

“If there be any virtue...”

Philippians 4:8 King James Version (KJV)

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

In my youth I was both an English major and a presenter of classical music on the radio. Spending more than I should, I accrued more than my fair share of books and recordings. Over the years, I left many of these unread and unplayed while technology leapt forward and gave myself and almost everyone a torrent of words and music.

Now suddenly, like many others, I have more free time on my hands.

Thanks to the local university being closed we now have both children back in the home, but I can already tell that much of that stuff I gathered to read or listen to later is never going to get used, not during the pandemic, not during retirement. Life is too short.

We go through life picking and choosing. Experiences with people and playing music with friends are far better than books and recording. Each has its place.

From time to time, the Apostle Paul would drop a few words of good advice into his letters. He suggests to his protege Timothy, for example, how not to get sick on the local cuisine (I Timothy 2:15).

At the end of his letter to the Philippians, Paul urges believers to stay with the truth of the Gospel. To me his words also give advice. Paul is well aware that Philippi lay at the crossroads of the Roman and Hellenic worlds. It was a vibrant place, with popular entertainments both brutal and sordid. I hear Paul urging the brothers and sisters to stay away, “don’t fill your mind up with the bad things.”

I don’t think Paul is arguing for “feel good” aesthetics; there is both truth and beauty in some things that are much deeper. He uses one of the most loaded words in Greek philosophy - ἀρετή (“virtue” in the KJV). The word contains the

sense of moral rightness, but also (for Aristotle and others) excellence, a fitness for purpose, a striving (as in athletics), a gathering of knowledge, an ultimate aim of education.

Paul's advice can be challenging, but we also live in a situation where the stories and the music of the wide world are at our keystrokes, and many of us have much time on our hands. His admonition remains good advice. Choose wisely *"...whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

P.S. Proverbs 17:22 tells us that *"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine..."* Laughter is needed at this time, so thanks to those who have been sending out jokes. Unfortunately, unlike Kathryn, I don't have any Baer jokes handy.

