

# Reflections

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reading notes

MARCH 2004—*Virtues and Vices*

The movie *Gladiator* won 5 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, in the year 2000. The movie begins with Maximus, a Roman General, winning a decisive battle for Rome. It is made obvious that he is Rome's favorite son.

Once the dust settles and every one has celebrated their victory, Marcus Aurelius, the Emperor, and his son engage in a private meeting. (This is the same Marcus Aurelius who wrote "Meditations.") The son lives with every expectation of being Rome's next Emperor.

The Emperor asks his son, "Are you ready to do your duty for Rome?"

His son responds, "Yes, Father."

Marcus Aurelius declares, "You will not be Emperor."

The son, obviously shaken and visibly dejected, asks, "Which wise older man will take my place?"

His father says, "Maximus...", to which the son replies, "You wrote to me once listing the four virtues: wisdom, justice, fortitude and temperance. As I read the list I knew I had none of them. But I have other virtues, Father: ambition. That can be a virtue when it drives us to excel. Resourcefulness, courage... perhaps not on the battlefield, but there are many forms of courage. Devotion to my family, to you, but none of my virtues are on your list." He then holds his father's face to his chest and suffocates him.

Virtue is the habit of right desire. Being a habit, it is a way of life. Some virtues are obvious to all men; otherwise, the New Testament would not have encouraged us to take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men. Ultimately, the things we ought to desire are identified by God in His word. Knowing and believing His word will guard us from getting confused like the Emperor's son. His confusion was in believing that the things he desired were virtuous, when in reality what he really desired were vices (desires for the wrong things).

The Christian is to make every effort to supplement our faith with virtue (2 Pet 1:5).

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