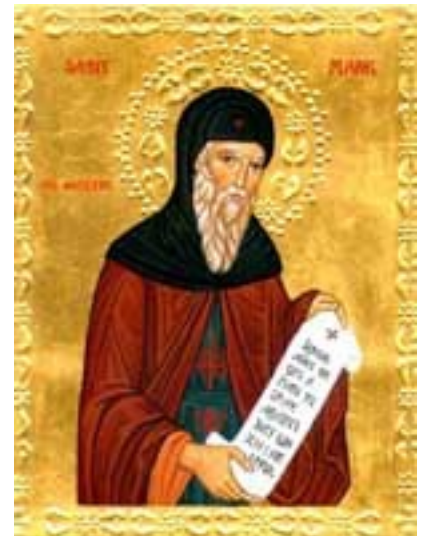


St. Mark the Ascetic

On Those who Think that They are Made Righteous by Works Two Hundred and Twenty Six Texts

1. In the texts which follow, the beliefs of those in error will be refuted by those whose faith is well founded and who know the truth.
2. Wishing to show that to fulfill every commandment is a duty, whereas sonship is a gift given to men through His own Blood, the Lord said: 'When you have done all that is commanded you, say: "We are useless servants: we have only done what was our duty" ' (Luke 17:10). Thus the kingdom of heaven is not a reward for works, but a gift of grace prepared by the Master for his faithful servants
3. A slave does not demand his freedom as a reward: but he gives satisfaction as one who is in debt, and he receives freedom as a gift.
4. 'Christ died on account of our sins in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3); and to those who serve Him well He gives freedom. 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' He says, 'you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your Lord' (Matt. 25:21).
5. He who relies on theoretical knowledge alone is not yet a faithful servant: a faithful servant is one who expresses his faith in Christ through obedience to His commandments.
6. He who honors the Lord does what the Lord bids. When he sins or is disobedient, he patiently accepts what comes as something he deserves.
7. If you love true knowledge, devote yourself to the ascetic life; for mere theoretical knowledge puffs a man up (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1).
8. Unexpected trials are sent by God to teach us to practice the ascetic life; and they lead us to repentance even when we are reluctant.
9. Afflictions that come to us are the result of our own sins. But if we accept them patiently through prayer, we shall again find blessings.
10. Some people when praised for their virtue are delighted, and attribute this pleasurable feeling of self-esteem to grace. Others when reprov'd for their sins are pained, and they mistake this beneficial pain for the action of sin.
11. Those who, because of the rigor of their own ascetic practice, despise the less zealous, think that they are made righteous by physical works. But we are even more foolish if we rely on theoretical knowledge and disparage the ignorant.
12. Even though knowledge is true, it is still not firmly established if unaccompanied by works. For everything is established by being put into practice.
13. Often our knowledge becomes darkened because we fail to put things into practice. For when we have totally neglected to practice something, our memory of it will gradually disappear.



14. For this reason Scripture urges us to acquire the knowledge of God, so that through our works we may serve Him rightly.
15. When we fulfill the commandments in our outward actions, we receive from the Lord what is appropriate; but any real benefit we gain depends on our inward intention.
16. If we want to do something but cannot, then before God, who knows our hearts, it is as if we have done it. This is true whether the intended action is good or bad.
17. The intellect does many good and bad things without the body, whereas the body can do neither good nor evil without the intellect. This is because the law of freedom applies to what happens before we act.
18. Some without fulfilling the commandments think that they possess true faith. Others fulfill the commandments and then expect the kingdom as a reward due to them. Both are mistaken.
19. A master is under no obligation to reward his slaves; on the other hand, those who do not serve him well are not given their freedom.
20. If 'Christ died on our account in accordance with the Scriptures' (Rom. 5: 8; 1 Cor. 15:3), and we do not 'live for ourselves', but 'for Him who died and rose' on our account (2 Cor. 5:15), it is clear that we are debtors to Christ to serve Him till our death. How then can we regard sonship as something which is our due? from nothing, and through His own Blood redeems him when dead in sin: and to those who believe in Him He has given His grace.
22. When Scripture says 'He will reward every man according to his works' (Matt. 16: 27), do not imagine that works in themselves merit either hell or the kingdom. On the contrary, Christ rewards each man according to whether his works are done with faith or without faith in Himself; and He is not a dealer bound by contract, but God our Creator and Redeemer.
23. We who have received baptism offer good works, not by way of repayment, but to preserve the purity given to
24. Every good work which we perform through our own natural powers causes us to refrain from the corresponding sin: but without grace it cannot contribute to our sanctification.
25. The self-controlled refrain from gluttony; those who have renounced possessions, from greed; the tranquil, from loquacity; the pure, from self-indulgence; the modest, from unchastity: the self-dependent, from avarice: the gentle, from agitation; the humble, from self-esteem; the obedient, from quarreling; the self-critical, from hypocrisy. Similarly, those who pray are protected from despair: the poor, from having many possessions: confessors of the faith, from its denial: martyrs, from idolatry. Do you see how every virtue that is performed even to the point of death is nothing other than refraining from sin? Now to refrain from sin is a work within our own natural powers, but not something that buys us the kingdom.
26. While man can scarcely keep what belongs to him by nature, Christ gives the grace of sonship through the Cross.
27. Certain commandments are specific, and others are comprehensive. Thus Christ enjoins us specifically to 'share with him who has none' (Luke 3:11); and He gives us a comprehensive command to forsake all that we have (cf. Luke 14:33).

