

St. Jerome

Servants' Meeting

7/26/15



Early Life

- Born in 347 in Stridon of ancient Dalmatia
- As a youth, he misbehaved often
 - Visited the theaters and chariot races
- “But idle though he certainly was, he was invariably to be seen at the law courts, listening to any celebrated case that was going on, following the pleaders eagerly with his eyes, and trying to make out for himself which were the weak points.”
- Initially skeptical of Christianity
- Started to grow tired of the amusements of Rome and the silliness and vulgar nature of his companions
- Baptized in 360-366



After Conversion

- Was terribly ashamed of his behavior as a youth
- To satisfy his conscience, he would on Sundays visit the tombs of the martyrs and Apostles in the catacombs because it would remind him of the terrors of hell:

“Often I would find myself entering those crypts, deep dug in the earth, with their walls on either side lined with the bodies of the dead, where everything was so dark that almost it seemed as though the Psalmist’s words were fulfilled, ‘Let them go down quick into Hell.’ Here and there the light, not entering in through windows, but filtering down from above through shafts, relieved the horror of the darkness. But again, as soon as you found yourself cautiously moving forward, the black night closed around and there came to my mind the line of Virgil, ‘On all sides round horror spread wide; the very silence breathed a terror on my soul’”

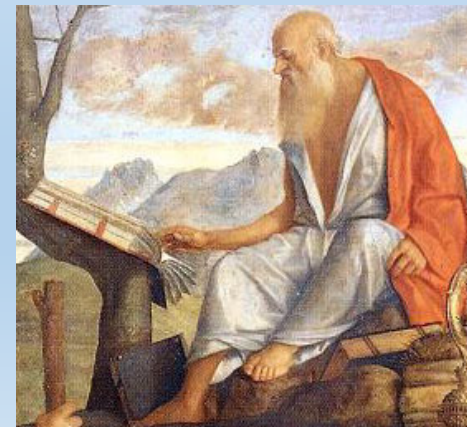
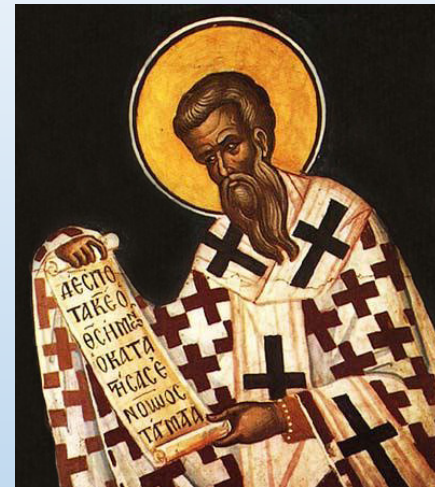
Changed Life

- In 373, set out on a journey through Asia Minor into northern Syria
- In Antioch, had a vision
- Taught and influenced by Bishop Apollinarius of Laodicea
- Developed a desire for a life of ascetic penance
- Returned to Antioch and was ordained a priest by Bishop Paulinus of Antioch:
 - Monastic practices would not be compromised
 - Priestly functions would not be forced upon him



Growing Fame

- Went to Constantinople to study Scripture under St. Gregory of Nazianzen (Gregory the Theologian)
- From 382-385, returned to Rome and served as secretary of Pope Damasus I
- Undertook a revision of the Latin Bible → Latin Vulgate
- During this time, was surrounded by a circle of well-born and well-educated women, including those of the noblest families
- He often criticized the indulgence of the secular clergy common in Rome



Leaves Rome

- Public opinion turns against St. Jerome:
 - Soon after Pope Damasus departed in 384, St. Jerome was forced to leave his position
 - Accused of an inappropriate relationship with Paula; plot by enemies
 - Blamed for the death of Blaesilla, Paula's daughter
 - Viewed as heartless
- Left Rome in 385 for Antioch, visited the Holy Land, and then Egypt
- Spent time at the Catechetical School of Alexandria
 - Listened to the preaching of St. Didymus the Blind
- Spent time in Wadi El Natrun: "city of the Lord"
- Settled in a hermit's cell near Bethlehem

