

Sectus the Pythagorean

Select Sentences

Translated and annotated by Thomas Taylor

1. To neglect things of the smallest consequence, is not the least thing in human life.
2. The wise man, and the despiser of wealth, resembles God.
3. Do not investigate the name of God, because you will not find it. For every thing which is called by a name, receives its appellation from that which is more worthy than itself,¹ so that it is one person that calls, and another that hears. Who is it, therefore, that has given a name to God? God, however, is not a name to God, but an indication of what we conceive of Him.
4. God is a light incapable of receiving its contrary [darkness].
5. You have in yourself some thing similar to God, and therefore use yourself as the temple of God, on account of that which in you resembles God.
6. Honour God above all things, that He may rule over you.
7. Whatever you honour above all things, that which you so honour will have dominion over you. But if you give yourself to the domination of God, you will thus have dominion over all things.
8. The greatest honour which can be paid to God, is to know and imitate Him.
9. There is not any thing, indeed, which wholly resembles God; nevertheless the imitation of Him as much as possible by an inferior nature is grateful to Him.

¹ For as every cause of existence to a thing, is better than that thing, so far as the one is cause and the other effect; thus also that which gives a name to any thing is better than the thing named, so far as it is named, *i.e.*, so far as pertains to its possession of a name. For the nominator is the cause, and the name the effect.



10. God, indeed, is not in want of anything, but the wise man is in want of God alone. He, therefore, who is in want but of few things, and those necessary, emulates him who is in want of nothing.
11. Endeavour to be great in the estimation of Divinity, but among men avoid envy.
12. The wise man whose estimation with men was but small while he was living, will be renowned when he is dead.
13. Consider all the time to be lost to you in which you do not think of divinity.
14. A good intellect is the choir of divinity.
15. A bad intellect is the choir of evil dæmons.
16. Honour that which is just, on this very account that it is just.
17. You will not be concealed from divinity when you act unjustly, nor even when you think of doing so.
18. The foundation of piety is continence; but the summit of piety is the love of God.
19. Wish that what is expedient and not what is pleasing may happen to you.
20. Such as you wish your neighbour to be to you, such also be you to your neighbours.
21. That which God gives you, no one can take away.
22. Neither do nor even think of that which you are not willing God should know.
23. Before you do anything think of God, that his light may precede your energies.
24. The soul is illuminated by the recollection of deity.
25. The use of all animals as food is Indifferent, but it is more rational to abstain from them.
26. God is not the author of any evil.
27. You should not possess more than the use, of the body requires.
28. Possess those things which no one can take from you.
29. Bear that which is necessary, as it is necessary.
30. Ask those things of God which it is worthy of God to bestow.
31. The reason which is in you, is the light of your life.
32. Ask those things of God which you cannot receive from man.
33. Wish that those things which labour ought to precede, may be possessed by you after labour.
34. Be not anxious to please the multitude.
35. It is not proper to despise those things of which we shall be in want after the dissolution² of the body.

² In the Latin it is “post *dispositionem* corporis.” But for *dispositionem* it is evidently necessary to read *dissolutionem*.



36. You should not ask of divinity that which, when you have obtained, you will not perpetually possess.
37. Accustom your soul after it has conceived all that is great of divinity, to conceive something great of itself.
38. Esteem nothing so precious, which a bad man may take from you.
39. He is dear to divinity, who considers those things alone to be precious, which are esteemed to be so by divinity.
40. Every thing which is more than necessary to man, is hostile to him.
41. He who loves that which is not expedient, will not love that which is expedient.
42. The intellect of the wise man is always with divinity.
43. God dwells in the intellect of the wise man.
44. Every desire is insatiable, and therefore is always in want.
45. The wise man is always similar to himself.
46. The knowledge and imitation of divinity are alone sufficient to beatitude.
47. Use lying like poison.
48. Nothing is so peculiar to wisdom, as truth.
49. When you preside over men, remember that divinity also presides over you.
50. Be persuaded that the end of life is to live conformably to divinity.
51. Depraved affections are the beginning of sorrows.
52. An evil disposition is the disease of the soul; but injustice and impiety are the death of it.
53. Use all men in such a way, as if you were the common curator of all things after God.
54. He who uses mankind badly, uses himself badly.
55. Wish that you may be able to benefit your enemies.
56. Endure all things, in order that you may live conformably to God.
57. By honouring a wise man, you will honour yourself.
58. In all your actions place God before your eyes.³
59. You are permitted to refuse matrimony, in order that you may live incessantly adhering to God.⁴ If, however, as one knowing the battle, you are willing to fight, take a wife, and beget children.
60. To live, indeed, is not in our power, but to live rightly is.