28. There is an energy of grace not understood by beginners, and there is also an energy of evil which resembles the truth. It is advisable not to scrutinize these energies too closely, because one may be led astray, and not to condemn them out of hand, because they may contain some truth, but we should lay everything before God in hope, for He knows what is of value in both of them.

29. He who wants to cross the spiritual sea is long-suffering, humble, vigilant and self-controlled. If he impetuously embarks on it without these four virtues, he agitates his heart, but cannot cross.

30. Stillness helps us by making evil inoperative.' If it also takes to itself these four virtues in prayer, it is the most direct support in attaining dispassion.

31. The intellect cannot be still unless the body is still also: and the wall between them cannot be demolished without stillness and prayer.

32. The flesh with its desire is opposed to the spirit, and the spirit opposed to the flesh, and those who live in the spirit will not carry out the desire of the flesh (cf Gal. 5:15-17).

33. There is no perfect prayer unless the intellect invokes God: and when our thought cries aloud without distraction, the Lord will listen.

34. When the intellect prays without distraction it afflicts the heart: and 'a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise' (Ps. 51:17).

35. Prayer is called a virtue, but in reality it is the mother of the virtues: for it gives birth to them through union with Christ.

36. Whatever we do without prayer and without hope in God turns out afterwards to be harmful and defective.

37. Christ's words that the 'first will be last, and the last will be first' (Matt. 19:30) refer to those who participate in the virtues and those who participate in love. For love is the last of the virtues to be born in the heart, but it is the first in value, so that those born before it turn out to be 'the last'.

38. If you are listless when you pray or afflicted by various forms of evil, call to mind your death and the torments of hell. But it is better to cleave to God through hope and prayer than to think about external things, even though such thoughts may be helpful.

39. No single virtue by itself opens the door of our nature: but all the virtues must be linked together in the correct sequence.

40. He whose mind teems with thoughts lacks self-control; and even when they are beneficial, hope is more so.

41. There is a sin which is always 'unto death' (1 John 5: 16): the sin for which we do not repent. For this sin even a saint's prayers will not be heard.

42. He who repents rightly does not imagine that it is his own effort which cancels his former sins; but through this effort he makes his peace with God.

43. If we are under an obligation to perform daily all the good actions of which our nature is capable, what do we have left over to give to God in repayment for our past sins?

44. However great our virtuous actions of today, they do not requite but condemn our past negligence.
45. He who suffers affliction in his intellect but relaxes physically is like one who suffers affliction in his body while allowing his intellect to be dispersed.
46. Voluntary affliction in one of these parts of our nature benefits the other: to suffer affliction with the mind benefits the flesh, and to suffer it with the flesh benefits the mind. When our mind and flesh are not in union, our state deteriorates.
47. It is a great virtue to accept patiently whatever comes and, as the Lord enjoins, to love a neighbor who hates you.
48. The sign of sincere love is to forgive wrongs done to us. It was with such love that the Lord loved the world.
49. We cannot with all our heart forgive someone who does us wrong unless we possess real knowledge. For this knowledge shows us that we deserve all we experience.
50. You will lose nothing of what you have renounced for the Lord's sake. For in its own time it will return to you greatly multiplied.
51. When the intellect forgets the purpose of true devotion, then external works of virtue bring no profit.
52. If poor judgment is harmful to everyone, it is particularly so to those who live with great strictness.
53. Philosophize through your works about man's will and God's retribution. For your words are only as wise and as profitable as your works.
54. Those who suffer for the sake of true devotion receive help. This must be learnt through obeying God's law and our own conscience.
55. One man received a thought and accepted it without examination. Another received a thought and tested its truth. Which of them acted with greater reverence?
56. Real knowledge is patiently to accept affliction and not to blame others for our own misfortunes.
57. He who does something good and expects a reward is serving not God but his own will.
58. A sinner cannot escape retribution except through repentance appropriate to his offense.
59. There are those who claim that we cannot do good unless we actively receive the grace of the Spirit.
60. Those who always by choice incline to sensual pleasures refrain from doing what lies within their power on the grounds that they lack-help.
61. Grace has been given mystically to those who have been baptized into Christ: and it becomes active within them to the extent that they actively observe the commandments.