Latter Years

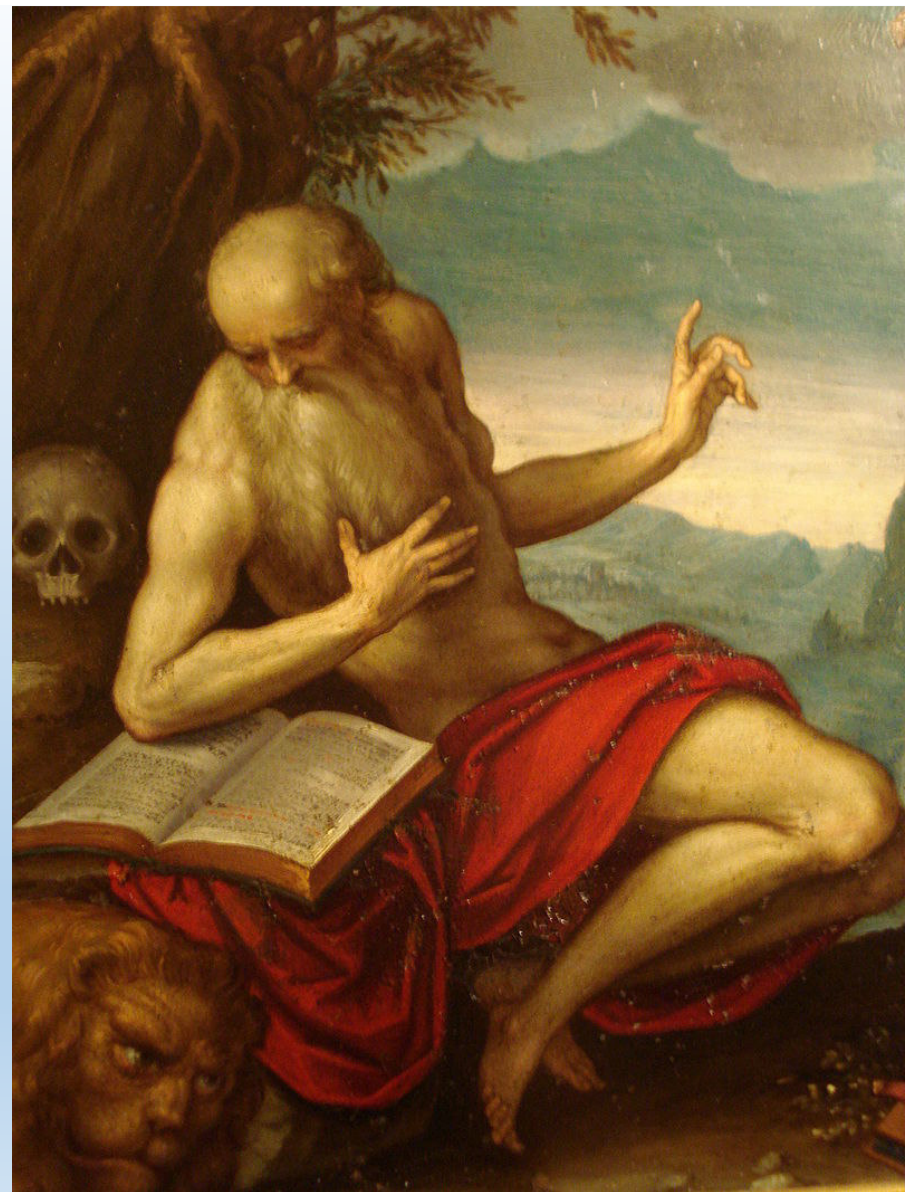
- Version of the Old Testament from original Hebrew
- Scriptural Commentaries
- Catalogue of Christian Authors
- Dialogue Against the Pelagians
- Treatises Against Origenism

