

Review of “**On the Duties of the Clergy**” (Book 2), authored by St Ambrose, written between 377 and 391 AD.

Chapter 1 – Virtue and blessing

St Ambrose explains that a happy life is a virtuous life and that a blessed life is what Scripture calls, “eternal life”. St Ambrose uses an analogy of the moon and sun saying “and as the risen sun hides the glow of the moon and the light of the stars, so the brightness of a virtuous life, where it glitters in true pure glory, casts into the shade all other things”.

St Ambrose explains in addition to a virtuous life, a blessed life is a life which is “not valued at the estimation of outsiders”, but “known, as judge of itself, by its own inner feelings”. St Ambrose continues to say “it therefore belongs to a virtuous life to show mercy and to fast in secret”. As the Lord says to do good works in secret so only the Father knows, you will obtain your reward. But if you perform good works in front of men, the accolades that these men provide will be your only reward.

Chapter 2 – On happiness

In this chapter St Ambrose summarises the various theories on happiness.

St Ambrose mentions various philosophical schools of thought on the subject. St Ambrose explains the views of Hieronymus that freedom from pain constitutes happiness, the view of Herillus that knowledge is happiness, the view of Epicurus that pleasure is happiness and the views of Callipho and Diodorus in that happiness is the marriage of virtue and pleasure.

St Ambrose argues that the philosophers are incorrect and that the sacred Scriptures say that eternal life rests on a knowledge of divine things and the fruit of good works.

St Ambrose also touches on the fact that king David spoke of these things in the Psalms much earlier than the philosophers did in their dialogues.

Chapter 3 – On the blessed life

St Ambrose continues the discourse on blessedness from the previous chapter and concludes that knowledge alone does not achieve blessedness. St Ambrose references the Scriptures to argue that unlike the theories of the philosophers, virtue is “blessed in every circumstance” and that the philosopher's views are incorrect, saying that virtue is “never enhanced by either corporal or other external good fortune, nor is it weakened by adversity”.

St Ambrose continues in saying there is no higher blessing than for one who is free from sin. St Ambrose concludes the chapter from the excerpt from Scripture “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you for righteousness sake. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”. Therefore St Ambrose says that a blessed life can “rise up in the midst of pain”.

Chapter 4 – Blessedness, trials and adversity

St Ambrose continues to explore the notion in the previous chapter that there is blessedness in times of pain and grief.

St Ambrose uses the example from the time when Moses and the fleeing Israelites became stuck between the pursuing Egyptians and the sea. In this time of grief and impending doom, God provided the blessing that would allow the Israelites to cross the sea.

Another example that pertains to this notion is the story of Daniel, when he was thrown to the hungry lions. Despite this terror, Daniel was not afraid, but his trust was completely in the Lord, and the Lord provided his blessing over Daniel.

St Ambrose uses these above examples to demonstrate that “There is then, in pain a virtue that can display the sweetness of a good conscience, and therefore it serves as a proof that pain does not lessen the pleasure of virtue”.

St Ambrose concludes the chapter by exhorting that unlike pain, riches and pleasure do not give assistance to a blessed life. He concludes the chapter with an excerpt from Scripture, being “Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst now, for they shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh.” (Luke 6:20-21).

St Ambrose concludes that because of the above excerpt from the Gospel poverty, hunger and pain do not hinder blessedness, but indeed foster it.

Chapter 5 – Blessedness, trials and adversity II

St Ambrose continues to provide examples of blessedness being fostered in the face of suffering such as pain, terror and grief. St Ambrose uses the example of Naboth refusing to sell his father's vineyard. Despite being put to death by Ahab because of this, he was indeed blessed by the Lord.

St Ambrose identifies that some people believe that a blessed life is impossible in the body as it is subject to pain, weakness and frailty. But St Ambrose says “it is not a blessed thing to be in the midst of suffering; but is blessed to be victorious over it, and not be cowed by the power of temporal pain”.

St Ambrose continues to use other examples that support this notion as in the life of Issac, Job and king David.

Chapter 6 – Usefulness

After the first book, when St Ambrose was discussing what was virtuous and what was seemly, St Ambrose introduces in this chapter, the importance of what is useful.

St Ambrose says “I am speaking, not to merchants who are covetous from a desire to make gain, but to my children”. Therefore St Ambrose, considering the audience in mind, says “But we do not reckon usefulness by the value of any gain in money, but in acquiring godliness”.

