



# Theology Corner

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## What are virtues and what do they mean for me?

A virtue is a disposition or “habit” to perform good acts. So someone who is virtuous is a person who habitually performs good acts. It is through the virtues that we are able to be oriented toward perfection. Now, there are many different virtues that orient us toward our perfection, and they are categorized as the **cardinal virtues** and the **theological virtues**. The cardinal virtues are those virtues that lead to us to human or *natural* perfection. What this means is that humans, as rational beings, are perfected (naturally speaking) when we act according to reason. This is to be distinguished from acting purely from feeling or instinct, separated from reason, much like any animal would. When we act irrationally, since it is not natural for humans to do so, the act would be considered as disordered, and those bad habits are known as **vices**. The cardinal virtues are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

The theological virtues are similar, but different than the cardinal virtues. They are similar in such a way that they are habits that order us toward perfection, but instead of natural perfection like the cardinal virtues, the theological virtues lead us to *supernatural* perfection. In other words, while it is through our actions as human beings that we are cardinally virtuous, it is through God alone that we are made theologically virtuous. It is primarily through forming habits in the theological virtues when we can be referred to as acting “Christ-like.” The theological virtues are: faith, hope, and charity (love). These virtues are only attained through God’s grace, as they transcend our nature as human beings. It is in this way that we can say that when we are faithful, hopeful, and loving, we are participants in God’s grace. We are able to form these virtues because God infuses them into our soul at baptism. Without them, we would not be able to move toward God on the supernatural level.

So which of the virtues should we pursue? All of them! While it is most important that we partake in the grace God offers us to form the theological virtues in our soul, without living in accordance with our nature as rational beings, the theological virtues will be much more difficult to strengthen because our nature and God’s grace both go hand in hand. When we act naturally and rationally according to His design, along with accepting His grace to become more like Him, we can then achieve our main purpose in life, which is to be united with Him in Heaven in the beatific vision.