Grace never ceases to help us secretly: but to do good- as far as lies in our power -depends on us.

62. Initially grace arouses the conscience in a divine manner. That is how even sinners have come to repent and so to conform to God's will.

63. Again, grace may be hidden in advice given by a neighbor. Sometimes it also accompanies our understanding during reading, and as a natural result teaches our intellect the truth about itself. If, then, we do not hide the talent given to us in this way, we shall enter actively into the joy of the Lord.

64. He who seeks the energies of the Spirit, before he has actively observed the commandments, is like someone who sells himself into slavery and who, as soon as he is bought, asks to be given his freedom while still keeping his purchase money.

65. When you have found that external events come to you through God's justice, then in your search for the Lord you have found 'spiritual knowledge and justice' (cf. Prov. 16:8. LXX).

66. Once you recognize that the Lord's judgments 'are in all the earth' (1 Chr. 16:14), then everything that happens to you will teach you knowledge of God.

67. Everyone receives what he deserves in accordance with his inner state. But only God understands the many different ways in which this happens.

68. When you suffer some dishonor from men, recognize at once the glory that will be given you by God. Then you will not be saddened or upset by the dishonor; and when you receive the glory you will remain steadfast and innocent.

69. When God allows you to be praised, do not become boastful on account of this divine providence, lest you then fall into dishonor.

70. A seed will not grow without earth and water; and a man will not develop without voluntary suffering and divine help.

71. Rain cannot fall without a cloud, and we cannot please God without a good conscience.

72. Do not refuse to learn, even though you may be very intelligent. For what God provides has more value than our own intelligence.

73. When through some sensual pleasure the heart is deflected from the ascetic way, it becomes difficult to control, like a heavy stone dislodged on steep ground.

74. Like a young calf which, in its search for grazing, finds itself on a ledge surrounded by precipices, the soul is gradually led astray by its thoughts.

75. When the intellect, having grown to full maturity in the Lord, wrenches the soul from long-continued prepossession, the heart suffers torments as if on the rack, since intellect and passion drag it in opposite directions.

76. Just as sailors, in the hope of gain, gladly endure the burning heat of the sun, so those who hate wickedness gladly accept reproof. For the former contend with the winds, the latter with passions.

77. Just as flight in winter or on the Sabbath day (cf Matt. 24: 20) brings suffering to the flesh and defilement to the soul, so too does resurgence of the passions in an aged body and a consecrated soul.
78. No one is as good and merciful as the Lord. But even He does not forgive the unrepentant.
79. Many of us feel remorse for our sins, yet we gladly accept their causes.
80. A mole burrowing in the earth is blind and cannot see the stars; and he who does not trust God in temporal things will not trust Him in eternal things.
81. Real knowledge has been given to men by God as a grace preceding the fullness of grace; it teaches those who partake of it to believe above all in the Giver.
82. When a sinful soul does not accept the afflictions that come to it, the angels say: 'We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed' (Jer. 51:9)
83. When an intellect forgets real knowledge, it fights with men for harmful things as though they were helpful.
84. Fire cannot last long in water, nor can a shameful thought in a heart that loves God. For every man who loves God suffers gladly, and voluntary suffering is by nature the enemy of sensual pleasure.
85. A passion which we allow to grow active within us through our own choice afterwards forces itself upon us against our will.
86. We have a love for the causes of involuntary thoughts, and that is why they come. In the case of voluntary thoughts we clearly have a love not only for the causes but also for the objects with which they are concerned.
87. Presumption and boastfulness are causes of blasphemy. Avarice and self-esteem are causes of cruelty and hypocrisy.
88. When the devil sees that our intellect has prayed from the heart, he makes a powerful attack with subtle temptations; but he does not bother to destroy the lesser virtues by such powerful attacks.
89. When a thought lingers within a man, this indicates his attachment to it; but when it is quickly destroyed, this signifies his opposition and hostility to it.
90. The intellect changes from one to another of three different noetic states; that according to nature, above nature, and contrary to nature. When it enters the state according to nature, it finds that it is itself the cause of evil thoughts, and confesses its sins to God, clearly understanding the causes of the passions. When it is in the state contrary to nature, it forgets God's justice and fights with men, believing itself unjustly treated. But when it is raised to the state above nature, it finds the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace and the other fruits of which the Apostle speaks (cf. Gal. 5:22); and it knows that if it gives priority to bodily cares it cannot remain in this state. An intellect that departs from this state falls into sin and all the terrible consequences of sin - if not immediately, then in due time, as God's justice shall decide.
91. Each man's knowledge is genuine to the extent that it is confirmed by gentleness, humility and love.

