

# The Seven Cardinal Virtues

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As Masons we are taught the respective lectures of the three degrees, wherein we are again re-acquainted with the Cardinal Virtues and which, we are taught are the formula to govern the conduct of every Mason. Fortitude, Temperance, Prudence and Justice are impressed upon us early in Masonic learning and it is by no means accidental that those four are an included part of the Entered Apprentice degree. As Steinmetz has so thoroughly explained in his text, Freemasonry, Its Hidden Meaning the Entered Apprentice degree deals principally with the material or temporal aspects of life. So too, do the four Cardinal Virtues of Fortitude, Temperance, Prudence and Justice.

Fortitude means we stay the course. It does not permit us to give up. It is human stick-to-it-ness, and not really a spiritual quality. Temperance dictates moderation in all things and therefore, the practicing Mason is not excessive in his living habits. Again, there is nothing particularly spiritual in that practice. Prudence requires that a Mason use good judgment in all that he endeavors as he goes about the business of daily living, and Justice dictates that he would practice the biblical lesson that "he would treat others as he would be treated." All of the foregoing deals with those attributes required for a stable, happy and productive life in the material temporal world. They work quite well when followed and certainly have withstood the test of time as a formula for constructive- action. These are all "DO" type virtues.

From a numerical point of view they are four in number, further evidence that they belong to the "horizontal" or material plane of Masonry and rightfully belong in the Entered Apprentice degree, as four is the number of the cube. The cube, when unfolded yields six squares in the shape of a cross. The cross is an ancient symbol predating Christianity, and is said to symbolize man with outstretched arms.

As we progress through the degree work we hear also of Faith, Hope and Charity and we are told that of these the greatest is Charity. Faith and Hope are clearly functions of the mind. A Mason has Faith that he will achieve a unity with Deity. In his mind he Hope(s) to fulfill his goal. Neither Faith nor Hope can occur outside of man's thought process and so must be attached to the Fellow Craft degree as that is the degree of a thinking Mason who is able to apply his gavel in the horizontal to remove rough edges and achieve an ashlar of not only horizontal dimensions, but also of true perpendiculars.

Charity, being the greatest of the virtues and the third of the group presents it's own special considerations because it is both temporal and thoughtful as well as spiritual. As the third of the group it creates the number three. Three represents the horizontal or temporal plane, the thought process of man or the perpendicular plane, and the oblique plane or spiritual aspects of man, which are characterized in Masonry as the Right Angle Triangle. In the temporal, mental and spiritual dimension we have the three aspects of man or as Steinmetz states, "the Complete Man." From a numerical point of view in Masonry, the number three can hardly be overstated for its profound meaning. We should now look at why Charity should just so happen to comprise the third virtue of this group. It is by no means accidental.

Charity is an act of giving. It must occur in the horizontal or temporal plane, which gives it a temporal characteristic that one could easily attribute to the Entered Apprentice degree. It is a temporal act, which requires unequivocal thought especially as it implies a free giving to another of that which is rightfully yours. Therefore, it is also a characteristic of the Fellow Craft degree. It is also a spiritual act insomuch as Jesus said, "that which you do to the least of man, you do also to me." Genesis also tells us that God created man and the world in His own likeness and image. This states that we must be in some part, godly. It then confirms that spoken by Jesus as it implies that we are all part of the same cloth, just different threads. Thus, it ties directly to the Master Mason degree since the Master Mason is supposed to be a Master in his understanding of the ways of the Craft. Finding these parallels, Charity could be said to be a giving act, prompted by thought, that we are all part of the Divine.

We are told that "Charity extends beyond the grave" and this is true since the act of charity is analogous to dropping that pebble in a pond where the ripple expands on and on to another shore. That shore, may be another foreign land wherein the Master may travel and collect wages at some future time. Could that be the life hereafter, and could it be relatively easy for us to lay-up in the archives of that foreign land, wages plus interest to be collected for a "job well done"? Did Jesus not tell us that, "the poor will always be amongst us"? One must ask, WHY? In two thousand years we have yet to resolve the problem of poor and destitute people abounding around us. Are not street people more plentiful than ever? Do we not have more social welfare programs than ever before in the history of mankind? This is the age of greatest need and perhaps so, because it is also the age of greatest abundance. If Charity is the greatest of all virtues, as already stated, perhaps the proliferation of so many needy people is nothing short of a Divine gift, which placed at our elbow, provides each of us with an immediate and accessible method to archive wealth in that foreign land, laid up for a time when the wages of our effort will be our recognition of our likeness to Deity, the identification of our own divine nature.

These are the conclusions of the writer carried to what he believes is a logical end-point of the lessons taught in the Lodge, and they are but lessons. Does not every Lodge hold it's annual fish fry or BBQ to raise funds for its charitable endeavors? Does not every Grand Lodge support a Masonic Home or a Widows & Orphans Fund? Do we not commit ourselves, to a worthy and distressed brother? Each of such events is a repetitive exercise in the same lesson that we are to learn. It is a lesson that must, sooner or later, be carried out of the Lodge with us and practiced as inculcated on a daily basis. Why? The answer is abundantly clear. That we may lay-up in the archives of the Celestial Lodge the wages or rewards for fulfilling the simple and accessible virtue of Charity. The opportunities are all around us everyday, if only we would look.

Lastly, the practice of so important a privilege is necessary for the development of our spiritual selves that, we might begin to design upon the trestle board as true Master Masons. To do so we will of necessity have to approach so inestimable a task from the perspective of spiritual insight, not just thought alone. The practice of this one virtue develops in us then, the spiritual aspect, the thoughtful aspect and the temporal action aspect of the "Complete Man." It is then that our horizontals and perpendiculars will be true. It will be said, that this work is good work; it is true work. We will be marked as Masters worthy of pay.