

# Whatsoever Things Are Lovely

by A.B. Simpson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of cultivating a holy character that reflects the beauty and loveliness of God.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 31:30, Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Peter 2:9

**Topics:** "Christian Character", "Virtues and Graces"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the importance of both essential virtues and ornamental qualities in Christian character, as outlined in Philippians 4:8. He categorizes virtues into two classes: the foundational qualities of truth, justice, and purity, which are essential for morality and religion, and the graces of honor, loveliness, and good report, which enhance one's character. Simpson encourages believers to cultivate these qualities, as they reflect the beauty of holiness and the character of Christ. He illustrates how these attributes can transform ordinary lives into examples of divine grace and influence. Ultimately, he calls for a life that embodies both the solid virtues and the lovely graces that attract others to Christ.

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## Transcript

"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" (Phil. 4:8).

This passage expresses the very point of the Apostle's subject in this letter, and by one discriminating flash of light points out the difference between the essentials of holy character and the lighter touches of grace and loveliness which may be added to these. Two classes of virtues are here specified, and each class is designated by a special word. "If there be any virtue" called fundamental and essential to holy character. "If there be any praise" denotes those qualities, which, while not essential, are ornamental. The first class includes three specifications; namely, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure." Without these there can be no morality and no religion. These are the cardinal virtues of life, the solid texture out of which the web is woven, the warp and woof on which the other qualities are embroidered as decorations and adornings. The second class includes also three specifications; namely, "Whatsoever things are honest." This ought to be translated honorable, venerable, lofty, for it denotes not so much practical righteousness as rather the qualities that demand admiration and veneration. Next, "Whatsoever things are lovely," those qualities that are inherently beautiful and

attractive, and make the possessor to be esteemed and beloved. The third specification is "Whatsoever things are of good report," those things that constitute influence, reputation and public esteem and respect. These are objects of praise and are to be added to the others. The qualities of virtue are like the solid granite rock; the qualities of praise resemble the luxuriant forest, the verdant grass, the mossy banks, the blooming shrubs and flowers, the sparkling waterfalls that cover those substantial rocks and turn the desert into a garden of beauty and delight. Let us look at these two classes of moral qualities, but especially at the second.

I. The essentials of character. There are three. The first is truth. Our religious character must be founded upon right principles, and having adopted them we must be true to them. Truth must be at once objective and subjective. We must have the truth, and we must be true to it. Sound doctrine must be held by a sound and sincere heart.

Next, "Whatsoever things are just," covers the whole range of our relationships to our fellowmen, our practical righteousness, our rightness of life in the family, in the social world, and in our business fellowships with others.

Finally, "Whatsoever things are pure," has reference to our own personal life. It describes a heart cleansed by the blood of Christ, filled with holy motives, thoughts and affections, and leading to right relations toward all men and toward God. These are the essential qualities of the Christian life. Without them there can be no morality and no religion.

2. But next are the graces of Christian character, "the beauties of holiness," as the Old Testament expresses it. One may be a Christian without these, but not without those mentioned before. They are the refinements of holy character, the lesser touches by which perfection is attained, even as the marble is polished by a thousand little touches. The difference between an ordinary copy and a work of genius lies in minute details which the coarse, uncultivated eye might never be able to detect.

Now, some of these graces are connected with the cardinal virtues already described. That is to say, there are people who may be said to be truthful, and who would not deliberately misrepresent. Yet they will exaggerate, they will shade the truth by little touches and faint colorings which practically do misrepresent and mislead. Then, again, there are some who are, in the main, honest, just and righteous, and would not willfully or knowingly do another a wrong. Yet perhaps they are too careless or too keen, and by little touches of unrighteousness mar the testimony of their lives. Then there are others who are pure in their purpose and intent, but it may be in their dress, manners, deportment, or conversation, compromise their influence enough to miss the full effectiveness of a holy life. Thus it becomes important to give heed to the message: "Let not your good be evil spoken of," and even in the things that are just and pure and true, to be careful to add the "things that are lovely" and "of good report."

But there is a distinct field, represented by another class of qualities altogether, which constitute the graces and refinements of the holy life, and of which it is true "these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

1. Dignity and self-respect are the things that add to the weight of our character and influence, and may be covered by the first phrase, "whatsoever things are honorable," or rather, "venerable." The estimate which others place upon us will always be proportioned to our true estimate of ourselves. There is a great difference between conceit and self-respect. "Let no man despise thee," is the dictate at once of true instinct and Holy Scripture. The Lord Jesus always bore Himself with true dignity, and allowed no person

to be too familiar. Even the disciple that leaned upon His breast looked up to Him with sacred awe. We can be simple, unaffected and humble, and yet carry ourselves with the holy dignity of the sons and daughters of God. Paul was a fine example of true manliness. When unjustly imprisoned, he refused to sneak out and run away, but manfully answered, "They have beaten us openly uncondemned, . . . and have cast us into prison; now, do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out." The soul in which the Holy Spirit dwells will always carry itself with sacred loftiness, as well as sweet humility. This is the safeguard of woman, and the glory of man.