St Ambrose explains the reason he is introducing the discourse on what is useful, “I wish to impress upon and impart to you, whom I have chosen for the service of the Lord; so that those things which have been already implanted and fixed in your minds and characters by habit and training may now be further unfolded to you by explanation and instruction”.

St Ambrose makes it clear that virtue, seemliness and what is justified are all useful, and what is useful is these three former embodiments.

Chapter 7 – Usefulness and virtue

St Ambrose begins this chapter by stating that there is a “close intercourse” between what is virtuous and useful, but the same thing is both “useful and virtuous”. St Ambrose explains that we must be examples and transcend common acts to those which are “more excellent” to demonstrate to others what is indeed useful.

St Ambrose explains that there is nothing so useful as to be loved and nothing so useless as not to be loved. St Ambrose explains to be hated is “simply fatal and all together deadly”. Therefore St Ambrose explains that we need to “try to get a place in other's affections through our calmness of mind and kindness of soul”. For he says that “For goodness is agreeable and pleasing to all, and there is nothing that so easily reaches human feelings”. St Ambrose goes on to say that when goodness is accompanied by gentleness, willingness, moderation, courtesy and honour “it is incredible how much all this tends to an increase of love”.

Chapter 8 – On good advice

St Ambrose explains that two things, love and confidence are what people determine to be commendable in use. St Ambrose explains that in addition to these two qualities, the ability to give good advice is also benefited by others.

St Ambrose explains that the giving of good advice cannot occur without the virtue of prudence and justice. St Ambrose says “who will put himself into the hands of a man whom he does not think to be more wise than himself who asks for advice? It is necessary therefore that he of whom advice is asked should be superior to him who asks it”.

St Ambrose says that the reason why justice and prudence is needed for advice giving is that “justice causes us to have no fear of deceit and prudence frees us from having any suspicions of error”.

St Ambrose concludes the chapter by referencing a pinnacle example of good advice giving from Scripture, being the story of king Solomon and the two mothers that both claimed a single child to be their own. (Kings 3:26).

Chapter 9 – Justice and prudence

In this brief chapter St Ambrose explains how justice and prudence are inseparable and are considered to be “the one special form of virtue...divided up”. St Ambrose synonymously interchanges prudence with wisdom in this chapter.

Chapter 10 – On good counsel

St Ambrose explains that despite trusting in “the most prudent man we can find” the “faithful counsel of a just man stands first and often has more weight than the great abilities of the wisest of men”. As mentioned in previous chapters if one connects prudence, justice and wisdom St Ambrose says “there will be great soundness in the advice given”.

St Ambrose again uses an example from the life of the wisest man in Scripture, the life of king

Solomon to demonstrate the advice of one who has these qualities.

St Ambrose touches on other examples in Scripture such as the good counsel that Daniel had as well as the counsel Joseph had under the Egyptians.

Chapter 11 – Prudence and good counsel

St Ambrose continues to make a point of how those who demonstrate prudence can be entrusted for advice. St Ambrose uses the examples of prudence in the lives of Moses, Joseph, Solomon and Daniel.

Chapter 12 – On who should give advice

.In this chapter St Ambrose discusses who is able to give advice. St Ambrose explains that one with prudence should be able to do so.

St Ambrose uses the analogy of a water fountain. “Who seeks for a spring in the mud?” “Who wants to drink from muddy water?”.

St Ambrose continues the fountain analogy by saying “And who will come to a man however well filled to give the best of advice who is nevertheless hard to approach? It goes with him as with a fountain whose waters are shut off”.

St Ambrose concludes the chapter by saying that if one gives advice whilst living a vicious life, that man by giving advice “pollutes the water at the source”.

Chapter 13 – The beauty of wisdom

In this chapter St Ambrose discusses the “beauty of wisdom”. St Ambrose explains “for it is more brilliant than the sun, and when compared with the stars far outshines any constellation. Night takes their light away in its train, but wickedness cannot overcome wisdom”. St Ambrose exhorts that wisdom “teacheth temperance and justice and virtue”.

Chapter 14 – Prudence and wisdom

St Ambrose explains how prudence works well in combination with all virtues. St Ambrose says that prudence does not go after the lucre of riches. St Ambrose believes that a wise man that does not pursue riches is a man worthy of praise.

Chapter 15 – Liberalism

St Ambrose discusses liberality in this chapter. St Ambrose explains that the love of people occurs when one shows liberality which is “neither too freely shown to those who are neither unsuitable, nor too sparingly bestowed upon the needy”.

St Ambrose explains that there are two forms of liberality. The first involves the giving freely of goods (money, food etc.) and the second being advice or counsel.