92. Everyone baptized in the orthodox manner has received mystically the fullness of grace; but he becomes conscious of this grace only to the extent that he actively observes the commandments.
93. If we fulfill Christ's commandments according to our conscience, we are spiritually refreshed to the extent that we suffer in our heart. But each thing comes to us at the right time.
94. Pray persistently about everything, and then you will never do anything without God's help.
95. Nothing is stronger than prayer in its action, nothing more effective in winning God's favor.
96. Prayer comprises the complete fulfillment of the commandments; for there is nothing higher than love for God.
97. Undistracted prayer is a sign of love for God; but careless or distracted prayer is a sign of love for pleasure.
98. He who can without strain keep vigil, be long-suffering and pray is manifestly a partaker of the Holy Spirit. But he who feels strain while doing these things, yet willingly endures it, also quickly receives help.
99. One commandment is higher than another; consequently one level of faith is more firmly founded than another.
100. There is faith 'that comes by hearing' (Rom. 10:17) and there is faith that 'is the substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11:1).
101. It is good to help enquirers with words; but it is better to co-operate with them through prayer and the practice of virtue. For he who through these offers himself to God, helps his neighbor through helping himself.
102. If you want with a few words to benefit one who is eager to learn, speak to him about prayer, right faith, and the patient acceptance of what comes. For all else that is good is found through these.
103. Once we have entrusted our hope about something to God, we no longer quarrel with our neighbor over it.
104. If, as Scripture teaches, everything involuntary has its cause in what is voluntary, man has no greater enemy than himself
105. The first among all evils is ignorance; next comes lack of faith.
106. Escape from temptation through patience and prayer. If you oppose temptation without these, it only attacks you more strongly.
107. He who is gentle in God's sight is wiser than the wise; and he who is humble in heart is stronger than the strong. For they bear the yoke of Christ with spiritual knowledge.
108. Everything we say or do without prayer afterwards turns out to be unreliable or harmful, and so shows us up without our realizing it.

109. One alone is righteous in works, words and thoughts. But many are made righteous in faith, grace and repentance.

110. One who is repentant cannot be haughty, just as one who sins deliberately cannot be humble-minded.

111. Humility consists, not in condemning our conscience, but in recognizing God's grace and compassion.

112. What a house is to the air, the spiritual intellect is to divine grace. The more you get rid of materiality, the more the air and grace will come in of their own accord; and the more you increase materiality, the more they will go away.

113. Materiality in the case of a house consists of furnishings and food. Materiality in the case of the intellect is self-esteem and sensual pleasure.

114. Ample room in the heart denotes hope in God; congestion denotes bodily care.

115. The grace of the Spirit is one and unchanging, but energizes in each one of us as He wills (cf 1 Cor. 12:11).

116. When rain falls upon the earth, it gives life to the quality inherent in each plant: sweetness in the sweet, astringency in the astringent; similarly, when grace falls upon the hearts of the faithful, it gives to each the energies appropriate to the different virtues without itself changing.

117. To him who hungers after Christ grace is food; to him who is thirsty, a reviving drink; to him who is cold, a garment; to him who is weary, rest; to him who prays, assurance; to him who mourns, consolation.

118. When you hear Scripture saying of the Holy Spirit that He 'rested upon each' of the Apostles (Acts 2:3), or 'came upon' the Prophet (1 Sam. 11:6), or 'energizes' (1 Cor. 12:11), or is 'grieved' (Eph. 4:30), or is 'quenched' (1 Thess. 5:19), or is 'vexed' (Isa. 63:10), and again, that some 'have the first fruits' (Rom. 8:23), and that others are 'filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:4), do not suppose that the Spirit is subject to some kind of division, variation or change: but be sure that, in the way we have described. He is unvarying, unchanging and all-powerful. Therefore in all His energies He remains what He is, and in a divine manner He gives to each person what is needful. On those who have been baptized He pours Himself out in His fullness like the sun. Each of us is illumined by Him to the extent to which we hate the passions that darken us and get rid of them. But in so far as we have a love for them and dwell on them, we remain in darkness.

119. He who hates the passions gets rid of their causes. But he who is attracted by their causes is attacked by the passions even though he does not wish it.

120. When evil thoughts become active within us, we should blame ourselves and not ancestral sin.

121. The roots of evil thoughts are the obvious vices, which we keep trying to justify in our words and actions.

122. We cannot entertain a passion in our mind unless we have a love for its causes.

123. For what man, who cares nothing about being put to shame, entertains thoughts of self-esteem? Or who welcomes contempt and yet is disturbed by dishonor? And who has 'a broken and a contrite heart' (Ps. 51:17) and yet indulges in carnal pleasure? Or who puts his trust in Christ and yet worries or quarrels about transitory things?

124. If a man is treated with contempt by someone and yet does not react with anger in either word or thought, it shows he has acquired real knowledge and firm faith in the Lord.

