

# Of the Good of Widowhood

By Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)

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*De Bono Viduitatis. Translated by Rev. C.L. Cornish.*

This work is not mentioned in the *Retractations*, probably because it is a letter, and as such it is reckoned by Possidius, cap. 7. It is also marked as St. Augustin's by its references to his other works, *De Bono Conjugali*, etc. cap. 15. Ep. to Proba, cap. 23. The date is marked by the recent consecration of Demetrias, which was in 413. The admonition for which he is thanked by Juliana, , may be that against Pelagianism.

An objection has been raised from its disagreement with the fourth Council of [Carthage](#), an. 398. can. 104, which excommunicates [widows](#) who marry again after consecration, and pronounces them guilty of [adultery](#), whereas in cap. 10 and 11, the opinion that such marriages are no marriages, and that they ought to return to continence, is refuted. The two, however, are not wholly irreconcilable, as there may be a guilt similar to that of [adultery](#) incurred, and it may be visited with a censure in the form of excommunication, and yet the marriage may remain valid. The 16th Canon of Chalcedon imposes such a penalty, with power to the Bishop to relax it.—*Abridged from the Benedictine Edition.*

Augustin the Bishop, servant of [Christ](#), and of the servants of [Christ](#), unto the religious handmaiden of [God](#), Juliana, in the Lord of lords health.

Not any longer to be in debt of my promise to your request and [love](#) in [Christ](#), I have seized the occasion as I could, amid other my very pressing engagements, to write to you somewhat concerning the profession of [holy](#) widowhood, forasmuch as, when I was present, you laded me with entreaty, and, when I had not been able to deny you this, you often by letters demanded my promise. And in this work of ours, when you shall find in reading that some things pertain not at all unto your own person, or unto the person of you, who are living together in [Christ](#), nor are strictly necessary to give counsel unto your life, it will be your duty not on this account to judge them superfluous. Forsooth this letter, although it be addressed to you, was not to be written for you alone; but certainly it was a matter for us not to neglect, that it should profit others also through your means. Whatsoever, therefore, you shall find here, such as either has been at no time necessary for you, or is not so now, and which yet you shall perceive to be necessary for others, grieve not either to possess or to lend to read; that your charity also may be the profit of others.

2. Whereas, therefore, in every question, which relates to life and conduct, not only teaching, but exhortation also is necessary; in order that by teaching we may [know](#) what is to be done, and by exhortation may be incited not to think it irksome to do what we

already [know](#) is to be done; what more can I teach you, than what we read in the Apostle? For [holy](#) Scripture sets a rule to our teaching, that we dare not "be wise more than it behoves to be wise;" but be wise, as himself says, "unto soberness, according as unto each God has allotted the measure of [faith](#)." Be it not therefore for me to teach you any other thing, save to expound to you the words of the Teacher, and to treat of them as the Lord shall have given to me.

3. Therefore (thus) says the Apostle, the teacher of the [Gentiles](#), the vessel of election, "But I say unto the unmarried and the [widows](#), that it is [good](#) for them, if they shall have so continued, even as I also." These words are to be so understood, as that we think not that [widows](#) ought not to be called unmarried, in that they seem to have made trial of marriage: for by the name of unmarried [women](#) he means those, who are not now bound by marriage, whether they have been, or whether they have not been so. And this in another place he opens, where he says, "Divided is a [woman](#) unmarried and a [virgin](#)." Assuredly when he adds a [virgin](#) also, what would he have understood by an unmarried [woman](#), but a [widow](#)? Whence also, in what follows, under the one term "unmarried" he embraces both professions, saying, "She who is unmarried is careful of the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord: but she who is married is careful of the things of the world, how to please her husband." Certainly by the unmarried he would have understood, not only her who has never married, but her also, who, being by widowhood set free from the bond of marriage, has ceased to be married; for on this account also he calls not married, save her, who has an husband; not her also, who has had, and has not. Wherefore every [widow](#) is unmarried; but, because not every unmarried [woman](#) is a [widow](#), for there are [virgins](#) also; therefore he has here set both, where he says, "But I say unto the unmarried and the [widows](#);" as if he should say, What I say unto the unmarried, I say not unto them alone, who are [virgins](#), but unto them also who are [widows](#); "that it is [good](#) for them, if they shall have so continued, even as also I."

4. Lo, there is your good compared to that good, which the Apostle calls his own, if [faith](#) be present: yea, rather, because [faith](#) is present. Short is this teaching, yet not on this account to be despised, because it is short; but on this account to be retained the more easily and the more dearly, in that in shortness it is not cheap. For it is not every kind of good soever, which the Apostle would here set forth, which he has unambiguously placed above the [faith](#) of married [women](#). But how great good the [faith](#) of married [women](#), that is, of [Christian](#) and religious [women](#) joined in marriage, has, may be understood from this, that, when he was giving charge for the avoiding of fornication, wherein assuredly he was addressing married [persons](#) also, he says, "Do you not [know](#) that your bodies are the members of Christ?" So great then is the good of faithful marriage, that even the very members are (members) of [Christ](#). But, forasmuch as the good of widowed continence is better than this good, the purpose of this profession is, not that a catholic [widow](#) be any thing more than a member of [Christ](#), but that she have a better place, than a married [woman](#), among the members of [Christ](#). Forsooth the same Apostle says, "For, as in one body we have many members, but all members have not the same course of action; so being many we are one body in [Christ](#), and each members one of another: having gifts diverse according unto the [grace](#), which has been given unto us."

5. Wherefore also when he was advising married [persons](#) not to defraud one another of the due of carnal intercourse; lest, by this means, the one of them, (the due of marriage being denied to him,) being through his own incontinence tempted of [Satan](#), should fall away into fornication, he says, "But this I say of leave, not of command; but I would that all [men](#) were as I myself; but each one has his own proper gift from [God](#); but one in this way, and another in that." You see that wedded [chastity](#) also, and the marriage [faith](#) of the [Christian](#) bed, is a "gift," and this of [God](#); so that, when as carnal [lust](#) exceeds somewhat the measure of sensual intercourse, beyond what is necessary for the begetting of children, this [evil](#) is not of marriage, but venial by reason of the good of marriage. For not concerning marriage, which is contracted for the begetting of children, and the [faith](#) of wedded [chastity](#), and the sacrament (indissoluble, so long as both live) of matrimony, all which are good; but concerning that immoderate use of the flesh, which is recognized in the weakness of married [persons](#), and is pardoned by the intervention of the good of marriage, the Apostle says, "I speak of leave, not of command." Also, when he says, "The [woman](#) is bound, so long as her husband lives: but, in case her husband shall have died, she is set free: let her be married to whom she will, only in the Lord: but she shall be more blessed, if she shall have so continued, according to my counsel;" he shows sufficiently that a faithful [woman](#) is [blessed](#) in the [Lord](#), even when she marries a second time after the death of her husband, but that a [widow](#) is more [blessed](#) in the same Lord; that is, to speak not only in the words, but by instances also, of the [Scriptures](#), that Ruth is blessed, but that Anna is more blessed.

