

# Reflections

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reading notes

DECEMBER 2004—*Virtue and Happiness (Part 2)*

In my previous article, “Virtue and Happiness,” I illustrated the fact that little permanent happiness belongs to a couple that is brought together because their passion is stronger than their virtue. I did so by appealing to a classic novel written by Jane Austen, a clergyman’s daughter in the early 1800’s. The book was *Pride and Prejudice*.

The article began, “The value of good literature is that it incarnates truth.” The truth that good literature embodies is the truth of Scripture. Jesus declared in His prayer to the Father, “Thy word is truth” (Jn 17:17). The Psalmist affirms, “The sum of thy word is truth” (Ps 119:160). Good literature also tells us about the way things are.

The apostle Paul employed the literature of his day to illustrate ideas. When he was before the crowd of philosophers in Athens he argued that God is not far from any one of us and cited one of their poets who wrote, “for we are His offspring” (Acts 17:28). In his letter to Titus he cites “a prophet of their own” who wrote, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons” (Titus 1:12). He then adds, “This testimony is true.”

Just think of the great biblical truths that are illustrated in such classics as Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, or C. S. Lewis’, *Till We Have Faces*, or any one of Jane Austen’s novels, for that matter. Volumes have recently been written concerning the Christian virtues to be found in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. While these books can never be used as a substitute for the faith, they can be used in a variety of ways to illustrate or support what the faith affirms. They may even be used as a first step toward faith.

The point of the previous article was that “little permanent happiness belongs to a couple who were brought together because their passion was stronger than their virtue.” Sinful passions not only rob one of genuine happiness, they are antithetical to genuine happiness. Not only do sinful passions rob us of genuine happiness, they are numbered among the works of the flesh, and “they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21).

The remedy for such wrong headedness in anyone like Lydia, in *Pride and Prejudice*, is submission to the Lord which would include a heavy dose of Proverbs, the purpose of which is “to give prudence to the simple” (Prov 1:4). Is it any wonder that Solomon urged his son to seek wisdom as the principle thing (Prov. 4:7)?

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