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The Sentences of Sextus

Translated by Frederik Wisse

(157) [...] is a sign of ignorance.

(158/159) Love the truth, and the lie use like poison.

(160) May the right time precede your words.

(161/162) Speak when it is not proper to be silent, but speak concerning the things you know (only) then when it is fitting.

(163a) The untimely word is characteristic of an evil mind.

(163b) When it is proper to act, do not use a word.

(164a) Do not wish to speak first in the midst of a crowd.

(164b) While it is a skill to speak, it is also a skill to be silent.

(165a) It is better for you to be defeated while speaking the truth, than to be victorious through deceit.

(165b) He who is victorious through deceit is defeated by the truth.

(165c) Untrue words are a characteristic of evil persons.

(165d) There has to be a great crisis before the lie is necessary.

(165e) When there is someone, while you speak the truth, even if you lie there is no sin.

(165f) Do not deceive anyone, especially him who needs advice.

(166) Faithful is he who is first with all good works.

(167) Wisdom leads the soul to the place of God.

(168) There is no kinsman of the truth except wisdom.

(169) It is not possible for a believing nature to become fond of lying.

- (170) A fearful and slavish nature will not be able to partake in faith.
- (171a) When you are faithful, what it is fitting to say is not of greater value than the hearing.
- (171b) When you are with believing persons, desire to listen rather than to speak.
- (172) A pleasure-loving man is useless in everything.
- (173) When there is no (accounting of) sin, do not speak in anything (which is) from God.
- (174) The sins of those who are ignorant are the shame of those who have taught them.
- (175) Those on account of whom the name of God is blasphemed are dead before God.
- (176) A wise man is a doer of good works after God.
- (177) May your life confirm your words before those who hear.
- (178) What it is not right to do, do not even consider doing it.
- (179) What you do not want to happen to you, do not do it yourself either.
- (180) What it is shameful to do, is also ...

(pp. 17-26 are missing)

- (307/308) He is a wise man who commends God to men, and God thinks more highly of the wise man than his own works.
- (309) After God, no one is as free as the wise man.
- (310) Everything God possesses, the wise man has also.
- (311/312) The wise man shares in the kingdom of God; an evil man does not want the foreknowledge of God to come to pass.
- (313) An evil soul flees from God.
- (314) Everything bad is the enemy of God.
- (315) What thinks in you, say with your mind that it is man.
- (316) Where your thought is, there is your goodness.
- (317) Do not seek goodness in flesh.
- (318) He who does not harm the soul neither does (so) to man.
- (319) After God, honor a wise man, since he is the servant of God.

- (320) To make the body of your soul a burden is pride, but to be able to restrain it gently when it is necessary, is blessedness.
- (321) Do not become guilty of your own death. Do not be angry at him who will take you out of (the) body and kill you.
- (322) If someone brings the wise man out of the body wickedly, he rather does what is good for him, for he has been released from bonds.
- (323) The fear of death grieves man because of the ignorance of the soul.
- (324) <It were better> for you had the man-killing sword not come into being; but when it comes, say with your mind that it does not exist.
- (325/326a) Someone who says "I believe," even if he spends a long time pretending, he will not prevail, but he will fall; as your heart is, (so) will be your life.
- (326b) A godly heart produces a blessed life.
- (327) He who will plot evil against another, he is the first [...].
- (328) Let not an ungrateful man cause you to cease to do good.
- (329) Do not say with your mind that these things which were asked, (and) you gave immediately, are more valuable than the receiver.
- (330) You will use great property, if you give to the needy willingly.
- (331) Persuade a senseless brother not to be senseless; if he is mad, protect him.
- (332/334) Strive eagerly to be victorious over every man in prudence; maintain self-sufficiency.
- (333) You cannot receive understanding unless you know first that you possess <it>. In everything there is again this sentence.
- (335) The members of the body are a burden to those who do not use them.
- (336) It is better to serve others than to make others serve you.
- (337) He whom God will not bring out of (the) body, let him not burden himself.
- (338) Not only do not hold an opinion which does not benefit the needy, but also do not listen to it.
- (339) He who gives something without respect commits an outrage. [...].
- (340) If you take on the guardianship of orphans, you will be the father of many children (and) you will be beloved of God.
- (341) He whom you serve because of honor, you have served for a wage.

