

Thessalonians Chapter 4 God's Best

by A.B. Simpson

The highest Christian life is the new creation in Christ, where we live a life of faith and love, and are transformed into the image of the heavenly.

Scripture: Isaiah 64:8, John 15:12, Romans 8:1-2, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 3:13-14, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, 1 John 3:7

Topics: "Pursuing God's Best", "Living a Christlike Life"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the pursuit of God's best in the Christian life, contrasting the good and better with the highest calling of faith and love. He illustrates that while salvation and sanctification are important, the ultimate goal is to embody the divine nature of Christ, reflecting His glory in our lives. Simpson encourages believers to strive for excellence in their faith, drawing on biblical examples of individuals who achieved great things through God's strength. He warns against complacency in the church and calls for a commitment to live out the highest standards of Christian living, which is possible through the indwelling of Christ. Ultimately, he urges the congregation to seek God's highest choice for their lives, ensuring they do not miss out on the full reward He has prepared.

Transcript

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." (2 Thes. 1: 11.)

There is a good, a better, and a best. It is a good thing to be saved; it is a better thing to be sanctified and consecrated unto the Lord; but there is a best and highest life into which we may enter, even all the good pleasure of His goodness and the highest possibilities of faith and love.

There is such a thing as graduating from college after passing the required subjects and receiving your diploma; but there is also an honor class, and a prize awaiting the successful competitors and the men who reach the highest proficiency.

St. Paul wanted to be the best. "All run," he says, in this great conflict, "but one receives the prize. . . . I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beats the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" -- not lost or cast away from the presence of God, but deprived of the incorruptible crown when the reward is given, and the eternal prize. And in another place he tells us, "Forgetting those things which

are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The day came when the prize was won, and even he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

This was the prize to which James and John aspired, and Jesus did not discourage them or tell them that it was unattainable. He told them it was dependent upon their willingness and ability to be baptized with His baptism and to drink of His cup. It was not His to give, except to those for whom it was prepared -- the heroes, the conquerors, the highest and the best.

This principle of hope is an element of human nature, and God appeals to it in the promises of His Word and the recompenses of His kingdom. God is not looking for great quantities today, but for high qualities.

We are in the closing days of the New Testament dispensation, and we may expect the same things that marked the last days of the old economy. Then God had to turn from communities to individuals for the accomplishment of His great purposes. The kingdom of Judah failed to fulfill His expectation and stand as His witness against an evil world; and so He had to reject Israel and Judah and let them go into captivity, and even allow His own glorious temple to fall because His people would not be true to Him.

Then He picked out a little woman named Esther, and a young man called Daniel, and three Hebrews in Babylon; and through these weak instruments He compelled the proud Babylonians to acknowledge His power and bow to His glory, and He wrought in a single generation more for His great name than all the dynasties of Israel had accomplished in centuries.

So again the day is approaching when even His own Church may fail Him. The pure apostolic church of John and Polycarp became the apostasy of Rome, and we need not wonder if the church of the Reformation should have begun already to resemble the picture of Laodicea, "rich and increased with goods" and saying, "I have need of nothing," and about to be rejected with disgust because of its lukewarmness.

God forbid that we should utter aught against its true spirit, but every earnest and true Christian knows that, at best, we have today a small minority for fidelity to the truth, and no sort of approximation of Christian living up to the standard of His Word and the power of His Spirit. It is the old story of Gideon once more, not only the thirty thousand picked out of Israel, but the three hundred picked out of the thirty thousand.

God is looking today for pattern men; and when He gets a true sample, it is very easy to reproduce it in a thousand editions, and multiply it in other lives without limitation.

All the experiences of life come to us as tests; and as we meet them, our loving Father is watching, with intense and jealous love, to see us overcome; and if we fail, He is deeply disappointed, and our great adversary is filled with joy and triumph. We are a gazing stock continually for angels and principalities, and every step we take is critical and decisive for something in our eternal future.

When Abraham went forth that morning to Mount Moriah, it was an hour of solemn probation; and when he came back, he was one of God's tested men, with the stamp of His eternal approbation. God could say, "I know him, that he will . . . do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him."

God is looking for such men today. He is longing to say of us: "I know him. I can depend upon him. I have tried him, and he has not been found wanting."

What is the highest Christian life? What is the life that God is trying to reproduce in the lives of His saints? Is it the repair of wrecked humanity? Is it simply the restoration of Adamic purity? Is it only the bringing back of the human soul to the condition in which it was before the fall? This would be a poor result for such tremendous cost as the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what guarantee have we that, if this were accomplished tomorrow, the wreck would not be repeated the next day, and the race as lost as ever?

No, God has accomplished something very much higher; nothing less, in fact, than the new creation of a new race, patterned not after the human, but the divine. "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." "As is the earth, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

God is now aiming to reproduce in us the pattern which has already appeared in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Christian life is not an imitation of Christ, but a direct new creation in Christ; and the union with Christ is so complete that He imparts His own nature to us, and lives His own life in us. It is not an imitation, but simply an outgrowth of the nature implanted within.

We live Christlike lives because we have the Christ life. God is not satisfied with anything less than perfection. He required that from His Son. He requires it from us, and He does not, in the process of grace, reduce the standard, but He brings us up to it. He counts us righteous in justification, and then He makes us righteous in sanctification, and says of the new creation, "He that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death," for this very purpose "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." He requires of us a perfect faith, and He tells us that if we believe and doubt not, we shall have whatsoever we ask. The faintest touch of unbelief will neutralize our trust.