St Ambrose explains that the highest form of liberality is, “to redeem captives, to save them from the hands of their enemies, to snatch men from death, and , most of all, women from shame, to restore

children to their parents, parents to their children, and, to give back a citizen to his country”.

St Ambrose concludes the chapter by explaining that the liberality of providing goods is inferior to the liberality of providing advice or counsel. The former is finite and eventually depletes, but the latter is never exhausted, and the more it is provided, the more powerful it becomes.

Chapter 16 – Liberalism II

St Ambrose continues the discourse on giving, that is liberality. St Ambrose explains that with liberality, moderation and method are to be observed.

St Ambrose explains that amongst those who are needy, some are indeed greedy. To prevent giving to such an extent that entices and benefits this greedy faction, a method must be put in place to provide liberality to all those who are needy, fairly.

To demonstrate the above notion, St Ambrose recounts the story of Joseph. St Ambrose explains that Joseph could have been unreasonably liberal in giving all the wealth of Egypt away, but instead decided to sell the corn instead of being wasteful. If Joseph did not take this measure there would have been no grain for most of Egypt. St Ambrose mentions how Joseph set a general tax on the population of Egypt demonstrating that true liberality considers all that are needy, not just a select few.

Chapter 17 – On who should give advice II

St Ambrose consolidates on who is to give counsel or advice to another. “In order that he may offer himself as a pattern in all good works, in teaching, in trueness of character, in seriousness. Thus his words will be wholesome and irreproachable, his counsel useful his life virtuous, and his opinion seemly”. St Ambrose continues describing one who should give counsel, saying “He must have nothing dark, or deceptive, or false about him, to cast a shadow on his life and character, nothing wicked or evil to keep back those who want advice”.

Chapter 18 –Bad counsellors

In this short chapter St Ambrose provides an example of the harm that bad counsellors can do. St Ambrose uses the example from Scripture when king Rehoboam answered the Israelites on the question of labour. “He would add a burden to the yoke of his father, and change their lighter toils for harder”.(1 Kings 12:4). The people rebuked King Rehoboam and eventually the king had control of not even two of the ten tribes of Israel.

Chapter 19 – Benevolence

St Ambrose explains the importance of benevolence in that “we may preserve not only the government of affairs in general, but also the rights of individuals.” St Ambrose concludes this short chapter saying our speech should be sincere and sensible, and free from flattery.

Chapter 20 – Good relationships

In this chapter St Ambrose speaks of the importance of having relationships with good men. St Ambrose explains that these relationships particularly benefit the young, as the elders are able to provide the young with wisdom and counsel. St Ambrose demonstrates this type of relationship through the union of Moses and Joshua. St Ambrose points out other examples in Scripture such as that of Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Silas and Timothy and Titus. St Ambrose eloquently says

“Beautiful, therefore, is the union between old and young. The one to give witness, the other to give comfort, the one to give guidance, the other to give pleasure.”

Chapter 21 – Liberalism III

In this chapter St Ambrose discusses how one benefits from acts of favour and what the difference is between liberalism and wastefulness. St Ambrose says “the regard in which one is held is also very much enhanced when one rescues a poor man out of the hands of a powerful one, or saves a condemned criminal from death”. St Ambrose says that care must be taken so that acts of favour are not done for the sake of showing off, lest they “might inflict severer wounds whilst desiring to heal slighter ones”.

St Ambrose explains that “hospitality also serves to recommend many”. St Ambrose exhorts that the stranger should be “courteously received”. St Ambrose demonstrates how hospitable Abraham was, as he “watched at the door of his tent, so that no stranger by any chance might pass by”.

St Ambrose says “There are two kinds of free giving, one arising from liberality, the other from wasteful extravagance”.

Chapter 22 – On correct instruction

St Ambrose explains that our words of instruction must not arise out of “too great mildness or too great harshness”.

St Ambrose explains that some prefer to be too mild in their instruction so “as to appear to be good.” St Ambrose explains in this case “nothing feigned or false can be the form of true virtue”. St Ambrose provides the following analogy in that falsehood “at first it flourishes, then, as time goes on, like a floweret it fades and passes away”.

St Ambrose concludes the chapter with the example of falsehood from the life of king David's son Absalon from the second book of the prophet Samuel.

Chapter 23 – Greed and adulation

In this brief chapter St Ambrose explains that those who can easily be bought with money or who are “allured by adulation” cannot be faithful to others, let alone their congregation. St Ambrose eloquently says “For the former are ever ready to sell themselves, whilst the latter cannot put up with a hard rule”.