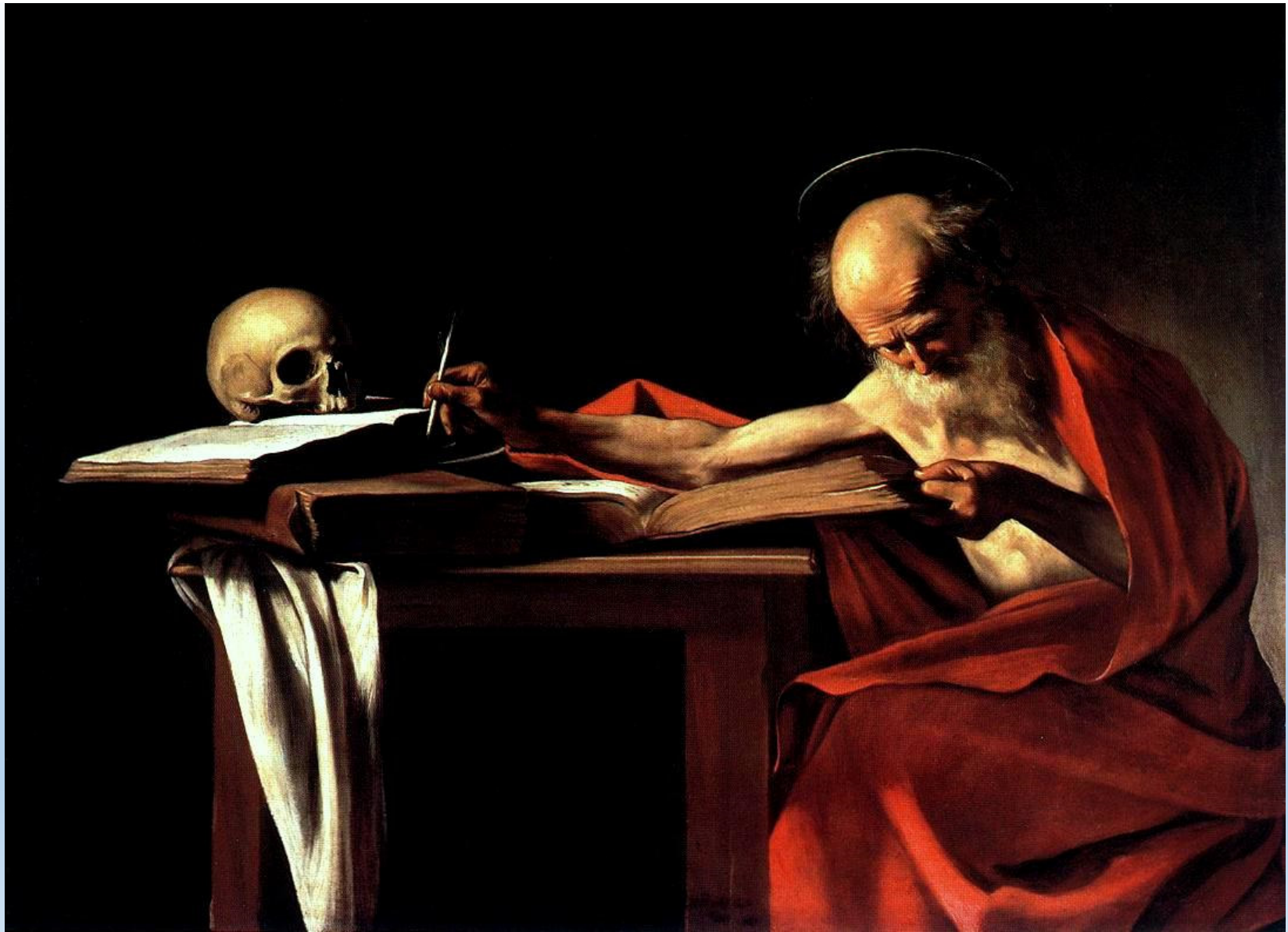
In Art

- Captured the imagination of Renaissance painters
- Often depicted as a tormented, praying ascetic
- Others depicted him wearing fine red clothes as a Cardinal
- Often depicted with any combination of four symbolic items:
 - Crucifix
 - Skull (symbolizes meditation on mortality)
 - Lion, lying down
 - Red cardinal's hat (anachronism)















