

Florilegium of Johannes Stobaeus
Pythagorean Ethics



LIVING THE LIFE SERIES
PYTHAGOREAN ETHICS

From *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras and Other Pythagorean Fragments*. Selected and arranged by Florence M Firth¹ Crotona, Hollywood, CA: Theosophical Publishing House, 1904. Frontispiece: Pythagoras teaching music (detail from Raphael's School of Athens)

1. Do not even think of doing what ought not to be done.
2. Choose rather to be strong in soul than in body.
3. Be persuaded that things of a laborious nature contribute more than pleasures to virtue.
4. Every passion of the soul is most hostile to its salvation.
5. It is difficult to walk at one and the same time many paths of life. [46]
6. Pythagoras said, it is requisite to choose the most excellent life; for custom will make it pleasant. Wealth is an infirm anchor, glory is still more infirm; and in a similar manner, the body, dominion, and honour. For all these are imbecile and powerless. What then are powerful anchors? Prudence, magnanimity, fortitude. These no tempest can shake. This is the Law of God, that virtue is the only thing that is strong; and that everything else is a trifle.
7. All the parts of human life, in the same manner as those of a statue, ought to be beautiful.
8. Frankincense ought to be given to the Gods, but praise to good men.
9. It is requisite to defend those who are unjustly accused of having acted injuriously, but to praise those who excel in a certain good.
10. Neither will the horse be adjudged to be generous, that is sumptuously adorned, but the horse whose nature is illustrious; nor is the man worthy who possesses great wealth, but he whose soul is generous.
11. When the wise man opens his mouth, the beauties of his soul present themselves [47] to the view, like the statues in a temple
12. Remind yourself that all men assert that wisdom is the greatest good, but that there are few who strenuously endeavour to obtain this greatest good.
13. Be sober, and remember to be disposed to believe; for these are the nerves of wisdom.
14. It is better to live lying on the grass, confiding in Divinity and yourself, than to lie on a golden bed with perturbation.

¹ [From Florence M. Firth's Preface, Bradford, November 1904:]

"Both Hall's translation from the Greek (1657), and Rowe's translation from the French of André Dacier (1707), have been used in reproducing the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, but Dacier's version has been almost exclusively followed, being clearer and more intelligible. [vi] *The Golden Sentences of Democritus*, the *Similitudes of Demophilus*, and *Pythagorean Symbols* are from Bridgman's translation, and are to be found in his little book, *Translations from the Greek*, published in 1804. *The Pythagorean Sentences of Demophilus*, translated by Taylor, are contained in that volume also. . . . The remaining sets of verses, translated by Taylor, are appended by him to his Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras, published in 1818."

15. You will not be in want of anything, which it is in the power of fortune to give and take away.¹
16. Despise all those things which when liberated from the body you will not want; invoke the Gods to become your helpers.
17. Neither is it possible to conceal fire in a garment, nor a base deviation from rectitude in time.
18. Wind indeed increases fire, but custom love.
19. Those alone are dear to Divinity who are hostile to injustice. [48]
20. Those things which the body necessarily requires, are easily to be procured by all men, without labour and molestation; but those things to the attainment of which labour and molestation are requisite, are objects of desire, not to the body, but to depraved opinion.
21. Of desire also, he [Pythagoras] said as follows: — This passion is various, laborious, and very multiform. Of desires, however, some are acquired and adventitious, but others are connascent. But he defined desire itself to be a certain tendency and impulse of the soul, and an appetite of a plentitude or presence of sense, or an emptiness and absence of it, and of non-perception. He also said, that there are three most known species of erroneous and depraved desire, viz., the indecorous, the incommensurate, and the unseasonable. For desire is either immediately indecorous, troublesome, and illiberal, or it is not absolutely so, but is more vehement and lasting than is fit. Or in the third place, it is impelled when it is not proper, and to objects to which it ought not to tend.
22. Endeavour not to conceal your errors [49] by words, but to remedy them by reproof.
23. It is not so difficult to err, as not to reprove him who errs.
24. As a bodily disease cannot be healed, if it be concealed, or praised, thus also, neither can a remedy be applied to a diseased soul, which is badly guarded and protected.
25. The grace of freedom of speech, like beauty in season, is productive of greater delight.
26. It is not proper either to have a blunt sword or to use freedom of speech ineffectually.
27. Neither is the sun to be taken from the world nor freedom of speech from erudition.
28. As it is possible for one who is clothed with a sordid robe, to have a good habit of body; thus also he whose life is poor may possess freedom of speech.
29. Be rather delighted with those that reprove, than with those that flatter you; but avoid flatterers, as worse than enemies.

¹ Hence the dogma of the Stoics derived its origin, that the wise man is independent of fortune.

30. The life of the avaricious resembles a funeral banquet. For though it has all things requisite to a feast, yet no one present rejoices. [50]
31. Acquire continence as the greatest strength and wealth.
32. "Not frequently man from man," is one of the exhortations of Pythagoras; by which he obscurely signifies, that it is not proper to be frequently engaged in venereal connexions.
33. It is impossible that he can be free who is a slave to his passions.
34. Pythagoras said, that intoxication is the meditation of insanity.
35. Pythagoras being asked, how a lover of wine might be cured of intoxication, answered, if he frequently surveys what his actions were when he was intoxicated.
36. Pythagoras said, that it was requisite either to be silent, or to say something better than silence.
37. Let it be more eligible to you to throw a stone in vain, than to utter an idle word.
38. Do not say a few things in many words, but much in a few words.
39. Genius is to men either a good or an evil dæmon.
40. Pythagoras being asked how a man ought to conduct himself towards his country, [51] when it had acted iniquitously with respect to him, replied, as to a mother.
41. Travelling teaches a man frugality, and the way in which he may be sufficient to himself. For bread made of milk and flour, and a bed of grass, are the sweetest remedies of hunger and labour.
42. To the wise man every land is eligible as a place of residence; for the whole world is the country of the worthy soul.
43. Pythagoras said that luxury entered into cities in the first place, afterwards satiety, then lascivious insolence, and after all these, destruction.
44. Pythagoras said, that of cities that was the best which contained most worthy men.
45. Do those things which you judge to be beautiful, though in doing them you should be without renown. For the rabble is a bad judge of a good thing. Despise, therefore, the reprehension of those whose praise you despise.
46. Those that do not punish bad men, wish that good men may be injured.
47. It is not possible for a horse to be [52] governed without bridle, nor riches without prudence.
48. It is the same thing to think greatly of yourself in prosperity, as to contend in the race in a slippery road.
49. There is not any gate of wealth so secure, which the opportunity of fortune may not open.
50. Expel by reasoning the unrestrained grief of a torpid soul.
51. It is the province of the wise man to bear poverty with equanimity.

52. Spare your life, lest you consume it with sorrow and care.

53. Nor will I be silent as to this particular, that it appeared both to Plato and Pythagoras, that old age was not to be considered with reference to an egress from the present life, but to the beginning of a blessed life.

54. The ancient theologians and priests testify that the soul is conjoined to the body through a certain punishment, and, that it is buried in this body as in a sepulchre.

55. Whatever we see when awake is death; and when asleep, a dream.

