

The Seven Virtues

In most religious reflections on moral behaviour we look at sin or moral wrong doing. This article is going to look at good behaviour by focusing on the seven virtues. These are the cardinal virtues of prudence (wisdom) justice, temperance and fortitude (courage), and the fundamental Christian virtues of faith, hope, love. These Christian virtues in particular prudence, temperance and fortitude can provide a basis in assisting the development of alternative approaches to how people live their lives. As people develop their understanding of justice it increases their awareness of the needs of others and the world in which they live. Let us take a look at these virtues.

Prudence is often associated with the careful use of money, but it has a far wider meaning. It means wisdom, good judgement, caution and carefulness. It is the opposite to greed and gluttony if these could be replaced by prudent action some of the world's problems could be solved. A good example is a prudent use of our natural resources. If we were to exercise prudent in our use of natural resource it may be possible to bring an end to the present environmental damage. The problems will require politicians to show wisdom in how they deal with this and other problems, but politicians do not always show good judgement, if the actions needed appear unpopular. People do not always behaviour in a prudent way when they buy produces. A person's greed or desire for riches leaves them open to exploitation. Prudence the practical expression of wisdom. Not to be mistaken for caution. A prudent person reaction to a situation as they are alert and aware, not blind by fear or their own selfish opinions. Prudence encourages a person to be humble, and exercise wisdom in all our actions.

Temperance: In the early part of the twentieth century the temperance movement campaigned for an end of alcohol abuse. However, the Christian understand of temperance is much wider than this and should be understood in the context of life style. It means self-restraint, abstemiousness, and self-denial a feature rarely seen in the western consumer society. Temperance in the modern world means acting to bring an end to self-indulgence and in the must buy consumerism of modern society, which is having a negative impact on the world we live, temperance presents a real challenge to the consumerist society.

A person should be temperate in all things, temperance brings quietness of mind which enable us to concentrate and reflect carefully on the things we do in our lives. The temperate person knows that their life and usefulness does not consist in the abundance of his activities, they know that the attempts to do to many pieces of work does not make for success. Temperance entails a ruthless selection of activities. For some people over indulgence in drugs and alcohol is often too dull their fears. Temperance means living a balanced life free from the fears people have in modern life.

Fortitude is defined as courage, strength of mind and moral strength. Christian ethical virtues clearly show it is morally right to care for and protect the weak and vulnerable is society, Christians do have to have the courage to speak out against the continuing damage caused by greed and selfishness. Sadly, too often Christian leaders appear to lack the real moral strength needed to take action to protect God's creation from human kind and the exploitation of the vulnerable.

Christians may be aware of the problems created by greed, but how can they respond? Christian organisations have frequently called for justice for the poor, but justice on its own will not solve the problems of the poor or prevent the threats to the natural environment, justice can only come about when people start to apply the other ethical virtues. This is a subject that is too vast to be discussed here, however these virtues could provide an important basis in helping to bring change in people's attitudes.

Fortitude is seen in the modern world when people have the courage to stand up for their convictions against the action that cause harm to others. If you have no convictions, you will have no courage. Courage is needed to conquer anxiety over material fears, prices inflation, unemployment. Spiritual fear brings a loss of freedom, inadequate in personal relationships. Religious fear of the failure and disappearance of churches or being in a small congregation, reluctance to stand up for your faith or beliefs. If these are to be overcome, then fortitude is need by all who want to overcome their fears.

Justice was one of the four cardinal virtues of the ancients, and it appears prominently in the Old Testament. The Oxford English dictionary says it is to treat or respect someone with due fairness, just behaviour or treatment. the quality of being just. The administration of the law or authority in maintaining this. Readers will have heard phrases

like; bringing someone to justice and try someone in court for a crime. Do oneself justice and perform as well as one is able.

Justice is a fundamental ethical concept, in modern times the quest for social justice has been a major ethical concern. In the narrowest sense justice is conformity to the law. The just person or the just act has regarded to the law. The Old Testament story of Moses receiving the law from God saw the basis of justice in the will of God. The Stoics thought of justice as rooted in the natural (rational) order of things. In an imperfect world, justice must be maintained and enforced in face of the constant threats of injustice, and the Christian has a duty to uphold justice as well as to exercise love.

