

St. Paul’s Teachings on Love and Other Virtues: A Neglected Treasure

Christian morality is not based only on the Ten Commandments, but also traditionally focuses on the seven “Deadly Sins” and the opposing seven “Principal Virtues,” as well as other categories of virtues and vices. These teachings are already found in the **Old Testament** and in the words of **Jesus** as recorded in the Gospels, but are *especially* prominent in the writings of **St. Paul**, for whom *love* is the most important virtue.

Decalogue / Ten Commandments:

- **Two Main Lists, as recorded in books attributed to Moses:**
 - Exodus 20:1-17 *and* Deuteronomy 5:6-21
- **Quotations and Applications of parts of the Decalogue elsewhere in the Bible:**
 - **Old Testament:** Leviticus 19:1-18; Jeremiah 7:3-11; Hosea 4:1-2; Wisdom 14:21-31
 - **New Testament:** Matthew 5:17-48 (“antitheses”); Mark 7:10, 21-22 & Matt 15:4, 19 (“purity”); Mark 10:17-22 (“rich man”; par. Matt 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23); Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8-11

Commandments to Love God and to Love our Neighbors:

- **Shema / “Hear, O Israel...” – Deut 6:4-5;** quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:29-30; Matt 22:37; cf. Luke 10:27
- **“Love your neighbor” – Lev 19:18;** quoted in Mark 12:31 & par.; Matt 19:19; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; James 2:8

Seven “Deadly Sins” & Seven “Principal Virtues”:

Capital/Deadly Sins:	pride arrogance <i>superbia</i>	avarice greed <i>avaritia</i>	envy jealousy <i>invidia</i>	wrath anger <i>ira</i>	lust impurity <i>luxuria</i>	gluttony voracity <i>gula</i>	sloth laziness <i>acedia</i>
Principal Virtues:	humility modesty <i>humilitas</i>	generosity charity <i>liberalitas</i>	kindness gratitude <i>humanitas</i>	patience compassion <i>patientia</i>	chastity purity <i>castitas</i>	temperance moderation <i>temperantia</i>	diligence fervor <i>industria</i>

The “capital sins” (or at least the idea of listing *seven* major vices) are based in part on a passage from Proverbs: “There are six things that the LORD hates, *seven* that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.” (**Prov 6:16-19**)

“Theological Virtues” & “Cardinal Virtues”

The seven main virtues are often listed differently in Christian ethics, not in contrast to the seven “deadly sins” but rather as a combination of three “**Theological Virtues**” and four “**Cardinal Virtues**”:

- **Theological Virtues:** *faith, hope, love*
 - See 1 Cor 13; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8; Gal 5:5-6; Col 1:4-5, 23; Heb 10:39; 11:1
- **Cardinal Virtues:** *prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance*
 - Discussed by various Church fathers and theologians after the New Testament times.
- See also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§1805-1845 (seven virtues) and §1866 (capital sins).

Old Testament Texts mentioning Virtues and Vices:

- The OT contains very few extended lists of virtues and/or vices, aside from the Ten Commandments, since ethical discussions did not become popular until the Hellenistic period (3rd cent. BCE and later).
- **Isaiah 11:1-3a** - Ancient Greek and Latin versions list the seven traditional “**gifts of the Spirit**”: *wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord*” (see CCC, §1831).
- See also Exodus 34:6; Proverbs 6:16-19; Hosea 2:19-20; Micah 6:8
- **Psalms** and **Proverbs** also mention other virtues and vices, but usually individually, rather than in lists.

Ethical Materials in the New Testament GOSPELS:

- Longer discussions of **virtues** and **vices**, habitual actions and ethical attitudes to be practiced and avoided, respectively, are not often found in the Gospels, but much more frequent in the NT letters, esp. Paul's.
- **Matthew 5:1-12 & 23:1-26; Luke 6:20-26** – Beatitudes & Woes
- **Matthew 5:43-48 & Luke 6:27-36** – Love Enemies; **Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31** – Golden Rule
- **Matthew 15:17-20 & Mark 7:20-23** – Jesus mentions several “evils from within” that “defile” people

Ethical Teachings in PAUL’S Letters, with contrasting Virtues and Vices:

- **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13** – “**LOVE** is *patient*; love is *kind*; love is *not envious* or *boastful* or *arrogant* or *rude*. It does *not insist on its own way*; it is *not irritable* or *resentful*; it *does not rejoice in wrongdoing*, but *rejoices in the truth*. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends... And now **faith, hope, and love abide**, these three; and **the greatest of these is love**.”
- **Galatians 5:13-26** – “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but *through love* become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh... Now **the works of the flesh** are obvious: *fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these*. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, **the fruit of the Spirit** is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. There is no law against such things...” (These are the nine traditional “fruits of the Spirit”; the Latin Vulgate Bible also includes *goodness, modesty, and chastity*, for a total of twelve.) A very similar text is **Romans 13:8-14**.
- **Romans 12:9-21** – “Let *love* be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; *love one another* with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering... *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*.”
- **See also** 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22; **Colossians 3:1-17**; Ephesians 4:25-32; 5:1-10; 1 Timothy 3:2-11; 6:3-12; 2 Timothy 2:22-26; Titus 1:6-9; 3:1-3

More VIRTUE Lists and related texts in the Pauline & Deutero-Pauline Letters:

- **Romans 5:3-5** – “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that *suffering* produces endurance, and *endurance* produces character, and *character* produces hope, and *hope* does not disappoint us, *because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit* that has been given to us.”
- **See also** Romans 14:17; 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; **Ephesians 6:10-20**; 1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:10-11a

More VICE Lists and related texts in the Pauline & Deutero-Pauline Letters:

- **2 Corinthians 12:20-21** – “I fear that there may perhaps be *quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder*... I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the *impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness* that they have practiced.”
- **See also** Romans 1:18-31; **1 Corinthians 5:9-11**; 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; 2 Timothy 3:1-5

“Household Codes” in the New Testament:

- Four of the *later* NT letters contain passages with instructions for particular groups of people within Christian “households” as to how they should treat other members of their family. These are similar to, yet also *significantly different* from, “codes of conduct” found in other Greco-Roman moral writings.
- **Colossians 3:18—4:1**; Ephesians 5:21—6:9; Titus 2:1-10; and 1 Peter 2:18—3:7

More Ethical Passages in the “Catholic Epistles” and the “Book of Revelation”:

- Hebrews 13:1-8, 16-17; **James 2:8-13; 3:13—4:4**; 1 Peter 2:1; 3:8-9; 4:3-4, 15; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 1 John 2:1-11; 3:4-18; 4:7-21; Revelation 9:20-21; 21:8; 22:15