Chapter 24 – Beneficial ambition

St Ambrose says it is right to want to achieve a position of duty or office in the Church, provided it is want out of legitimacy and “right aim”. St Ambrose again exhorts that in office it is “not right to be harsh and severe, nor to be too easy”.

St Ambrose explains in this chapter that clergy should not become jealous of each other with respect to good works, achievement or of grace received. St Ambrose says “But it is seemly for a priest to show such favour in his kindness and his decisions, as to guard equity, and to show regard to the other clergy as parents”.

St Ambrose exhorts in this chapter that clergy, should not be disobedient to authority, the bishop. St

Ambrose says the rule of truth is “to do nothing to advance one's own cause whereby another loses ground, nor to use whatever good one has to the disgrace or blame of another”.

St Ambrose concludes this chapter by exhorting that the rich and poor alike should be treated justly and the rich should not be given any preferential treatment.

Chapter 25 – Showing charity to the rich and poor

St Ambrose explains the difference between providing charity to a rich man, and a poor man. St Ambrose explains that when you provide for a rich man, you will be repaid in full, as the rich man has monetary capacity to pay his debts. St Ambrose explains that when you provide for a poor man you “make the Lord to be your recompense”, as the Lord has “offered himself as surety for the poor”. St Ambrose goes on to say “for money is paid in coins, but gratitude never fails; money grows less by payment, but gratitude fails when held back, and is preserved when given to others”.

Chapter 26 – The danger of money

In this chapter St Ambrose shows us how dangerous the pursuit of money is. “But man's habits have so long applied themselves to this admiration of money, that no one is thought worthy of honour unless he is rich”.

St Ambrose uses plenty examples of Scripture to support this notion, through the lives of Joshua and the falling of Jericho, when Achan had taken a garment of gold and two hundred shekels, and Delilah's deceit of Samson for money.

Chapter 27 – The danger of money II

St Ambrose explains that the “contempt of riches is a form of justice”. St Ambrose exhorts those seeking office to “avoid love of money, and strive with all our powers never to do anything against justice, but to guard it in all our deeds and actions”. St Ambrose sees a bishop's clerics and attendants as one body, in that if one part needs treatment it is given treatment, if the part is unable to be treated it is “cut off by a good physician”.

Chapter 28 – On odium

St Ambrose begins this chapter by preaching “it is a very great incentive to mercy to share in other's misfortunes, to help the needs of others as far as our means allow, and sometimes even beyond them”.

St Ambrose discloses that he brought odium on himself by showing mercy to the poor and captive. St Ambrose tells us he sold the gold, sacred vessels belonging to the Church to redeem captives that otherwise would have been put to death.

St Ambrose tells us the story of St Lawrence and how he achieved martyrdom. St Lawrence was demanded of him, the gold of the Church, but instead of complying to the thief's wishes he pointed out to the poor and said “These are the treasures of the Church”. St Ambrose concludes “these treasures Lawrence pointed out, and prevailed, for the persecutors could not take them away”.

Chapter 29 – Trust money

In this chapter St Ambrose exhorts clerics to not abuse the Church's trust money, which in St Ambrose's day was kept for the widows and orphans who were part of the Church.

St Ambrose uses the following example from Scripture (2 Maccabees), when Simon told king Antiochus he could find trust money in large quantities in the temple of Jerusalem. The king sent Heliodorus to investigate the matter. When Heliodorus arrived in Jerusalem the high priest Onias put up resistance and God repelled Heliodorus.

St Ambrose uses another example that related to the Church of Ticinum of the time which was in danger of losing the widow's trust money that it had received.

St Ambrose exhorts the clergy by saying “Therefore my sons, good faith must be preserved in the case of trust money, and care too must be shown. Your service will glow the brighter if the oppression of a powerful man, which some widow or orphan cannot withstand, is checked by the assistance of the Church, and if ye show that the command of the Lord has more weight with you than the favour of the rich”.

Chapter 30 – Final exhortation and blessing

St Ambrose concludes book two on the 'duties of the clergy' by advising his audience to “avoid wicked men” and “guard against the envious”.

St Ambrose exhorts his listeners to “think before you act” and if the opportunity for a “praiseworthy death is given let it be seized at once” as opportunities of to obtain glory rarely occur.

St Ambrose concludes with the blessing “let there be peace among you, which passeth all understanding. Love one another. Nothing is sweeter than charity, nothing more blessed than peace. Ye yourselves know that I have ever loved you and do now love you above all others. As the children of one father ye have become united under the bond of brotherly affection”. “Amen”.