Story of the Lion

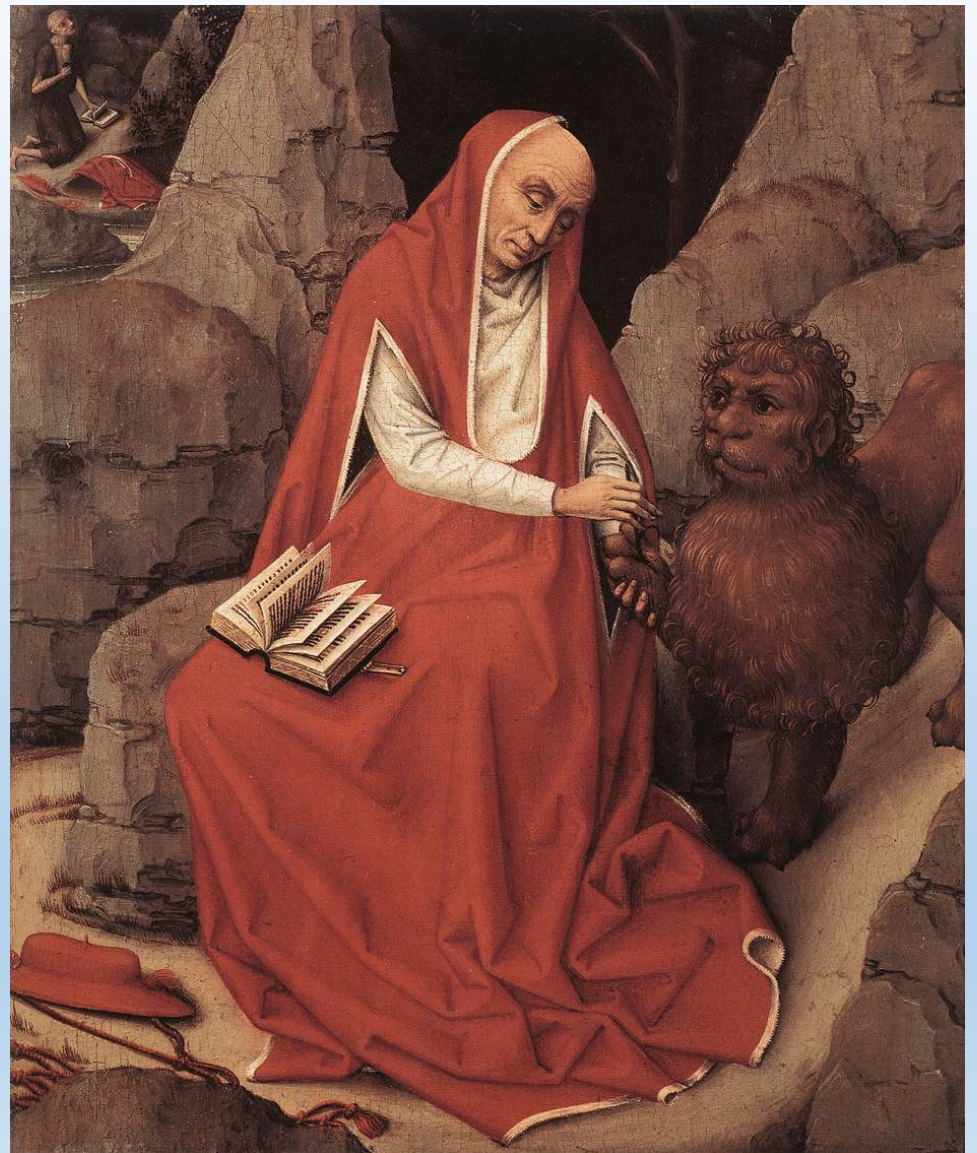
He was sitting—so runs the story—with some of his [28] monks in the cell of Bethlehem, when a lion entered the open door. The brethren all jumped up in a fright, and tumbled as fast as they could through the window, while Jerome stayed quietly in his chair and waited. The lion looked at him doubtfully for a moment, then limped towards him, holding up a paw. This Jerome took, and examined carefully. At first he could see nothing, the soft pad was so badly swollen; but at length he detected a thorn, near one of the nails, and managed to pull it out with a pair of pinchers.