125. 'The sons of men are false, and cheat with their scales' (Ps. 62:9. LXX), but God assigns to each what is just.

126. If the criminal will not keep his gains for ever and his victim will not always suffer want, 'surely man passes like a shadow and troubles himself in vain' (Ps. 39:6. LXX).

127. When you see someone suffering great dishonor, you may be sure that he was carried away by thoughts of self-esteem and is now reaping, much to his disgust, the harvest from the seeds which he sowed in his heart.

128. He who enjoys bodily pleasures beyond the proper limit will pay for the excess a hundredfold in sufferings.

129. A man exercising authority should tell his subordinate his duty; and, if disobeyed, should warn him of the evil consequences.

130. He who suffers wrong and does not demand any reparation from the man who wronged him, trusts in Christ to make good the loss; and he is rewarded a hundredfold in this world and inherits eternal life (cf Mark 10:30).

131. The remembrance of God is suffering of heart endured in a spirit of devotion. But he who forgets God becomes self-indulgent and insensitive.

132. Do not say that a dispassionate man cannot suffer affliction: for even if he does not suffer on his own account, he is under a liability to do so for his neighbor.

133. When the enemy has booked against a man many forgotten sins, he forces his debtor to recall them in memory, taking full advantage of 'the law of sin' (cf. Rom. 8: 2).

134. If you wish to remember God unceasingly, do not reject as undeserved what happens to you, but patiently accept it as your due. For patient acceptance of whatever happens kindles the remembrance of God, whereas refusal to accept weakens the spiritual purpose of the heart and so makes it forgetful.

135. If you want your sins to be 'covered' by the Lord (cf. Ps. 32:1), do not display your virtues to others. For whatever we do with our virtues, God will also do with our sins.

136. Having hidden your virtue, do not be filled with pride, imagining you have achieved righteousness. For righteousness is not only to hide your good actions, but also never to think forbidden thoughts.

137. Rejoice, not when you do good to someone, but when you endure without rancor the hostility that follows. For just as night follows day, so acts of malice follow acts of kindness.

138. Acts of kindness and generosity are spoilt by self-esteem, meanness and pleasure, unless these have first been destroyed by fear of God.

139. The mercy of God is hidden in sufferings not of our choice, and if we accept such sufferings patiently, they bring us to repentance and deliver us from everlasting punishment.

140. Some, when they actively observe the commandments, expect this to outweigh their sins; others, who observe the commandments without this presumption, gain the grace of Him who died on account of our sins. We should consider which of these is right.

141. Fear of hell and love for God's kingdom enable us patiently to accept affliction; and this they do, not by themselves, but through Him who knows our thoughts.

142. He who believes in the blessings of the world to come abstains of his own accord from the pleasures of this present world. But he who lacks such faith becomes pleasure-loving and insensitive.

143. Do not ask how a poor man can be self-indulgent when he lacks the material means. For it is possible to be self-indulgent in a yet more despicable way through one's thoughts.

144. Knowledge of created beings is one thing, and knowledge of the divine truth is another. The second surpasses the first just as the sun outshines the moon.

145. Knowledge of created beings increases the more we observe the commandments actively: but knowledge of the truth grows the more we hope in Christ.

146. If you wish to be saved and 'to come unto the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4), endeavor always to transcend sensible things, and through hope alone to cleave to God. Then you will find principalities and powers fighting against you (cf Eph. 6:12), deflecting you against your will and provoking you to sin. But if you prevail over them through prayer and maintain your hope, you will receive God's grace, and this will deliver you from the wrath to come.

147. If you understand what is said in a mystical sense by St Paul, that 'we wrestle . . . against spiritual wickedness' (Eph. 6:12), you will also understand the parable of the Lord, which He spoke 'to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to lose heart' (Luke 18:1).

148. The Law figuratively commands men to work for six days and on the seventh to rest (cf. Exod. 20:9-10). The term 'work' when applied to the soul signifies acts of kindness and generosity by means of our possessions - that is, through material things. But the soul's rest and repose is to sell everything and 'give to the poor' (Matt. 19:21), as Christ Himself said: so through its lack of possessions it will rest from its work and devote itself to spiritual hope. Such is the rest into which Paul also exhorts us to enter, saying: 'Let us strive therefore to enter into that rest' (Heb. 4:11).

149. In saying this we are not forgetting the blessings of the life to come or limiting the universal reward to the present life. We are simply affirming that it is necessary in the first place to have the grace of the Holy Spirit energizing the heart and so, in proportion to this energizing, to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Lord made this clear in saying: 'The kingdom, of heaven is within you' (cf. Luke 17:21). The Apostle, too, said the same: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11:1): 'Run, that you may reach your goal' (1 Cor. 9:24); 'Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith. . . . Do you not know . . . that Jesus Christ is in you unless you are worthless' (2 Cor. 13:5).