6. Wherefore this in the first place you ought to [know](#), that by the good, which you have chosen, second marriages are not condemned, but are set in lower [honor](#). For, even as the good of [holy virginity](#), which your daughter has chosen, does not condemn your one marriage; so neither does your widowhood the second marriage of any. For hence, specially, the [heresies](#) of the Cataphryges and of the Novatians swelled, which [Tertullian](#) also, inflated with cheeks full of sound not of wisdom, while with railing tooth he attacks second marriages, as though unlawful, which the Apostle with sober mind allows to be altogether lawful. From this soundness of doctrine let no man's reasoning, be he unlearned, or be he learned, move you; nor do you so extol your own good, as to charge as [evil](#) that of another's which is not [evil](#); but do thou [rejoice](#) so much the more of your own good, the more you see, that, by it, not only are [evils](#) shunned, but some goods too surpassed. For [adultery](#) and fornication are [evils](#). But from these unlawful things she is very far removed, who has bound herself by liberty of vow, and, not by command of law, but by counsel of charity, has brought to pass that even things lawful should not be lawful to her. And marriage [chastity](#) is a good, but widowed continence is a better good. Therefore this better good is [honored](#) by the submission of that other, not that other condemned by the praise of this that is better.

7. But whereas the Apostle, when commending the fruit of unmarried men and [women](#), in that they have thought of the things of the Lord, how to please [God](#), added and says, "But this I say for your profit, not to cast a snare on you," that is, not to force you; "but in order to that which is [honorable](#);" we ought not, because he says that the good of the unmarried is [honorable](#), therefore to think that the bond of marriage is base; otherwise we shall condemn first marriages also, which neither Cataphryges, nor Novatians, nor their

most learned upholder [Tertullian](#) dared to call base. But as, when he says, "But I say unto the unmarried and [widows](#), that it is [good](#) for them if they shall have so continued;" assuredly he set down "good" for "better," since every thing, which, when compared with a good, is called better, this also without [doubt](#) is a good; for what else is it that it is so called better, save that it is more good? and yet we do not on this account suppose him by consequence to have thought that it was an [evil](#), in case they married, in that he said, "it is [good](#) for them, if they shall have so continued;" so also, when he says, "but in order to that which is honest," he has not shown that marriage is base, but that which was honest than (another thing also) honest, he has commended by the name of honest in general. Because what is honest, save what is more honest? But what is more honest is certainly honest. Forsooth he plainly showed that this is better than that other that is [good](#), where he says, "Whoso gives to marry, does well; but whoso gives not to marry, does better." And this more blessed than that other that is blessed, where he says, "But she shall be more blessed, if she shall have so continued." As, therefore, there is than good a better, and than blessed a more blessed, so is there than honest an honest, which he chose to call honest. For far be it that that be base, of which the Apostle Peter speaking says, "Husbands, unto your wives, as unto the weaker and subject vessel, give [honor](#), as unto co-heirs of [grace](#);" and addressing the wives, he exhorts them, by the pattern of Sarah, to be subject unto their husbands; "For so," says he, "certain [holy women](#), who hoped in [God](#), adorned themselves, [obeying](#) their own husbands; even as Sarah [obeyed Abraham](#), calling him lord, whose daughters you are made, well-doing, and not fearing any disturbance."

8. Whence, also, what the [Apostle Paul](#) said of the unmarried [woman](#), "that she may be [holy](#) both in body and spirit;" we are not so to understand, as though a faithful [woman](#) being married and chaste, and according to the [Scriptures](#) subject unto her husband, be not [holy](#) in body, but only in spirit. For it cannot come to pass, that when the spirit is sanctified, the body also be not [holy](#), of which the sanctified spirit makes use: but, that we seem not to any to argue rather than to prove this by divine saying; since the Apostle Peter, making mention of Sarah, says only "[holy women](#)," and says not, "and in body;" let us consider that saying of the same [Paul](#), where forbidding fornication he says, "Do you not [know](#), that your bodies are members of Christ? Taking, therefore, members of [Christ](#), shall I make them members of an harlot? Far be it." Therefore let any one dare to say that the members of Christ are not [holy](#); or let him not dare to separate from the members of Christ the bodies of the [faithful](#) that are married. Whence, also, a little after he says, "Your body is the temple within you of the [Holy Spirit](#), Whom you have from [God](#); and you are not your own; for you have been bought with a great price." He says that the body of the faithful is both members of [Christ](#), and the temple of the [Holy Spirit](#), wherein assuredly the faithful of both sexes are understood. There therefore are married [women](#), there unmarried [women](#) also; but distinct in their deserts, and as members preferred to members, while yet neither are separated from the body. Whereas, therefore, he says, speaking of an unmarried [woman](#), "that she may be [holy](#) both in body and spirit," he would have understood a fuller sanctification both in body and in spirit, and has not deprived the body of married [women](#) of all sanctification.

9. Learn, therefore, that your good, yea, rather, remember what you have learned, that your good is more praised, because there is another good than which this is better, than if this could not on any other condition be a good, unless that were an [evil](#), or altogether were not. The eyes have great [honor](#) in the body, but they would have less, if they were alone, and there were not other members of less [honor](#). In heaven itself the sun by its light surpasses, not chides, the moon; and star from star differs in [glory](#), not is at variance through [pride](#). Therefore, "[God](#) made all things, and, lo, very good;" not only "good," but also "very;" for no other reason, than because "all." For of each several work throughout it was also said, "[God](#) saw that it is [good](#)." But, when "all" were named, "very" was added; and it was said, "[God](#) saw all things which He made, and, lo, very good." For certain several things were better than other several, but all together better than any several. Therefore, may the sound doctrine of Christ make you in His Body sound through His Grace, that, what you have better than others in body and spirit, the self-same your spirit, which rules the body, may neither extol with insolence, nor distinguish with lack of [knowledge](#).