Story of the Lion

He next boiled some water, in which he soaked some dried herbs, and bathed the sore place till the swelling began to go down, when he tied a linen rag round it, so that the dirt might not get in and inflame the wound afresh. As soon as he had finished, and the look of pain had disappeared from the lion's eyes, Jerome expected him to depart, but instead the huge beast stretched himself out comfortably on the floor. Jerome pointed to the door; the lion wagged his tail happily, and took no notice. This happened several times, till at last Jerome gave up the struggle and went to bed, the lion on the floor sleeping beside him.

Story of the Lion

Next morning Jerome said to this visitor: "You seem to intend to live for ever in my cell"—the lion wagged his tail again—"but learn that no one here spends his time in idleness. If you stay here, you must be ready to work"—the tail wagged a second time—"and you will therefore accompany my donkey daily to the forest to defend her from robbers and savage wolves, when she brings back the firewood needful for the monastery."



Legacy

- One of the great western (“Latin”) saints
- Great theologian, hermit, scholar, writer, translator, orator, historian
- He was so scholarly that he was actually admired and even envied by St. Augustine
- Considered one of the four great “doctors” of the Roman Catholic Church:
 - St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo
 - St. Gregory the Great (pope)
 - St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan
 - St. Jerome, priest and monk
- In the Eastern Orthodox Church, term is not used, but rather the Three Holy Hierarchs:
St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nazianzen



Legacy

Dictionary of Christian Biography:

“He was vain and unable to bear rivals, extremely sensitive as to the estimation in which he was held by his contemporaries, and especially by the Bishops; passionate and resentful, but at times becoming suddenly gentle; scornful and violent in controversy; kind to the weak and the poor; respectful in his dealings with women; entirely without greed; extraordinarily diligent in work, and nobly tenacious of the main objects to which he devoted his life.”

Works

- Latin Vulgate
- Translation of Hebrew Old Testament
- Numerous letters (over 140)
- Numerous Biblical Commentaries
- Books on Church History
- Histories of Saints
- Translations of Origen's homilies
- Treatises Against Corrupt Teaching or Behavior of his time:
 - Letter to Eustochium
 - Dialogue with a Pelagian

Writing Style

- Letters:
 - Special charm from being so personal
 - He himself, his correspondents, and the scenes in which they moved, are made to live before our eyes
 - His counsels and guidance are deeply rooted in ascetic practices

Letter to Eustochium

- Daughter of the widow Paula:

“How often, when I was living in the desert, in the vast solitude which gives to hermits a savage dwelling-place, parched by a burning sun, how often did I fancy myself among the pleasures of Rome! I used to sit alone because I was filled with bitterness. Sackcloth disfigured my unshapely limbs and my skin from long neglect had become as black as an Ethiopian’s. Tears and groans were every day my portion; and if drowsiness chanced to overcome my struggles against it, my bare bones, which hardly held together, clashed against the ground. Of my food and drink I say nothing: for, even in sickness, the solitaries have nothing but cold water, and to eat one’s food cooked is looked upon as self-indulgence.”

Letter to Eustochium

“Now, although in my fear of hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts, I often found myself amid bevvies of girls. My face was pale and my frame chilled with fasting; yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept bubbling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead. Helpless, I cast myself at the feet of Jesus, I watered them with my tears, I wiped them with my hair: and then I subdued my rebellious body with weeks of abstinence.”