150. He who has come to know the truth does not oppose the afflictions that befall him, for he knows that they lead him to the fear of God.

151. To recall past sins in detail inflicts injury on the man who hopes in God. For when such recollection brings remorse it deprives him of hope; but if he pictures the sins to himself without remorse, they pollute him again with the old defilement.

152. When the intellect through rejection of the passions attains to unwavering hope, then the enemy makes it visualize its past sins on the pretext of confessing them to God. Thus he tries to rekindle passions which by God's grace have been forgotten, and so secretly to inflict injury. Then, even though someone is illumined and hates the passions, he will inevitably be filled with darkness and confusion at the memory of what he has done. But if he is still befogged and self-indulgent, he will certainly dally with the enemy's provocations and entertain them under the influence of passion, so that this recollection will prove to be a prepossession and not a confession.

153. If you wish to make a blameless confession to God do not go over your failings in detail, but firmly resist their renewed attacks.

154. Trials come upon us because of our former sins, bringing what is appropriate to each offense.

155. The man who possesses spiritual knowledge and understands the truth confesses to God, not by recalling what he has done, but by accepting patiently what comes.

156. If you refuse to accept suffering and dishonor, do not claim to be in a state of repentance because of your other virtues. For self-esteem and insensitivity can serve sin even under the cover of virtue.

157. Just as suffering and dishonor usually give birth to virtues, so pleasure and self-esteem usually give birth to vices.

158. All bodily pleasure results from previous laxity, and laxity results from lack of faith.

159. He who is under the power of sin cannot by himself prevail over the will of the flesh, because he suffers continual stimulation in all his members.

160. Those who are under the sway of passions must pray and be obedient. For even when they receive help, they can only just manage to fight against their prepossessions.

161. He who tries to conquer his own will by means of obedience and prayer is following a wise ascetic method. His renunciation of external things indicates his inward struggle.

162. He who does not make his will agree with God is tripped up by his own schemes and falls into the hands of his enemies.

163. When you see two evil men befriending one another, you may be sure that each is co-operating with the other's desires.

164. The haughty and the conceited gladly agree together; for the haughty man praises the conceited man who fawns on him in a servile manner, while the conceited man extols the haughty man who continually praises him.

165. The man who loves God benefits from both praise and blame: if commended for his good actions he grows more zealous, and if reproved for his sins he is brought to repentance. Our outward life should accord with our inner progress, and our prayers to God with our life.

166. It is good to hold fast to the principal commandment, and not to be anxious about particular things or to pray for them specifically, but to seek only the kingdom and the word of God (cf Matt. 6: 25-33). If, however, we are still anxious about our particular needs, we should also pray for each of them. He who does or plans anything without prayer will not succeed in the end. And this is what the Lord meant when He said; 'Without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).

167. If a man disregards the commandment about prayer, he then commits worse acts of disobedience, each one handing him over to the next like a prisoner.

168. He who accepts present afflictions in the expectation of future blessings has found knowledge of the truth; and he will easily be freed from anger and remorse.

169. He who chooses maltreatment and dishonor for the sake of truth is walking on the apostolic path: he has taken up the cross and is bound in chains (cf Matt. 16: 24: Acts 28:20). But when he tries to concentrate his attention on the heart without accepting these two, his intellect wanders from the path and he falls into the temptations and snares of the devil.

170. In our ascetic warfare we can neither rid ourselves of evil thoughts apart from their causes, nor of their causes without ridding ourselves of the thoughts. For if we reject the one without the other, before long the other will involve us in them both at once.

171. He who fights against others out of fear of hardship or reproach will either suffer more harshly through what befalls him in this life, or will be punished mercilessly in the life to come.

172. He who wishes to be spared all misfortunes should associate God with everything through prayer: with his intellect he should set his hope in Him, putting aside, so far as possible, all concern about things of the senses.

173. When the devil finds someone preoccupied needlessly with bodily things, he first deprives him of the hard-won fruits of spiritual knowledge, and then cuts off his hope in God.

174. If you should ever reach the stronghold of pure prayer, do not accept the knowledge of created things which is presented to you at that moment by the enemy, lest you lose what is greater. For it is better to shoot at him from above with the arrows of prayer, cooped up as he is down below, than to parley with him as he offers us the knowledge he has plundered, and tries to tear us away from this prayer which defeats him.

175. Knowledge of created things helps a man at a time of temptation and listlessness: but at a time of pure prayer it is usually harmful.

176. If it is your task to give spiritual instruction and you are disobeyed, grieve inwardly but do not be outwardly upset. For if you grieve, you will not share the guilt of the person who disobeys you: but if you are upset you will be tested by the same temptations as he is.

177. When you are explaining things, do not conceal what is relevant to the needs of those present. You should discuss explicitly whatever is seemly, but refer less explicitly to what is hard to accept.