But how shall we have such perfect faith? Is it possible for human nature? No, but it is possible to the divine nature; it is possible to the Christ within us. It is possible for God to give it, and God does give it. But Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and He bids us "Have the faith of God"; and as we have it through the imparting of the Spirit of Christ, we believe even as He.

We pray in His name and in His very nature, and we "live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The love that He requires of us is not mere human love, nor even the standard of love required in the Old Testament, but something far higher. The new commandment is "Love one another," not as yourselves, but "as I have loved you."

How shall such love be made possible? "Herein is our love made perfect, . . . because as he is, so are we in this world." Our love is simply His love wrought in us, and imparted to us through His own indwelling Spirit.

There is no place in life to which we ever come that is so delicate, so difficult, and so critical, as the place where God requires of us some exercise of love which is contrary to nature, and we find ourselves utterly inadequate to it. When we have to meet an enemy with divine forgiveness and with what seems a perfect adjustment of spirit, not ignoring, perhaps, their gross and inexcusable wrongs, but, at the same time

seeing them as He sees them, loving them as He loves them, meeting them without resentment, but with a pure divine benevolence -- at such points as these we are thrown upon Christ, and without Him we should sink in despair.

It is here that the life of Christ reveals itself, and the heart is lifted up into a divine sweetness impossible to the natural man, and filled with praise and wonder at the riches of Christ's glorious grace.

This is also the secret of all true service and of all victorious suffering. Someone has expressed it in this striking way: "We can do more than we can." God is constantly calling us to situations where human nature is utterly unequal to the pressure, just that we may show the infinite resources of His grace. Therefore, it is not the patience of the suffering one, but the power of Christ which enables us to bear it, so that we shall be stronger for the very suffering. This was Paul's experience with the thorn in the flesh. The thorn was not removed, but there came to him through it such an influx and afflux of divine strength that he was really better off than if the thorn had not been there; and the spectacle of his victorious spirit brought infinite glory to the name of his divine Lord.

So again our service for Christ is not the best that we can do, for God most frequently uses the weakest instruments, and uses them at their weakest, that the glory may be given to him, and that it may be manifestly His working and not ours.

How shall we glorify God? By doing something for Him that will make Him our debtor, and show how loving, faithful, and capable we are? That would glorify us, not Him. God needs no addition to His happiness from our little store. He is richer by far than we, and all we call our own belongs to Him. The true way to glorify God is for God to show His glory through us, to shine through us as empty vessels reflecting His fullness of grace and power. The sun is glorified when it has a chance to show its light through the crystal window, or reflect it from the spotless mirror or the glassy sea.

There is nothing that glorifies God so much as for a weak and helpless man or woman to be able to triumph, through His strength, in places where the highest human qualities fail us, and carry in divine power, through every form of toil and suffering, a spirit naturally weak, irresolute, selfish, and sinful, transformed into sweetness, purity, and power, and standing victorious amid circumstances for which its natural qualities must utterly unfit it; a mind not naturally wise or strong, directed by divine wisdom, and carried along the line of a great and mighty plan -- this is what glorifies God.

He does not want to see us reflecting our own glory, but, like the heavenly blue and the celestial constellations reflected from the glassy bosom of the lake, He wants to see His own face and His own grace shining through our lives and saying to the world, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

So the highest possibilities of Christian life are put within the reach of the feeblest and the most helpless lives. It is all of God; and if it is all of God, it is possible for the weakest of men. And, therefore, in a sense, it is easier to live a high life than to drag along upon the lower plane.

It is easier to stand on a higher plane than below; it is easier to stand on the mountaintop than to stand with one foot on the heights of grace while with the other we are dragging our life along the lower levels. It is easier for a car to run on a track than off, and it is easier to be always on the track than to be sometimes dragged along the pavement stones.

If we are but willing to trust God utterly, and belong to Him unreservedly, He is waiting for vessels "meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

The potter has the clay before him for a beautiful vase, to be embellished with every touch of loveliness, to stand in his palace for the highest and holiest use. But, alas, through no fault of the potter, but because the clay will not suffer His hand to mold it as He would, it is marred in the hands of the potter, and unfitted for His highest destination. One little scratch will cause a hopeless blemish. The highest things must be the most unspotted. The more costly the dress, the more it shows the ink spot. The whiter the muslin, the more easily it takes a stain. The more perfect the French glass, the more quickly does it show a flaw. It may be used for some other purpose, but it is unfitted for the highest place. It must be set aside, and its highest use be ever unfulfilled.

Oh, how very, very sad the disappointments that heaven will reveal; the might-have-beens that will pass before our vision and then vanish forever away; the crowns we might have worn; the high callings we might have won!

The potter may take up the clay again and make another vessel. So God takes up our broken lives and does the best He can with them.

O beloved, may God inspire us to choose His highest choice, and let nothing hinder all the good pleasure of His goodness, or keep us from what the Apostle John has said, "that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

Give me, Lord, Your highest choice;

Let others take the rest;

Their good things have no charm for me

For I have got Your best.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ab-simpson/thessalonians-chapter-4-gods-best/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net