shone here in holiness.

Apply the strength of your whole mind to achieving a full perfection of life now. Prepare a heavenly life for its heavenly reward. The virgin's holiness should shine for all like the most splendid star. The greatness of her future reward should be indicated by renewal of her life. The way to goodness will be easier for you since your soul does not have evil customs to hold it back. Nor need we fear that the vices will hinder your pursuit of virtue or that the sterile sowing of the devil will ruin Christ's harvest. If penance can restore even people who have nearly obliterated the goodness of nature by prolonged sinful practices, if they can change the direction of their lives and destroy one custom with another, if they can go from being the worst to being among the best, then how much more can you overcome the evils that have never overcome you. You need only drive the vices away, not drive them out. How much easier not to acquire them than to get rid of them once they are acquired.