10. Nor, because I called Ruth blessed, Anna more blessed, in that the former married twice, the latter, being soon widowed of her one husband, so lived long, do you straightway also think that you are better than Ruth. Forsooth different in the times of the Prophets was the dispensation of [holy females](#), whom [obedience](#), not [lust](#), forced to marry, for the propagation of the people of [God](#), that in them Prophets of Christ might be sent beforehand; whereas the People itself also, by those things which in figure happened among them, whether in the case of those who [knew](#), or in the case of those who [knew](#) not those things, was nothing else than a Prophet of [Christ](#), of whom should be born the Flesh also of [Christ](#). In order therefore for the propagation of that people, he was accounted accursed by sentence of the Law, whoso raised not up seed in [Israel](#). Whence also [holy women](#) were kindled, not by [lust](#) of sensual intercourse, but by [piety](#) of bearing; so that we most rightly [believe](#) of them that they would not have sought sensual intercourse, in case a [family](#) could have come by any other means. And to the husbands was allowed the use of several wives living; and that the [cause](#) of this was not [lust](#) of the flesh, but forethought of begetting, is shown by the fact, that, as it was lawful for [holy](#) men to have several wives living, it was not likewise lawful for [holy women](#) to have intercourse with several husbands living; in that they would be by so much the baser, by how much the more they sought what would not add to their fruitfulness. Wherefore [holy](#) Ruth, not having seed such as at that time was necessary in [Israel](#), on the death of her husband sought another of whom to have it. Therefore than this one twice married, Anna once married a [widow](#) was on this account more blessed, in that she attained also to be a prophetess of Christ; concerning whom we are to [believe](#), that, although she had no sons, (which indeed Scripture by keeping silence has left uncertain,) yet, had she by that Spirit foreseen that Christ would immediately come of a [virgin](#), by Which she was enabled to recognize Him even as a child: whence, with good reason, even without sons, (that is, assuming she had none,) she refused a second marriage: in that she [knew](#) that now was the time wherein Christ were better served, not by duty of bearing, but by [zeal](#) of containing: not by fruitfulness of married womb, but by [chastity](#) of widowed conduct. But if Ruth also was aware that by her flesh was propagated a seed, whereof Christ should hereafter have flesh, and by marrying set forth her ministering to this [knowledge](#), I

dare not any longer say that the widowhood of Anna was more blessed than her fruitfulness.

11. But you who both have sons, and live in that end of the world, wherein now is the time not of casting stones, but of gathering; not of embracing, but of abstaining from embracing; when the Apostle cries out, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remains, that both they who have wives be as not having;" assuredly if you had sought a second marriage, it would have been no [obedience](#) of [prophecy](#) or law, no carnal desire even of [family](#), but a mark of incontinence alone. For you would have done what the Apostle says, after he had said, "It is [good](#) for them, if they shall have so continued, even as I;" forsooth he straightway added, "But if they contain not themselves, let them marry; for I had rather that they marry than be burned." For this he said, in order that the [evil](#) of unbridled desire might not be carried headlong into criminal baseness, being taken up by the honest estate of marriage. But thanks be to the Lord, in that you have given birth to what you would not be, and the [virginity](#) of your child has compensated for the loss of your [virginity](#). For [Christian](#) doctrine, having diligent question made of it, makes answer, that a first marriage also now at this time is to be despised, unless incontinence stand in the way. For he, who said, "If they contain not themselves, let them marry," could have said, "If they have not sons, let them marry," if, when now after the Resurrection and Preaching of [Christ](#), there is unto all nations so great and abundant supply of sons to be spiritually begotten, it were any such duty to beget sons after the flesh as it was in the first times. And, whereas in another place he says, "But I will that the younger marry, bear children, be mothers of [families](#)," he commends with apostolic sobriety and authority the good of marriage, but does not impose the duty of bearing, as though in order to [obey](#) the law, even on those who "receive" the good of continence. Lastly, why he had said this, he unfolds, when he adds and says, "To give no occasion of speaking [evil](#) to the adversary; for already certain have turned back after [Satan](#):" that by these words of his we may understand, that those, whom he would have marry, could have done better to contain than marry; but better to marry than to go back after [Satan](#), that is, to fall away from that excellent purpose of virginal or widowed [chastity](#), by looking back to things that are behind, and perish. Wherefore, such as contain not themselves, let them marry before they make profession of continence, before they vow unto [God](#), what, if they pay not, they are [justly](#) condemned. Forsooth in another place he says of such, "For when they have lived in delights in [Christ](#), they wish to marry: having condemnation, in that they have made of none effect their first [faith](#);" that is, they have turned aside their will from the purpose of continence unto marriage. Forsooth they have made of none effect the [faith](#), whereby they formerly vowed what they were unwilling by perseverance to fulfill. Therefore the good of marriage is indeed ever a good: but in the people of God it was at one time an act of [obedience](#) unto the law; now it is a remedy for weakness, but in certain a solace of [human nature](#). Forsooth to be engaged in the getting of children, not after the fashion of dogs by promiscuous use of [females](#), but by honest order of marriage, is not an affection such as we are to blame in a man; yet this affection itself the [Christian mind](#), having thoughts of heavenly things, in a more praiseworthy manner surpasses and overcomes.

12. But since, as the Lord says, "Not all receive this word;" therefore let her who can receive it, receive it; and let her, who contains not, marry; let her, who has not begun, deliberate; let her, who has undertaken it, persevere; let there be no occasion given unto the adversary, let there be no oblation withdrawn from Christ. Forsooth in the marriage bond if [chastity](#) be preserved, condemnation is not feared; but in widowed and virginal continence, the excellence of a greater gift is sought for: and, when this has been sought, and chosen, and by debt of vow offered, from this time not only to enter upon marriage, but, although one be not married, to wish to marry is matter of condemnation. For, in order to show this, the Apostle says not, "When they shall have lived in delights, in Christ" they marry; but "they wish to marry; having," says he, "condemnation, in that they have made of none effect their first [faith](#)," although not by marrying, yet by wishing; not that the marriages even of such are judged matter of condemnation; but there is condemned a wrong done to purpose, there is condemned a broken [faith](#) of vow, there is condemned not a relief by lower good, but a fall from higher good: lastly, such are condemned, not because they have entered upon marriage [faith](#) afterwards, but because they have made of none effect the first [faith](#) of continence. And in order to suggest this in few words, the Apostle would not say, that they have condemnation, who after purpose of greater [sanctity](#) marry, (not because they are not condemned, but lest in them marriage itself should be thought to be condemned:) but, after he had said, "they wish to marry," he straightway added, "having condemnation." And he stated the reason, "in that they have made of none effect their former [faith](#)," in order that it may appear that it is the will which fell away from its purpose, which is condemned, whether marriage follow, or fail to follow.

