

The Virtues of Freemasonry

A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to “do good.” It allows a person not only to perform “Good acts,” but to give the very best of himself if he practices said virtues.

Within Freemasonry, we advocate two different types of virtues. The first are called the “Cardinal Virtues” (sometimes referred to as human virtues), while the second type is referred to as “Theological Virtues.”

The Cardinal Virtues

Four virtues play a pivotal role in our lives and, accordingly, are called “Cardinal.” All other virtues are grouped around them. They are: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice, and are praised by other names in many passages of scripture.

Temperance is that moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of all things. It insures the will’s mastery over instincts, and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable.

Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of good. It strengthens our resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. It is the virtue of Fortitude that conquers fear, even fear of death, trials and persecution.

Prudence is the moral virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance, and to choose the right means of achieving it. According to Aristotle, Prudence is “right reason in action.” It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. Among philosophers and theologians, it is called “auriga virtutum” (i.e., the charioteer of virtues). It guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is Prudence that immediately guides the judgment of our conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with his judgment. With the help of this virtue, we apply moral principles to overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.

Justice is the moral virtue that consists of the constant and firm will to give their just due to the Great Architect and neighbor. Justice toward Deity is called the “virtue of religion.” Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regards to persons and for the common good. The just man is distinguished by the habitual fairness of his conduct toward his neighbor.

The Theological Virtues

Theological Virtues take a higher place than the Cardinal Virtues as they are intimately connected with the relationship of man to the Great Architect of the Universe. Their importance is symbolized in Freemasonry by the Theological ladder of Jacob. Many Masonic Writers have also called them the “Three Graces”.

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in the Creator of the Universe, and believe all that He has said and revealed to us. By Faith, “man freely commits his entire self to God.” However, “Faith without works is dead.” When it is deprived of Hope and Charity, faith does not fully exhibit itself.

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life and happiness, placing our “Trust in God,” and relying not on our own strength, but in Divine Guidance. The virtue of Hope responds to the aspiration, which the Great Architect of the Universe has placed in the heart of every man. It is Hope that inspires man’s activities. It keeps man from discouragement. It sustains him in times of abandonment, and it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal life.

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love the One Living and True God beyond all things, and our neighbors as ourselves. Two thousand years ago, the Great Teacher left us this message: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”