

✓ Those who make happiness their goal seldom find it, it always seems to allude them. Happiness as the goal of life tends to force people to think exclusively about the here and now, not about their future and certainly not about eternity.

? **What do people think brings happiness?**
In a secular sense, how do you find happiness?
Ecclesiastes gives us the answers to this. 2:24-25,3:13, 5:18-20, 9:7-10, 11:9-10. It is to make the most of what you have and to make every moment count, to see the journey of life as the important thing rather than to strive after impossible goals.

In a spiritual sense, how do you find happiness?
Do people think that being a Christian is likely to make them miserable?

✓ Happiness comes as a side effect of living right. Forgiveness and obedience to God bring happiness.

You may have noticed that Christianity threatens the way secular people view these cardinal virtues. This is one of the reasons it is such a big decision to follow Christ. The truth of the matter is that things like freedom and happiness are found in surrender to God's will not rejection of it.

These virtues have taken on cult or idol status for the world around us.

5 **Rights**
Complete the following: "I have the right to..."
Going through these secular virtues you may have noticed that they all centre around the individual. They are personal rights. Today everyone has defined rights in almost every area of their life. As Christians, we mature spiritually by surrendering these rights to God. In this Christ was our great example.

! **What rights do we surrender to God?**
Do we have any rights before God?
Should all our rights have us at their centre?

They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God,"
Revelation 4:10-11

6 **Fairness**
It is said that America's number one virtue is freedom and that for New Zealanders it is fairness.

? **Why do you think fairness is so important to us?**
What does fairness mean?
Is the world fair?

It is because of this that New Zealanders are so keen to root for the underdog.

Are there any dangers in this?

The flip side of this is the "Tall Poppy Syndrome".

As believers do we value fairness?

! **If you had to choose four cardinal virtues** (as opposed to theological virtues of which Aquinas noted three faith, hope and love.) **what would they be?**

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FREEDOM

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Cardinal Virtues

* Morality is a strange thing. Morals are something we all have. There is even honour among thieves. Our ideas about what is moral behaviour are often quite different. Even when people acknowledge that their behaviour is wrong they usually have an excellent excuse to justify themselves.

! **Read Proverbs 26:12, Proverbs 26:16, Proverbs 16:2**
What do these verses tell us?

These verses tell us that everyone thinks they are right. This stands to reason, concluding that you might just be wrong is the first and perhaps the most important step in changing.

Does thinking you are right, mean that you are?

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 1 Corinthians 4:4

? **How could Paul's conscience be clear and yet he not be innocent?**
How can you be sure that you are innocent?

✓ Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the famous theologian philosopher and apologist produced a list of cardinal virtues, things we should all aspire to. They were; prudence, temperance, courage and justice. Cardinal means fundamental or central. Today if we were to produce a list of cardinal virtues, things that people around us consider to be of the utmost importance, things they aspire to what would it include?

What do you think of Aquinas's list?

Here are some things the secular world around us consider to be cardinal virtues.

1 **Choice**
The freedom to choose on issues that affect us. To choose our own destiny and not to be told by anyone what we should do. This is especially important to the younger generation.

You might have noticed how much the word 'choose' is used on social media and in advertising. (eg "Wear it your way") often this is pseudo-choice. (You can wear the clothes however you want, but you can still only buy what we put on the shelves.) People demand to be consulted on anything that may affect them. It is amazing how often people will reject ideas, which are sound and they even agree with, simply because they were not involved in the process of forming them.

? **Why don't we like being told what to do?**
How do people react when you try to limit their choice?
What kinds of choices do people want to exercise?
Have all societies considered personal choice to be important?

No, they haven't in some societies, there is very little choice, you may be told who you will marry or even what job you will do.

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Is this freedom to choose a bad thing?

What dangers are there in the cult of choice that surrounds us?

Issues like abortion are good examples of when personal choice becomes dangerous. It is a woman's right to choose, but what about the rights of the baby? Ethic is often about balancing two different sets of rights. Many dubious moral practices are defended by claiming the right to choose.

What things should we allow to limit our personal choice?

Paul would say it's effects on others. Righteousness and the will of God are the all-important controlling factors.



Does God give us freedom to choose?

What choices does He offer us?



Read Deuteronomy 30:15

Is this a dangerous strategy?

God has given us the freedom to chose if we serve Him and obey Him. But He has not given us the freedom to choose how we serve or obey Him.



What's the difference?

What implications does this have for us?

What will happen if personal choice is a cardinal virtue for the Christian?

What choices do you have to surrender when you become a Christian?



Tolerance

What does tolerance mean to people today?

Why is it so important?

Being tolerant means not being judgmental about another person's choices or culture. We have to accept that if it is their choice, then it is right for them. Nothing else is important. Often this ideal of tolerance comes crashing down the moment people make choices we don't like. (you get to set your own morality as long as it is the same as mine.)



Is tolerance always a good thing?

When is it and when isn't it?

Read Revelation 2:2, Habakkuk 1:13

For Christians, there are two dichotomies that have to be considered.



The first is to what extent should we try to impose Biblical standards on a world that does not believe in Christ? To what extent are they personal and to what extent are they universal? If you do not know Christ is it even possible to live by His standards?

What do you think?



The second issue does tolerance have to mean acceptance, or can they be two separate issues.

For example.

As a Christian is it wrong to discriminate against a cross-dresser?

Does this mean that I have to accept their lifestyle as correct?

As a Christian, it is wrong to discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, creed or lifestyle. Jesus made friends with the kind of people we usually shun. But He did not agree with their sin. In many areas as Christians, we accept and love but we do not affirm. This is an increasingly difficult position to hold as today failure to affirm is often seen as discrimination.

As a Christian, should we show a judgmental attitude? Matthew 7:1-2



What are the dangers for a Christian if we tolerate things we should not tolerate?

Do ordinary people consider Christians to be intolerant?

What are the dangers of this?



What is more important tolerance or love?

Why?

We are a tolerant society, but we are not a loving society. Although we claim so much for our compassion-based ethics most of the time they seem ankle deep.



Freedom

The Bible talks a lot about freedom, so do people around us. Freedom comes in two kinds, freedom from and freedom to.

What things do people around us mean when they talk about freedom? (From and to)

What does the Bible mean when it talks about freedom? (From and to)



Many of the freedoms the world seeks are good freedoms, freedom from slavery, poverty, abuse, inequality, fear etc. Other freedoms are not so good. One of the tenets of Freud was the giving people restrictive forms of morality (Judo-Christian) caused them to be repressed and unbalanced. It was the cause of all the worlds ills. Today people seem keen to cast off as many moral restraints as possible, everything is permissible nothing is taboo and nothing is sacred.

People see Christianity as being restrictive, is this true?

Freedom always has limits



In a secular sense, what limits are there to peoples freedom?

In a spiritual sense, what limits are there to peoples freedom?

Any form of cooperation requires us to limit our freedom, even being part of a society.

We do not want people or governments to have too much control over our lives.

When we feel our freedom is being limited how do we react?

Has God given people the freedom to sin?

The strange answer to this is yes He has. He has told them not to sin but Has not stopped them from doing it.

What has He done? Ecclesiastes 11:9



As a Christian what does it mean to be free?

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36



How much freedom do people in fact have?

Why do you think freedom is such an important issue for so many?

Can you be free while a slave to sin? John 8:34

Can you be free when you don't know what is waiting for you beyond death? Hebrews 2:15



Happiness

Is happiness a bad thing?

What is happiness?

Is happiness a right?

Whose job is it to make you happy?

What percentage of people do you think are happy?



What are the dangers of seeking happiness?

Why is happiness a bad goal?