13. Wherefore they who say that the marriages of such are not marriages, but rather adulteries, seem not to me to consider with sufficient acuteness and care what they say; forsooth they, are misled by a semblance of [truth](#). For, whereas they, who of [Christian sanctity](#) marry not, are said to choose the marriage of [Christ](#), hence certain argue saying, If she, who during the life of her husband is married to another, be an adulteress, even as the Lord Himself has laid down in the [Gospel](#); therefore, during the life of [Christ](#), over Whom death has no more dominion, if she who had chosen His marriage, be married to a [man](#), she is an adulteress. They, who say this, are moved indeed with acuteness, but fail to observe, how great absurdity in fact follows on this reasoning. For whereas it is praiseworthy that, even during the life of her husband, by his consent, a female vow continence unto Christ, now, according to the reasoning of these [persons](#), no one ought to do this, lest she make Christ Himself, what is impious to [imagine](#), an adulterer, by being married to Him during the life of her husband. Next, whereas first marriages are of better desert than second, far be it that this be the thought of [holy widows](#), that Christ seem unto them as a second husband. For Himself they used heretofore also to have, (when they were subject and did faithful service to their own husbands,) not after the flesh, but after the Spirit a Husband; unto Whom the Church herself, of which they are members, is the wife; who by soundness of [faith](#), of hope, of charity, not in the [virgins](#) alone, but in [widows](#) also, and faithful married [women](#), is altogether a [virgin](#). Forsooth unto the universal Church, of which they all are members, the Apostle says, "I joined you unto one husband a chaste virgin to present unto Christ." But He [knows](#) how to make fruitful, without marring of [chastity](#), a wife a [virgin](#), Whom even in the flesh itself His Mother

could without violation of [chastity](#) conceive. But there is brought to pass by means of this ill-considered notion, (whereby they think that the marriages of [women](#) who have fallen away from this [holy](#) purpose, in case they shall have married, are no marriages,) no small [evil](#), that wives be separated from their husbands, as though they were adulteresses, not wives; and wishing to restore to continence the [women](#) thus separated, they make their husbands real adulterers, in that during the life of their wives they have married others.

14. Wherefore I cannot indeed say, of [females](#) who have fallen away from a better purpose, in case they shall have married, that they are adulteries, not marriages; but I plainly would not hesitate to say, that departures and fallings away from a holier [chastity](#), which is vowed unto the Lord, are worse than adulteries. For if, what may no way be [doubted](#), it pertains unto an offense against [Christ](#), when a member of Him keeps not [faith](#) to her husband; how much graver offense is it against Him, when unto Himself [faith](#) is not kept, in a matter which He requires when offered, Who had not required that it should be offered. For when each fails to render that which, not by force of command, but by advice of counsel, he vowed, by so much the more does he increase the unrighteousness of the wrong done to his vow, by how much the less necessity he had to vow. These matters I for this reason treat of, that you may not think either that second marriages are criminal, or that any marriages whatsoever, being marriages, are an [evil](#). Therefore let this be your [mind](#), not that you condemn them, but that you despise them. Therefore the good of widowed [chastity](#) is becoming after a brighter fashion, in that in order to make vow and profession of it, [females](#) may despise what is both pleasing and lawful. But after profession of vow made they must continue to rein in, and overcome, what is pleasing, because it is no longer lawful.

15. Men are wont to move a question concerning a third or fourth marriage, and even more numerous marriages than this. On which to make answer strictly, I dare neither to condemn any marriage, nor to take from these the shame of their great number. But, lest the brevity of this my answer may chance to displease any, I am prepared to listen to my reprover treating more fully. For perhaps he alleges some reason, why second marriages be not condemned, but third be condemned. For I, as in the beginning of this discourse I gave warning, dare not to be more wise than it behoves to be wise. For who am I, that I should think that that must be defined which I see that the Apostle has not defined? For he says, "A [woman](#) is bound, so long as her husband lives." He said not, her first; or, second; or, third; or, fourth; but, "A [woman](#)," says he, "is bound, so long as her husband lives; but if her husband shall be dead, she is set free; let her be married to whom she will, only in the Lord: but she shall be more blessed, if she shall have so continued." I [know](#) not what can be added to, or taken from, this sentence, so far as relates to this matter. Next I hear Himself also, the Master and Lord of the Apostles and of us, answering the [Sadducees](#), when they had proposed to Him a [woman](#) not once-married, or twice-married, but, if it can be said, seven-married, whose wife she should be in the resurrection? For rebuking them, He says, "You do [err](#), not [knowing](#) the [Scriptures](#), nor the power of [God](#). For in the resurrection they shall neither be married, nor marry wives; for they shall not begin to die, but shall be equal to the Angels of [God](#)." Therefore He made mention of their resurrection, who shall rise again unto life, not who shall rise again unto punishment. Therefore He might have said, You do [err](#), [knowing](#) not the [Scriptures](#),

nor the power of God: for in that resurrection it will not be possible that there be those that were wives of many; and then added, that neither does any there marry. But neither, as we see, did He in this sentence show any sign of condemning her who was the wife of so many husbands. Wherefore neither dare I, contrary to the feeling of natural shame, say, that, when her husbands are dead, a [woman](#) marry as often as she will; nor dare I, out of my own heart, beside the authority of [holy](#) Scripture, condemn any number of marriages whatever. But, what I say to a [widow](#), who has had one husband, this I say to every [widow](#); you will be more blessed, if you shall have so continued.

16. For that also is no foolish question which is wont to be proposed, that whoso can may say, which [widow](#) is to be preferred in desert; whether one who has had one husband, who, after having lived a considerable time with her husband, being left a [widow](#) with sons born to her and alive, has made profession of continence; or she who as a young [woman](#) having lost two husbands within two years, having no children left alive to console her, has vowed to God continence, and in it has grown old with most enduring [sanctity](#). Herein let them exercise themselves, if they can, by discussing, and by showing some [proof](#) to us, who weigh the merits of [widows](#) by number of husbands, not by the strength itself of continence. For, if they shall have said, that she who has had one husband is to be preferred to her who has had two; unless they shall have alleged some special reason or authority, they will assuredly be found to set before excellence of [soul](#), not greater excellence of [soul](#), but good fortune of the flesh. Forsooth it pertained unto good fortune of the flesh, both to live a long time with her husband, and to conceive sons. But, if they prefer her not on this account, that she had sons; at any rate the very fact that she lived a long time with her husband, what else was it than good fortune of the flesh? Further, the [desert](#) of Anna herself is herein chiefly commended, in that, after she had so soon buried her husband, through her protracted life she long contended with the flesh, and overcame. For so it is written, "And there was Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was far advanced in many days; and had lived with her husband seven years from her [virginity](#); and she was a [widow](#) even unto eighty-four years, who used not to depart from the Temple, by [fastings](#) and [prayers](#) serving day and night." You see how the [holy widow](#) is not only commended in this, that she had had one husband, but also, that she had lived few years with a husband from her [virginity](#), and had with so great service of [piety](#) continued her office of widowed [chastity](#) even unto so great age.