Christians therefore have to work through persuasion, to help people to understand why they are concerned by a particular issue, although others do share the Christian teaching that people should love their neighbour and care for the natural environment. Christians do face a challenge when it comes to persuading greedy consumers to change their consumption patterns to protect the environment or government to care for the weak and disadvantaged in society. Governments have a responsibility to treat people justly, but there are far too many places in the world where this is not happening and the international community seem unwilling to take action against corrupt leaders.

Faith, in the context of the virtues in the Christian faith, faith is a strong belief in a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof. Faith in God is a necessary part of a faithful attitude and obedience to the teaching of the faith. There are those who take the view that faith should be dependent on or conditional on observation and facts that can be supported. While this may make sense to those who only want to believe in something which is supported by logic alone, they fail to understand that faith goes beyond logic understand and places trust on the life and witness of others who believe. If we have faith in God, then we have to believe in the existence of a being that cannot be define by observation and facts alone. Faith is not a rigidity to Church law but the belief is our conduct and attitudes to our faith.

Faith is believing in God and following the teaching of our faith in how we lead our daily lives. Faith gives us hope that death is not the end. It helps form our attitudes to others and how we treat or behave towards them. Our faith means following the principles of our faith which has at its heart the love of others. At the heart of the Christian faith is the teaching to love others and hope for the future. It also guides our understanding of justice, give us the courage(fortitude) to stand up to actions which we believe are morally wrong. Faith give us the confidence to place our trust in God in times of adversity.

Hope: a feeling of expectation and desire. a cause or source of hope. grounds for hoping, archaic a feeling of trust. An expect and desire: he's hoping for an offer of compensation. Readers will have heard phrases like hope against hope cling to a mere possibility or as one hymn puts it all my hope on God is founded.

Christians uses the word hope to express their belief in the measureless power and love of God who is never idle but active in every movement of life, never living for people but always with them. Christians regard faith, hope and love as the three fundamental virtues (1 Corinthians 12.27-13.13). They cannot be treated separately though they may be distinguished from one another. Love depends on faith and hope. Hope like faith and love have a dynamic quality of living which is discernible, spasmodically on the complex, ceaselessly moving pattern of human behaviour. Hope is not to be confused with optimism's assurance that all will be well in the end. Hope is the style of living which proclaims that all is well here and now despite alarms, dangers and anxiety.

Love is an intense feeling of deep affection. a deep romantic or sexual attachment to someone. affectionate greetings. It can also be a great interest and pleasure in something, a person or thing that one loves. A person may be said to love anything in which they take special delight – the sea, flowers, birds, music or poets. The features thought out the Bible. The love of God is indeed often coupled with the keeping of his commandments, but there is no need to evade an apparent paradox by arguing that the command to love God really means the requirements of obedience to God's law in all the action of life.

In the teaching of Jesus, the love of God's is displayed by; his indiscriminate goodness of creation, his free forgiveness for the repentant sinner, and in his redeeming activity, going out to seek and to save. So people are bidden to imitate the divine love, by doing good to all without distinction, by forgiving as they have been forgiven, and by being ready to respond to every call of need. The labour of God's love to overcome pride and covetousness which estranges people from God. Christian love therefore cannot be perfected without the warmth of personal

affection which is the cement of unity between parent and children, brother and sister. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is what gives the warmth to people's service of one another and to their loyal obedience to the law of God.

The Christian faith seeks to encourage people to care for God's creation and live their lives by trying to apply the cardinal and theological virtues to the own lives, perhaps these virtues can provide a basis for an alternative approach for the consumerist society of the twenty-first century. (These virtues have been referred to earlier they are prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, faith, hope and love).

Sadly, in the modern western consumer society, the consumer philosophy has not produced the greatest happiness because people are starting to realise that wealth and possessions do not produce inner peace and happiness, so people are starting to look for some form of spiritual fulfilment. An understanding of how the seven virtues can help us find that inner peace and happiness that many people are seeking.

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