178. If someone is not under obedience to you, do not rebuke him to his face for his faults. For that would imply you have authority over him, and are not just giving advice.

179. What is said without explicit reference to individuals is helpful to all, for each applies it to himself according to his own conscience.

180. He who speaks rightly should recognize that he receives the words from God. For the truth belongs not to him who speaks, but to God who is energizing him.

181. Do not argue with people not under obedience to you when they oppose the truth; otherwise you may arouse their hatred.

182. If you give way when someone who is under obedience to you wrongly contradicts you, you lead him astray over the point at issue and also encourage him to repudiate his promise of obedience.

183. He who with fear of God admonishes or corrects a man who has sinned, gains the virtue that is opposite to that sin. But he who reproaches him out of rancor and ill will becomes subject to a similar passion, according to the spiritual law.

184. He who has learned the law properly fears the Lawgiver and, fearing Him, he turns away from every evil.

185. Do not be double-tongued, saying one thing when your conscience says another. For Scripture places such people under a curse (cf. Eccles. 28:13).

186. One man speaks the truth and is hated for it by the foolish: another speaks hypocritically and for this reason is loved. But in both cases their reward is not long delayed, for at the appropriate moment the Lord renders to each his due.

187. He who wishes to avoid future troubles should endure his present troubles gladly. For in this way, balancing the one against the other, through small sufferings he will avoid those which are great.

188. Guard your speech from boasting and your thoughts from presumption: otherwise you may be abandoned by God and fall into sin. For man cannot do anything good without the help of God, who sees everything.

189. God, who sees everything, rewards at their proper value not only our actions but also our voluntary thoughts and purposes.

190. Involuntary thoughts arise from previous sin; voluntary ones from our free will. Thus the latter are the cause of the former.

191. Evil thoughts which arise against our will are accompanied by remorse, and so they soon disappear; but when they are freely chosen, they are accompanied by pleasure, and so they are hard to get rid of.

192. The self-indulgent are distressed by criticism and hardship; those who love God by praise and luxury.

193. He who does not understand God's judgments walks on a ridge like a knife-edge and is easily unbalanced by every puff of wind. When praised, he exults; when criticized, he feels bitter. When he feasts, he makes a pig of himself; and when he suffers hardship, he moans and groans. When he understands, he shows off; and when he does not understand, he pretends that he does. When rich, he is boastful; and when in poverty, he plays the hypocrite. Gorged, he grows brazen; and when he fasts, he becomes arrogant. He quarrels with those who reprove him; and those who forgive him he regards as fools.

194. Unless a man acquires, through the grace of Christ, knowledge of the truth and fear of God, he is gravely wounded not only by the passions but also by the things that happen to him.

195. When you want to resolve a complex problem, seek God's will in the matter, and you will find a constructive solution.

196. When something accords with God's will, all creation aids it. But when God rejects something, creation too opposes it.

197. He who opposes unpleasant events opposes the command of God unwittingly. But when someone accepts them with real knowledge, he 'waits patiently for the Lord' (Ps. 27; 14).

198. When tested by some trial you should try to find out not why or through whom it came, but only how to endure it gratefully, without distress or rancor.

199. Another man's sin does not increase our own, unless we ourselves embrace it by means of evil thoughts.

200. If it is not easy to find anyone conforming to God's will who has not been put to the test, we ought to thank God for everything that happens to us.

201. If Peter had not failed to catch anything during the night's fishing (cf Luke 5:5), he would not have caught anything during the day. And if Paul had not suffered physical blindness (cf Acts 9:8), he would not have been given spiritual sight. And if Stephen had not been slandered as a blasphemer, he would not have seen the heavens opened and have looked on God (cf Acts 6:15; 7:56).

202. As work according to God is called virtue, so unexpected affliction is called a test.

203. God 'tested Abraham' (cf. Gen. 22:1-14), that is, God afflicted him for his own benefit, not in order to learn what kind of man Abraham was - for He knew him, since He knows all things before they come into existence - but in order to provide him with opportunities for showing perfect faith.

204. Every affliction tests our will, showing whether it is inclined to good or evil. This is why an unforeseen affliction is called a test, because it enables a man to test his hidden desires.

205. The fear of God compels us to fight against evil; and when we fight against evil, the grace of God destroys it.

206. Wisdom is not only to perceive the natural consequence of things, but also to accept as our due the malice of those who wrong us. People who go no further than the first kind of wisdom become proud, whereas those who attain the second become humble.

207. If you do not want evil thoughts to be active within you, accept humiliation of soul and affliction of the flesh; and this not just on particular occasions, but always, everywhere and in all things.

208. He who willingly accepts chastening by affliction is not dominated by evil thoughts against his will; whereas he who does not accept affliction is taken prisoner by evil thoughts, even though he resists them.