17. Let us therefore set before our eyes three [widows](#), each having one of the things, the whole of which were in her: let us suppose one who had had one husband, in whose case is wanting both so great length of widowhood, in that she has lived long with her husband, and so great [zeal](#) of [piety](#), in that she does not so serve with [fasts](#) and [prayers](#): a second, who after the very short life of her former husband, had quickly lost a second also, and is now long time a [widow](#), but yet herself also does not so set herself to the most religious service of [fasts](#) and [prayers](#): a third, who not only has had two husbands, but also has lived long with each of them singly, or with one of them, and being left a [widow](#) at a later period of life, wherein indeed, in case she had wished to marry, she might also conceive sons, has taken upon her widowed continence; but is more intent on [God](#), more careful to do always the things that please Him, day and night, like Anna,

serving by [prayers](#) and [fasts](#). If a question be raised, which of these is to be preferred in deserts, who but must see that in this contest the palm must be given to the greater and, more glowing [piety](#)? So also if three others be set, in each of whom are two of those three, but one of the three in each wanting, who can [doubt](#) that they will be the better, who shall have in a more excellent manner in their two goods [pious](#) humility, in order that there may be lofty [piety](#)?

18. No one indeed of these six [widows](#) could come up to your standard. For you, in case that you shall have maintained this vow even unto old age, may have all the three things wherein the [desert](#) of Anna excelled. For both you have had one husband, and he lived not long with you in the flesh; and, by this means, in case that you shall show forth [obedience](#) to the words of the Apostle, saying, "But she who is a [widow](#) indeed and desolate, has hoped in the [Lord](#), and perseveres in [prayers](#) night and day," and with sober watchfulness shall shun what follows, "But she who passes her time in delights, living is dead," all those three goods, which were Anna's, shall be thine also. But you have sons also, which haply she had not. And yet you are not on this account to be praised, that you have them, but that you are [zealous](#) to nurture and educate them piously. For that they were born to you, was of fruitfulness; that they are alive, is of good fortune; that they be so brought up, is of your will and disposal. In the former let men congratulate you, in this let them imitate you. Anna, through prophetic [knowledge](#), recognized Christ with His virgin Mother; you the [grace](#) of the [Gospel](#) has made the mother of a [virgin](#) of [Christ](#). Therefore that [holy](#) virgin, whom herself willing and seeking it you have offered unto Christ, has added something of virginal desert also unto the widowed deserts of her grandmother and mother. For you who have her, fail not to have something thence; and in her you are, what in yourselves you are not. For that [holy virginity](#) should be taken from you at your marriage, was on this account brought to pass, in order that she should be born of you.

19. These discussions, therefore, concerning the different deserts of married [women](#), and of different [widows](#), I would not in this work enter upon, if, what I am writing unto you, I were writing only for you. But, since there are in this kind of discourse certain very difficult questions, it was my wish to say something more than what properly relates to you, by reason of certain, who seem not to themselves learned, unless they essay, not by passing judgment to discuss, but by rending to cut in pieces the labors of others: in the next place, that you yourself also may not only keep what you have vowed, and make advance in that good; but also [know](#) more carefully and more surely, that this same good of yours is not distinguished from the [evil](#) of marriage, but is set before the good of marriage. For let not such, as condemn the marriage of widowed [females](#), although they exercise their continence in abstaining from many things, which you make use of, on this account lead you astray, to think what they think, although you cannot do what they do. For no one would be a madman, although he see that the strength of a madman is greater than of men in their sound senses. Chiefly, therefore, let sound doctrine both adorn and guard goodness of purpose. Forsooth it is from this [cause](#) that catholic [females](#), even after that they have been married more than once, are by just judgment preferred, not only to the [widows](#) who have had one husband, but also to the [virgins](#) of [heretics](#). There are indeed on these three matters, of marriage, widowhood, and [virginity](#), many winding

recesses of questions, many perplexities; and in order by discussion to enter deeply into and solve these, there is required both greater care, and a fuller discourse; that either we may have a right mind in all those things, or, if in any matter we be otherwise minded, this also God may reveal unto us. However, what there also the Apostle says next after, "Whereunto we have arrived, in that let us walk." But we have arrived, in what relates to this matter on which we are speaking, so far as to set continence before marriage, but [holy virginity](#) even before widowed continence; and not to condemn any marriages, which yet are not adulteries but marriages, by praise of any purpose whatever of our own or of our friends. Many other things on these matters we have said in a Book concerning the Good of Marriage, and in another Book concerning Holy Virginity, and in a Book which we composed with as great pains as we could against Faustus the Manichee; since, by most biting reproaches in his writings of the chaste marriages of Patriarchs and Prophets, he had turned aside the minds of certain unlearned [persons](#) from soundness of [faith](#).

20. Wherefore, forasmuch as in the beginning of this little work I had proposed certain two necessary matters, and had undertaken to follow them out; one which related to doctrine, the other to exhortation; and I have not failed in the former part, to the best of my power, according to the business which I had undertaken; let us come to exhortation, in order that the good which is [known](#) wisely, may be pursued ardently. And in this matter I give you this advice first, that, how great soever [love](#) of [pious](#) continence you feel to be in you, you ascribe it to the favor of [God](#), and give Him thanks, Who of His [Holy Spirit](#) has freely given unto you so much, as that, His [love](#) being shed abroad in your heart, the [love](#) of a better good should take away from you the permission of a lawful matter. For it was His gift to you that you should not wish to marry, when it was lawful, in order that now it should not be lawful, even if you wished; and that by this means the wish not to do it might be the more settled, lest what were now unlawful be done, which was not done even when lawful; and that, a [widow](#) of [Christ](#), you should so far attain as to see your daughter also a [virgin](#) of Christ; for while you are [praying](#) as Anna, she has become what Mary was. These by how much the more you [know](#) them to be gifts of [God](#), by so much the more are you by the same gifts blessed; yea, rather, you are not so otherwise than as you [know](#) from Whom you have what you have. For listen to what the Apostle said on this matter, "But we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit Which is of [God](#), that we may [know](#) what things have been given to us by [God](#)." Forsooth many have many gifts of [God](#), and by not [knowing](#) from Whom they have them, come to boast themselves with impious vanity. But there is no one blessed with the gifts of [God](#), who is ungrateful to the Giver. Forasmuch as, also, whereas in the course of the sacred Mysteries we are bidden to "lift up our hearts," it is by His help that we are able, by Whose bidding we are admonished; and therefore it follows, that, of this so great good of the heart lifted up, we give not the [glory](#) to ourselves as of our own strength, but render thanks unto our Lord God. For of this we are straightway admonished, that "this is meet," "this is right." You remember whence these words are taken, you recognize by what sanction, and by how great [holiness](#) they are commended within. Therefore hold and have what you have received, and return thanks to the Giver. For, although it be yours to receive and have, yet you have that, which you have received; forasmuch as to one waxing [proud](#), and impiously glorying of that which he had, as

though he had it of himself, the Truth says by the Apostle, "But what have you, which you have not received? But, if you have received, why do you boast, as if you had not received?"