³ This is conformable to the well-known Pythagoric precept, "Follow God."

⁴ "We can by no other means obtain the true end of a contemplative intellectual life than by *adhering* to God, if I may be allowed the expression, as if fastened by a nail, at the same time being torn away and separated from body and corporeal delights; having procured safety from our deeds, and not from the mere attention to words." (Porphyry: *De Abstinen.* lib. I, 57)



61. Be unwilling to admit accusations against the man who is studious of wisdom.
62. If you wish to live with hilarity, be unwilling to do many things. For in a multitude of actions you will be minor.
63. Every cup should be sweet to you which extinguishes thirst.
64. Fly from intoxication as you would from insanity.
65. No good originates from the body.
66. Think that you suffer a great punishment when you obtain the object of corporeal desire; for the attainment of such objects never satisfies desire.
67. Invoke God as a witness to whatever you do.
68. The bad man does not think there is a providence.
69. Assert that which possesses wisdom in you to be the [true] man.⁵
70. The wise man participates of God.
71. Where that which is wise in you resides, there also is your good.
72. That which is not noxious to the soul, is not noxious to man.
73. He who unjustly expels a wise man from the body, confers a benefit on him by his iniquity. For he thus becomes liberated, as it were, from bones.
74. The fear of death renders a man sad through the ignorance of his soul.
75. You will not possess intellect, till you understand that you have it.
76. Think that your body is the garment of your soul; and therefore preserve it pure.
77. Impure dæmons vindicate to themselves the impure soul.
78. Speak not of God to every man.
79. It is dangerous and the danger is not small, to speak of God even things which are true.
80. A true assertion respecting God is an assertion of God.
81. You should not dare to speak of God to the multitude.
82. He does not know God who does not worship Him.
83. The man who is worthy of God is also a God among men.
84. It is better to have nothing, than to possess much and impart it to no one.
85. He who thinks that there is a God, and that nothing is taken care of by him, differs in no respect from him who does not believe that there is a God.
86. He honours God in the best manner who renders his intellect as much as possible similar to God.
87. If you injure no one, you will fear no one.

⁵ But intellect is the recipient of wisdom, and therefore intellect is the true man. This is also asserted by Aristotle.



88. No one is wise who looks downward to the earth.
89. To lie is to deceive in life, and to be deceived.
90. Recognise what God is, and what that is in you which recognises God.
91. It is not death, but a bad life, that destroys the soul.
92. If you know him by whom you were made, you will know yourself.
93. It is not possible for a man to live conformable to divinity, unless he acts modestly, well, and justly.
94. Divine Wisdom is true Science.
95. You should not dare to speak of God to an impure soul.
96. The wise man follows God, and God follows the soul of the wise man.
97. A king rejoices in those whom he governs, and therefore God rejoices in the wise man. He who governs likewise, is inseparable from those whom he governs; and therefore God is inseparable from the soul of the wise man, which he defends and governs.
98. The wise man is governed by God and on this account is blessed.
99. A scientific knowledge of God causes a man to use few words.
100. To use many words when speaking of God, produces an ignorance of God.
101. The man who possesses a knowledge of God, will not be very ambitious.
102. The erudite,⁶ chaste, and wise soul, is the prophet of the truth of God.
103. Accustom yourself always to look to Divinity.
104. A wise intellect is the mirror of God.



⁶ In the Latin *fidelis*; but as Ruffinus, the Latin translator of these sentences, frequently adulates the true meaning of Sextus, by substituting one word for another, I have no doubt that in this sentence the original was *πεπαιδευμενος eruditus*, and not *πιστος fidelis*. My reason for so thinking is, that in one of the sentences of Demophilus it is said, “that the life of *ignorant* men is a disgrace,” *των αμαθων ονειδος ειναι τον βιον*; and this in the sentences of Sextus is, “*Hominum infidelium vita, opprobrium est.*” If, therefore, Ruffinus translates *αμαθων infidelium*, there is every reason to suppose that he would translate *πεπαιδευμενος, fidelis*.