209. When you are wronged and your heart and feelings are hardened, do not be distressed, for this has happened providentially; but be glad and reject the thoughts that arise within you, knowing that if they are destroyed at the stage when they are only provocations, their evil consequences will be cut off, whereas if the thoughts persist the evil may be expected to develop.

210. Without contrition of the heart, it is altogether impossible to rid ourselves of evil. Now the heart is made contrite by threefold self-control: in sleep, in food and in bodily relaxation. For excess of these three things leads to self-indulgence: and this in turn makes us accept evil thoughts, and is opposed to prayer and to appropriate work.

211. If it is your duty to give orders to your brethren, be mindful of your role and, when they contradict you, do not fail to tell them what is necessary. When they obey you, you will be rewarded because of their virtue; but when they disobey you, you will none the less forgive them, and will equally be rewarded by Him who said: 'Forgive and it shall be forgiven you' (cf Matt. 6:14).

212. Every event is like a bazaar. He who knows how to bargain makes a good profit, he who does not makes a loss.

213. If someone does not obey you when you have told him once, do not argue and try to compel him; but take for yourself the profit which he has thrown away. For forbearance will benefit you more than correcting him.

214. When the evil conduct of one person begins to affect others, you should not show long-suffering; and instead of your own advantage you should seek that of the others, so that they may be saved. For virtue involving many people is more valuable than virtue involving only one.

215. If a man falls into some sin and does not feel remorse for his offence as he should, he will easily fall into the same net again.

216. Just as a lioness does not make friends with a calf, so impudence does not gladly admit the remorse that accords with God's will.

217. Just as a sheep does not mate with a wolf, so suffering of the heart does not couple with satiety for the conception of virtues.

218. No one can experience suffering and remorse in a way that accords with God's will, unless he first loves what causes them.

219. Fear of God and reproof induce remorse; hardship and vigils make us intimate with suffering.

220. He who does not learn from the commandments and warnings of Scripture will be driven by 'the horse's whip' and 'the ass's goad' (cf. Prov. 26:3. LXX). And if he refuses to obey these as well, his 'mouth must be controlled with bit and bridle' (Ps. 32:9).

221. He who is easily overcome by the lesser will inevitably be enslaved by the greater. But he who is superior to the lesser will also with the Lord's help resist the greater.

222. When someone boasts about his virtues, do not try to help him by reproving him. For a man cannot love showing off and at the same time love the truth.

223. Every word of Christ shows us God's mercy, justice and wisdom and, if we listen gladly, their power enters into us. That is why the unmerciful and the unjust, listening to Christ with repugnance, were not able to understand the wisdom of God, but even crucified Him for teaching it. So we, too, should ask ourselves whether we listen to Him gladly. For He said: 'He who loves Me will keep My commandments, and he will be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him' (cf John 14: 21). Do you see how He has hidden His manifestation in the commandments? Of all the commandments, therefore, the most comprehensive is to love God and our neighbor. This love is made firm through abstaining from material things, and through stillness of thoughts.

224. Knowing this, the Lord enjoins us 'not to be anxious about the morrow' (Matt. 6:34); and rightly so. For if a man has not freed himself from material things and from concern about them, how can he be freed from evil thoughts? And if he is beset by evil thoughts, how can he see the reality of the sin concealed behind them? This sin wraps the soul in darkness and obscurity, and increases its hold upon us through our evil thoughts and actions. The devil initiates the whole process by testing a man with a provocation which he is not compelled to accept; but the man, urged on by self-indulgence and self-esteem, begins to entertain this provocation with enjoyment. Even if his discrimination tells him to reject it, yet in practice he takes pleasure in it and accepts it. If someone has not perceived this general process of sinning, when will he pray about it and be cleansed from it? And if he has not been cleansed, how will he find purity of nature? And if he has not found this, how will he behold the inner dwelling-place of Christ? For we are a dwelling-place of God, according to the words of Prophet, Gospel and Apostle (cf Zech. 2:10; John 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16; Heb. 3:6).

225. Following the sequence just described, we should try to find the dwelling-place and knock with persistent prayer, so that either in this life or at our death the Master may open to us and not say because of our negligence: 'I do not know where you come from' (Luke 13:25). Not only ought we to ask and receive, but we should also keep safely what is given; for some people lose what they have received. A theoretical knowledge or chance experience of these things may perhaps be gained by those who have begun to learn late in life or who are still young; but the constant and patient practice of these things is barely to be acquired even by devout and deeply experienced elders, who have repeatedly lost it through lack of attention and then through voluntary suffering have searched for and found it again. So let us constantly imitate them in this, until we, too, have acquired this practice irremovably.

226. Out of the many ordinances of the spiritual law we have come to understand these] few. The great Psalmist again and again urges us to learn and practice them as we ceaselessly praise the Lord Jesus. To Him are due glory, power and worship, both now and through all the ages.
Amen.