21. These things I am compelled to admonish by reason of certain little discourses of some men, that are to be shunned and avoided, which have begun to steal through the ears unto the minds of many, being (as must be said with tears) hostile to the [grace](#) of [Christ](#), which go to persuade that we count not as necessary for us [prayer](#) unto the Lord, that we enter not into [temptation](#). For they so essay to defend the [free will](#) of [man](#), as that by it alone, even without help of the [grace](#) of [God](#), we are able to fulfill what is commanded us of [God](#). And thus it follows, that the Lord in vain said, "Watch and [pray](#), lest ye enter into [temptation](#);" and in vain daily in the Lord's Prayer itself we say, "Lead us not into [temptation](#)." For if it is of our own power alone that we be not overcome by [temptation](#), why do we [pray](#) that we enter not, nor be led into it? Rather let us do what is of our own [free will](#), and most absolute power; and let us mock at the Apostle, saying, "[God](#) is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able;" and let us oppose him, and say, Why seek I of the Lord, what He has set in my own power? But far be it, that he be so minded, who is sound minded. Wherefore let us seek that He may give, what He bids us that we have. For to this end He bids us have this, which as yet we have not, to admonish as what to seek; and that when we shall have found the power to do what He has bidden, we may understand, of this also, whence we have received it; lest, being puffed and lifted up by the spirit of this world, we [know](#) not what things have been given unto us of [God](#). Wherefore the free choice of the human will we by no means destroy, when the Grace of [God](#), by which the free choice itself is helped, we deny not with ungrateful [pride](#), but rather set forth with grateful [piety](#). For it is ours to will: but the will itself is both admonished that it may arise, and healed, that it may have power; and enlarged, that it may receive; and filled, that it may have. For were not we to will, certainly neither should we receive the things that are given, nor should we have. For who would have continence, (among the rest of the gifts of God to speak of this rather, of which I am speaking to you,) who, I say, would have continence, unless willing? forasmuch as also no one would receive unless willing. But if you ask, Whose gift it is, that it can be by our will received and had? listen to Scripture; yea, rather, because you know, recollect what you have read, "Whereas I [knew](#)," says he, "that no one can be continent, unless God give it, and this itself was of wisdom, to [know](#) whose gift it was." Great are these two gifts, wisdom and continence; wisdom, forsooth, whereby we are formed in the [knowledge](#) of [God](#); but continence, whereby we are not conformed unto this world. But God bids us that we be both wise and continent, without which goods we cannot be just and perfect. But let us [pray](#) that He give what He bids, by helping and inspiring, Who has admonished us what to will by commanding and calling. Whatsoever of this He has given, let us [pray](#) that He preserve; but what He has not given as yet, let us [pray](#) that He supply; yet let us [pray](#) and give thanks for what we have received; and for what we have not yet received, from the very fact that we are not ungrateful for what we have received, let us trust that we shall receive it. For He, Who has given power unto the [faithful](#) who are married to contain from adulteries and fornications, Himself has given unto [holy virgins](#) and [widows](#) to contain from all sexual intercourse; in the case of which [virtue](#) now the term inviolate [chastity](#) or continence is properly used. Or is it haply that

from Him indeed we have received continence, but from ourselves have wisdom? What then is it that the Apostle James says, "But if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of [God](#), Who gives unto all liberally, and upbraids not, and it shall be given unto him." But on this question, already in other little works of ours, so far as the Lord has helped us, we have said many things; and at other times, so far as through Him we shall be able, when opportunity is given, we will speak.

22. Now it has been my wish on this account to say something on this subject, by reason of certain of our brethren most friendly and dear to us, and without willful guilt indeed entangled in this [error](#), but yet entangled; who think, that, when they exhort any to righteousness and [piety](#), their exhortation will not have force, unless the whole of that, wherein they would work upon man that man should work, they set in the power of [man](#), not helped by the [grace](#) of [God](#), but put forth by the alone choice of the [free will](#); as though there can be [free will](#) to perform a good work, unless set free by the gift of God! And they mark not that this very thing themselves also have by the gift of [God](#), that with such power they exhort, as to excite the dull wills of men to enter upon a good life, to enkindle the cold, to correct such as are in [error](#), to convert such as are turned aside, to pacify such as are opposed. For thus they are able to succeed in persuading what they would persuade to, or if they work not these things in the wills of [men](#), what is their work? wherefore speak they? Let them leave them rather to their own choice. But if in them they work these things, what? I [pray](#), does man, in the [will](#) of [man](#), work so great things by speaking, and does God work nothing there by helping? Yea rather, with how great soever power of discourse man may prevail, as that by skill of discussion, and sweetness of speech, he in the [will](#) of man implant [truth](#), nourish charity, by teaching remove [error](#), by exhortation remove sloth, "Neither he who plants is any thing, nor he who waters, but God Who gives the increase." For in vain would the workman use all means without, unless the Creator should work secretly within. I hope therefore that this letter of mine by the worthy deed of your Excellence will soon come into the hands of such also; on this account I thought that I ought to say something on this subject. Next that both you yourself, and whatsoever other [widows](#) shall read this, or hear it read, may [know](#) that you make more advance unto the [love](#) and profession of the good of continence by your own [prayers](#) than by our exhortations; forasmuch as if it be any help to you that our addresses also are supplied to you, the whole must be assigned to His [grace](#), "in Whose Hand," as it is written, "are both we and our discourses."