(342) If you have given that which honors you ..., you have given not to man, but you have given for your own pleasure.

(343/344) Do not provoke the anger of a mob. Know, then, what is fitting for the fortunate man to do.

(345) It is better to die than to darken the soul because of the immoderation of the belly.

(346) Say with your mind that the body is the garment of your soul: keep it, therefore, pure since it is innocent.

(347) Whatever the soul will do while it is in (the) body, it has as witnesses when it goes into judgment.

(348/349) Unclean demons do lay claim to a polluted soul; a faithful (and) good soul, evil demons will not be able to hinder in the way of God.

(350) Do not give the word of God to everyone.

(351) For those who are corrupted by glory it is not assuring to hear about God.

(352/353) It is not a small danger for us to speak the truth about God; do not say anything about God before you have learned from God.

(354/356) Do not speak with a godless person about God; if you are polluted on account of impure works, do not speak about God.

(357) The true word about God is the word of God.

(355) Speak concerning the word about God as if you were saying it in the presence of God.

(358) If first your mind is persuaded that you have been god-loving, then speak to whomever you wish about God.

(359) May your pious works precede every word about God.

(360) Do not wish to speak with a crowd about God.

(361) Be (more) sparing with a word about God (than) about a soul.

(362) It is better to dispose of a soul than to discard at random a word about God.

(363a) You conceive the body of a god-loving man, but you will not be able to rule over his speech.

(363b) The lion also rules over the body of the wise man; also the tyrant rules over it alone.

(364) If a tyrant threatens you, then, especially, remember God.

(365) He who speaks the word of God to those for whom it is not lawful, he is the betrayer of God.

(366) It is better for you to be silent about the word of God, than to speak recklessly.

(367/368) He who speaks lies about God is lying to God; a man who does not have anything truthful to say about God is abandoned by God.

(369) It is not possible for you to know God when you do not worship him.

(370) A man who does evil to someone will not be able to worship God.

(371) The love of man is the beginning of godliness.

(372) He who takes care of men while praying for all of them - this is the truth of God.

(373/374) It is God`s business to save whom he wants; on the other hand, it is the business of the pious man to beseech God to save everyone.

(375) When you pray for something and it happens to you through God, then say with your mind that you have [...].

(376a) A man who is worthy of God, he is God among men, and he is the son of God.

(376b) Both the great one exists and he who is next to the great one exists.

(377/378) It is better for man to be without anything than to have many things while not giving to the needy; so also you, if you pray to God, he will not give to you.

(379) If you, from your whole heart, give your bread to the hungry, the gift is small, but the willingness is great with God.

(380) He who thinks that no one is in the presence of God, he is not humble towards God.

(381) He who makes his mind like unto God as far as he is able, he is the one who honors God greatly.

(382) God does not need anything, but he rejoices over those who give to the needy.

(383) The faithful do not speak many words, but their works are numerous.

(384) It is a faithful person fond of learning who is the worker of the truth.

(385) Adjust [...] the calamities, in order that [...].

(386) If you do not do evil to anyone, you will not be afraid of anyone.

(387) The tyrant will not be able to take away happiness.

(388) What is right to do, do it willingly.

(389a) What is not right to do, do not do it in any way.

(389b) Promise everything rather than to say "I am wise".

(390) What you do well, say with your mind that it is God who does it.

(391) No man who <looks> down upon the earth and upon tables is wise.

(392) The philosopher who is an outer body, he is not the one to whom it is fitting to pay respect, but (the) philosopher according to the inner man.

(393) Guard yourself from lying; there is he who deceives and there is he who is deceived.

(394/395) Know who God is, and know who is the one who thinks in you; a good man is the good work of God.

(396) They are miserable because of whom the word is blasphemed.

(397) Death will not be able to destroy [...].

(pp. 35-end are missing)

Selection made from James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990.