Letter to Eustochium: Ascetic Practices

“Let your companions be women pale and thin with fasting, and approved by their years and conduct; such as daily sing in their hearts: ‘Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed your flock, Where you make it rest at noon,’ and say, with true earnestness, ‘I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ.’ Be subject to your parents, imitating the example of your spouse. Rarely go abroad, and if you wish to seek the aid of the martyrs seek it in your own chamber. For you will never need a pretext for going out if you always go out when there is need. Take food in moderation, and never overload your stomach. For many women, while temperate as regards wine, are intemperate in the use of food.”

Letter to Eustochium: Ascetic Practices

“When you rise at night to pray, let your breath be that of an empty and not that of an overfull stomach. Read often, learn all that you can. Let sleep overcome you, the roll still in your hands; when your head falls, let it be on the sacred page. Let your fasts be of daily occurrence and your refreshment such as avoids satiety. It is idle to carry an empty stomach if, in two or three days’ time, the fast is to be made up for by repletion. When cloyed the mind immediately grows sluggish, and when the ground is watered it puts forth the thorns of lust. If ever you feel the outward man sighing for the flower of youth, and if, as you lie on your couch after a meal, you are excited by the alluring train of sensual desires; then seize the shield of faith, for it alone can quench the fiery darts of the devil.”

Letter to Eustochium: Encouraging Virginity

“Like the ark of the covenant Christ’s spouse should be overlaid with gold within and without; she should be the guardian of the law of the Lord. Just as the ark contained nothing but the tables of the covenant, so in you there should be no thought of anything that is outside. For it pleases the Lord to sit in your mind as He once sat on the mercy-seat and the cherubims. As He sent His disciples to loose Him the foal of an ass that he might ride on it, so He sends them to release you from the cares of the world, that leaving the bricks and straw of Egypt, you may follow Him, the true Moses, through the wilderness and may enter the land of promise. Let no one dare to forbid you, neither mother nor sister nor kinswoman nor brother: “The Lord hath need of you.”

Letter to Eustochium: Encouraging Virginity

“Should they seek to hinder you, let them fear the scourges that fell on Pharaoh, who, because he would not let God’s people go that they might serve Him, suffered the plagues described in Scripture. Jesus entering into the temple cast out those things which belonged not to the temple. For God is jealous and will not allow the father’s house to be made a den of robbers. Where money is counted, where doves are sold, where simplicity is stifled where, that is, a virgin’s breast glows with cares of this world; straightway the veil of the temple is rent, the bridegroom rises in anger, he says: “Your house is left unto you desolate.”

Writing Style

- Polemical:
 - a strong written or spoken attack against someone else's opinions, beliefs, practices, etc.
 - the art or practice of using language to defend or harshly criticize something or someone
- Debate:
 - a discussion between people in which they express different opinions about something
 - might find common ground

Against Jovinianus

- He was an opponent of Christian asceticism
 - Was initially a monk, but turned against monastic asceticism
 - Was eventually condemned as a heretic
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1. That a virgin is no better, as such, than a wife in the sight of God.
 2. Abstinence from food is no better than a thankful partaking of food.
 3. A person baptized with the Spirit as well as with water cannot sin.
 4. All sins are equal.
 5. There is but one grade of punishment and one of reward in the future state.

Against Jovinianus

“The Apostle has described Jovinianus speaking with swelling cheeks and nicely balancing his inflated utterances, promising heavenly liberty, when he himself is the slave of vice and self-indulgence, a dog returning to his vomit. For although he boasts of being a monk, he has exchanged his dirty tunic, bare feet, common bread, and drink of water, for a snowy dress, sleek skin, honey-wine and dainty dishes, for the sauces of Apicius and Paxamus, for baths and rubbings, and for the cook-shops. Is it not clear that he prefers his belly to Christ, and thinks his ruddy complexion worth the kingdom of heaven?”