23. If, therefore, you had not as yet vowed unto God widowed continence, we would assuredly exhort you to vow it; but, in that you have already vowed it, we exhort you to persevere. And yet I see that I must so speak as to lead those also who had as yet thought of marriage to [love](#) it and to seize on it. Therefore let us give ear unto the Apostle, "She who is unmarried," says he, "is careful about the things of the Lord, to be [holy](#) both in body and spirit; but she who is married is careful about the things of the world, how to please her husband." He says not, is careful about the things of the world, so as not to be [holy](#); but certainly that that marriage [holiness](#) is less, in regard of that portion of cares, which has thought of the pleasure of the world. Whatever, therefore, I of earnest purpose of mind would be expended also on these things whereby she would have to please a husband, the unmarried [Christian woman](#) ought in a certain way to gather and bring

together unto that earnest purpose whereby she is to please the Lord. And consider, Whom she pleases, who pleases the Lord; and assuredly she is by so much the more blessed by how much the more she pleases Him; but by how much the more her thoughts are of the things of the world, by so much the less does she please Him. Therefore do ye with all earnest purpose please Him, Who is "fair of form above the sons of men." For that you please Him, it is by His [grace](#) which is "shed abroad on His lips." Please ye Him in that portion of thought also, which would be occupied by the world, in order to please a husband. Please ye Him, Who displeased the world, in order that such as please Him might be set free from the world. For This One, fair of form above the sons of [men](#), men saw on the Cross of the Passion; "and He had not form or beauty, but His face cast down, and His posture unseemly." Yet from this unseemliness of your Redeemer flowed the price of your beauty, but of a beauty within, for "all the beauty of the King's daughter is within." By this beauty please ye Him, this beauty order ye with studious care and anxious thought. He loves not dyes of deceits; the Truth delights in things that are [true](#), and He, if you recognize what you have read, is called the Truth. "I am," says He, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." Run ye to Him through Him, please ye Him of Him; live ye with Him, in Him, of Him. With [true](#) affections and holiest [chastity love](#) ye to be loved by such a Husband.

24. Let the inner ear of the virgin also, your [holy](#) child, hear these things. I shall see how far she goes before you in the Kingdom of That King: it is another question. Yet you have found, mother and daughter, Him, Whom by beauty of [chastity](#) ye ought to please together, having despised, she all, you second, marriage. Certainly if there were husbands whom you had to please, by this time, perhaps, you would feel ashamed to adorn yourself together with your daughter; now let it not shame you, to set yourselves to do what may adorn you both together; because it is not matter of blame, but of [glory](#), that you be loved both together by That One. But white and red, feigned and laid on with paints, you would not use, even if you had husbands; not thinking that they were fit [persons](#) for you to deceive, or yourselves such as ought to deceive; now therefore That King, Who had longed for the beauty of His Only Spouse, of Whom you are members, do ye with all [truth](#) together please, together cleave unto; she with virginal [chastity](#), you with widowed continence, both with spiritual beauty. In which beauty also her grandmother, and your mother-in-law, who by this time surely has grown old, is beautiful together with you. Forsooth while charity carries the vigor of this beauty into things that are before, length of years causes not in it a wrinkle. You have with you a [holy](#) aged [woman](#), both in your house and in [Christ](#), whom to consult concerning perseverance; how you are to fight with this or that [temptation](#), what you are to do, that it may be the more easily overcome; what safeguard you are to take, that it may not easily again lay wait; and if there be any thing of this sort, she teaches you, who is now by time fixed, by [love](#) a well-wisher, by natural affection full of cares, by age secure. Do you specially, do you in such things consult her, who has made trial of what you have made trial of. For your child sings that song, which in the Apocalypse none save [virgins](#) can sing. But for both of you she [prays](#) more carefully than for herself, but she is more full of care for her granddaughter, for whom there remains a longer space of years to overcome [temptations](#); but you she sees nearer to her own age, and mother of a daughter of such an age, as that, had you seen her married, (which now is not lawful, and far be it from her,) I think you would have blushed to bear

children together with her. How much then is it that now remains to you of a dangerous age, who are on this account not called a grandmother, in order that together with your daughter you may be fruitful in offspring of [holy](#) thoughts and works? Therefore not without reason is the grandmother more full of care for her, for whom you also the mother; because both what she has vowed is greater, and the whole of what she has just now begun remains to her. May the Lord hear her [prayers](#), that you may holily follow her good deserts, Who in youth gave birth to the flesh of your husband, in old age travails with the heart of your daughter. Therefore do ye all, alike and with one accord, by conduct please, by [prayers](#) press upon, That One Husband of One Wife, in Whose Body by One Spirit you are living.

25. The past day returns not hereafter, and after yesterday proceeds today, and after today will proceed tomorrow; and, lo, all times and the things of time pass away, that there may come the promise that shall abide; and "whoso shall have persevered even unto the end, this one shall be saved." If the world is now perishing, the married [woman](#), for whom bears she? Or in heart about to bear, and in flesh not about to bear, why does she marry? But if the world is still about to last, why is not He more loved, by Whom the world was made? If already enticements of this life are failing, there is not any thing for a [Christian soul](#) with desire to seek after; but if they shall yet remain, there is what with [holiness](#) he may despise. For the one of these two there is no hope of [lust](#), in the other greater [glory](#) of charity. How many or how long are the very years, in which the flower of carnal age seems to flourish? Some [females](#) having thoughts of marriage, and with ardor wishing it, while they are being despised or put off, on a sudden have grown old, so as that now they would feel shame, rather than desire, to marry. But many having married, their husbands having set out into distant countries very soon after their union, have grown aged expecting their return, and, as though soon left [widows](#), at times have not even attained so as at least as old [women](#) to receive their old men on their return. If therefore, when [betrothed](#) bridegrooms despised or delayed, or when husbands were abroad, carnal desire could be restrained from commission of fornication or [adultery](#), why cannot it be restrained from commission of sacrilege? If it has been repressed, when being deferred it was glowing, why is it not put down, when having been cut off it had grown cold? For they in greater measure endure glowing of desire, who despair not of the pleasure of the same desire. But whoso of unmarried [persons](#) vow [chastity](#) to [God](#), withdraw that very hope, which is the fuel of [love](#). Hence with more ease is desire bridled, which is kindled by no expectation; and yet, unless against this [prayer](#) be made, in order to overcome it, itself as unlawful is the more ardently wished for.

26. Therefore let spiritual delights succeed to the place of carnal delights in [holy chastity](#); reading, [prayer](#), psalm, good thought, frequency in good works, hope of the world to come, and a heart upward; and for all these giving of thanks unto the Father of lights, from Whom, without any [doubt](#), every good gift, and every perfect gift, as Scripture bears [witness](#), comes down. For when, in stead of the delights of married [women](#), which they have in the flesh of their husbands, the use of other carnal delights is taken, as it were to solace them, why should I speak of the [evils](#) which follow, when the Apostle has said in short, that the [widow](#), who lives in delights, living is dead. But far be it from you, that you be taken with [lust](#) of riches instead of [lust](#) of marriage, or that in your hearts money

succeed to the place of [love](#) of a husband. For looking into men's conversation, we have often found by experience, that in certain [persons](#), when wantonness has been restrained, [avarice](#) has increased. For, as, in the senses themselves of the body, they who see not hear more keenly, and discern many things by touch, nor have such as have the use of their eyes so great life in their touch; and in this instance it is understood that, when the exertion of the power of attention has been restrained in one approach, that is, of the eyes, it puts itself forth into other senses, more ready with keenness to distinguish, as though it essayed to supply from the one what was denied in the other; thus also often carnal [lust](#), being restrained from pleasure of sensual intercourse, with greater strength reaches itself forth to desire money, and when turned away from the one, turns itself with more glow of passion to the other. But in you let the [love](#) of riches grow cold together with the [love](#) of marriage, and let a [pious](#) use of what property you possess be directed to spiritual delights, that your liberality wax warm rather in helping such as are in want than in enriching [covetous persons](#). Forsooth into the heavenly treasury are sent not gifts to the [covetous](#), but [alms](#) to the needy, which above measure help the [prayers](#) of [widows](#). Fastings, also, and watchings, so far as they disturb not health, if they be spent in [praying](#), singing psalms, reading, and meditating in the Law of [God](#), even the very things which seem laborious are turned into spiritual delights. For no way burdensome are the labors of such as [love](#), but even of themselves delight, as of such as hunt, fowl, fish, gather grapes, traffic, delight themselves with some game. It matters therefore what be loved. For, in the case of what is loved, either there is no labor, or the labor also is loved. And consider how it should be matter for shame and grief, if there be pleasure in labor, to take a wild beast, to fill cask and purse, to cast a ball, and there be no pleasure in labors to win God!

27. Indeed in all spiritual delights, which unmarried [women](#) enjoy, their [holy](#) conversation ought also to be with caution; lest haply, though their life be not [evil](#) through haughtiness, their report be [evil](#) through negligence. Nor are they to be listened to, whether they be [holy](#) men or [women](#), when (upon occasion of their neglect in some matter being blamed, through which it comes to pass that they fall into [evil](#) suspicion, from which they [know](#) that their life is far removed) they say that it is enough for them their [conscience](#) before [God](#), despising what men think of them, not only imprudently but also cruelly; when they slay the [souls](#) of others; whether of such as [blaspheme](#) the way of [God](#), who following their suspicion are displeased at what is the chaste life of the Saints, as though it were shameful, or of such also as make excuse, and imitate, not what they see, but what they think. Wherefore whosoever guards his life from charges of shameful and [evil deeds](#), does good to himself; but whosoever guards his character too, is merciful also towards others. For unto ourselves our own life is necessary, unto others our character; and certainly even what we mercifully minister unto others, for their health, abounds also to our own profit. Whence not in vain the Apostle, "We provide [good](#) things," says he, "not only before [God](#), but also before men;" also he says, "Please ye all [men](#) through all things; even as I also please all [men](#) through all things, not seeking what is of profit unto myself, but what unto many, that they may be saved." Also in a certain exhortation he says, "For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things are [true](#), whatsoever things are [holy](#), whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are most dear, whatsoever things are of good report; if any [virtue](#), if any praise, these things think on, which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me." You see

how among many things, unto which by exhortation he admonished them, he neglected not to set, "whatsoever things are of good report;" and in two words included all things, where he says, "if any [virtue](#), if any praise." For unto [virtue](#) pertain the [good](#) things of which He made mention above; but good report unto praise. I think that the Apostle took not the praise of men for any great thing, saying in another place, "But to me it is the least thing, that I be judged of you, or of day of man;" and in another place, "If I were pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ;" and again, "For our [glory](#) is this, the testimony of our [conscience](#)." But of these two, that is, of a good life, and a good report, or as is said more shortly, of [virtue](#) and praise, the one for his own sake he most wisely kept, the other for the sake of others he most mercifully provided. But, forasmuch as human caution, how great soever, cannot on every side avoid most malevolent suspicions, when for our good report we shall have done whatever we rightly can, if any, either by [falsely](#) pretending [evil](#) things of us, or from believing [evil](#) of us, endeavor to stain our fair fame, let there be present the solace of [conscience](#), and clearly also the [joy](#), in that our reward is great in [Heaven](#), even when men say many [evil](#) things of us, and we yet live godly and righteously. For that reward is as the pay of such as serve as soldiers, through the arms of righteousness, not only on the right hand, but on the left also; that is to say, through [glory](#) and mean estate, through ill report and good report.

28. Go on therefore in your course, and run with perseverance, in order that you may obtain; and by pattern of life, and discourse of exhortation, carry away with you into this same your course, whomsoever you shall have had power. Let there not bend you from this earnest purpose, whereby ye excite many to follow, the complaint of vain [persons](#), who say, How shall the [human race](#) subsist, if all shall have been continent? As though it were for any other reason that this world is delayed, save that the [predestined](#) number of the Saints be fulfilled, and were this the sooner fulfilled, assuredly the end of the world would not be put off. Nor let it stay you from your earnest purpose of persuading others to the same good you have, if it be said to you, Whereas marriage also is [good](#), how shall there be all goods in the Body of [Christ](#), both the greater, forsooth, and the lesser, if all through praise and [love](#) of continence imitate? In the first place, because with the endeavor that all be continent, there will still be but few, for "not all receive this word." But forasmuch as it is written, "Whoso can receive, let him receive;" then do they receive who can, when silence is not kept even toward those who cannot. Next, neither ought we to [fear](#) lest haply all receive it, and some one of lesser goods, that is, married life, be wanting in the body of [Christ](#). For if all shall have heard, and all shall have received, we ought to understand that this very thing was [predestinated](#), that married goods already suffice in the number of those members which so many have passed out of this life. For neither now, if all shall have been continent, will they give the [honor](#) of the continent to those who have already borne into the garners of the Lord the fruit thirty-fold, if that be understood of married good. Therefore all these goods will have there their place, although from this time no [woman](#) wish to be married, no man wish to marry a wife. Therefore without anxiety urge on whom you can, to become what you are; and [pray](#) with watchfulness and fervor, that by the help of the Right Hand of the Most High, and by the abundance of the most merciful [grace](#) of the Lord, you may both persevere in that which you are, and may make advances unto that which you shall be.

29. Next I entreat you, by Him, from Whom you have both received this gift, and hope for the rewards of this gift, that you be mindful to set me also in your [prayers](#) with all your household Church. Forsooth it has come to pass in most proper order, that I should write unto your Mother now aged a letter concerning [prayer](#); unto her, forsooth, it chiefly pertains by [praying](#) to contend on your behalf, who is less full of care for herself than for you; and that for you rather than for her I should compose this little work concerning widowed continence; because unto you it remains to overcome, what her age has already overcome. But the [holy](#) virgin your child, if she desire anything concerning her profession from our labors, she has a large book on Holy Virginitie to read. Concerning the reading of which I had also admonished you, forasmuch as it contains many things necessary unto either [chastity](#), that is, virginal and widowed, which things on this account I have here partly touched on lightly, partly altogether passed over, because I there discussed them more fully.

May you persevere in the [grace](#) of [Christ](#).