2. Modesty is as necessary as dignity, and at once corrects it and adorns it. It does not lower our self-respect, but it simply veils us with the beautiful covering of self-unconsciousness. You may always know John, the beloved, by the fact that he never mentions himself, but speaks of the "disciple whom Jesus loved." When Moses' face shone with the brightest glow, he wist not that it shone at all. When beauty is conscious of itself it becomes disgusting. When talent and genius begin to show off, then they sink below contempt. When spiritual gifts and holy services are used to glorify the possessor or the worker, then they become objects of derision and lose their merit. The seraphim not only covered their faces but their feet with their wings, and tried to hide not only their beauty but their work. God gives us the sweetly-chastened spirit that bows its head and stands veiled with heavenly modesty.

3. Personal habits have much to do with the loveliness of our character and our lives. While we do not believe with the old lady that "cleanliness is next to godliness," yet we certainly believe that cleanliness stands near to godliness. While we do not go so far as to denounce chewing, smoking and snuffing as the basest of crimes, yet it is enough to say that they are not among the things that are lovely, venerable or of good report. And there are a thousand other things which a sanctified soul will learn, by holy intuition and watchfulness, to lay aside as defects if not defilements.

4. Good manners, refinement, and courtesy are among the things that are lovely and attractive in our Christian example. There is an affectation of refinement that is but the gloss and the counterfeit, but the true follower of Jesus Christ will always be gentle and gentlemanly, considerate of others and careful to avoid offense, and will act toward all with whom he comes in contact with that thoughtful consideration and courteous politeness which speak so strongly for Christ. After the greatest gentleman in Europe, Lord Chesterfield, had spent a few days with Archbishop Fenelon, who was as sweet as he was saintly, he remarked, "If I had stayed much longer I should have been charmed into accepting his religion." "Be courteous" is one of the commands of the Holy Ghost. The Christian lady and the Christian gentleman will carry their good manners into the kitchen and the factory, as well as into the social circle; the wife will be as polite to her husband and her cook as she is to the fashionable caller in the afternoon. The parent will be as gentle and considerate in speaking to his child, as when called to receive some distinguished visitor, or in wearing some courtly air on a great public occasion. Let us adorn the little things and the commonplaces of life with that "manner of love," which "the Father hath bestowed upon us," and which He would have us reflect.

5. Propriety, good sense, and the instinct of knowing the fitness of things, and always acting with good taste are among the most charming features of a well-balanced character. It is what the Apostle calls, "the spirit of a sound mind." The Lord Jesus was always on time and in order. We never find Him making a mistake or doing an unbecoming thing. And so of divine love it is said, "Doth not behave itself unseemly." A very simple remark, if appropriate to the occasion, is more effective than the most eloquent speech which is out of place. The Holy Spirit will give the heavenly quality of doing the right thing at the right time and in the right manner.

6. Wise and fitting speech, a well-governed tongue, and a discreet pen. Briefly, fitness in the use of words. This has much to do with the effectiveness of our lives and the attractiveness of our example. To be able to state in a few brief words the matter about which you wish to confer, to come quickly to the point and stop when you get there -- what a rare gift! To be able to put on the first page of your letter the exact idea that you mean to express, and to get to the point of your subject before you exhaust the patience and interest of your correspondent, these are things that do not require so much education as consideration. The conversational bore not only wearies his listener, but must often weary the Lord Himself. Such errors largely arise either from selfishness, self-consciousness, or lack of consideration for others. These are little things, but they are the flies that spoil the ointment, or the touches that polish the workmanship and glorify the grace of God. Reserve in conversation is just as necessary as frankness. "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards." There is a silence that is golden, and a quiet dignity that belongs to all spiritual force, and that speaks for God in our very manner.

7. Cheerfulness. Cheerfulness of disposition and manner have much to do with our influence and example. There are people who clasp your hand with a clammy touch that makes you think of a corpse. There are other touches that stir you, and looks that inspire you, and faces that lift you to heavenly things. It is told of a Christian minister who was in deep depression, that while attending certain religious meetings in England he was attracted by the face of a lady who attended the services from day to day. Her calm and peaceful expression of countenance impressed him with a sense of the Lord's presence, and encouraged him to seek and obtain the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the same source of light and gladness which he saw reflected in her. Long afterwards he met her and told her how her silent look had been the benediction of his life. Our faces can speak for God, and, if the heart is illuminated within, we ought to show it in every feature, in every tone, in every gesture. Our whole expression and bearing should be such as to make men say of us, as they said of some of old, "Each one resembled the children of a king."

8. Cordiality and heartiness of spirit and manner are desirable. There are people that chill us and repel us, and there are others that draw us and encourage us. There is a stiffness that is sometimes born of diffidence, sometimes of selfishness, sometimes of natural coldness. But it can be overcome by a true spirit and by a watchful discipline.

Just as a graceful carriage can be acquired by thoughtful attention, and a careless, clumsy and clownish walk can grow upon one through carelessness and neglect, so we can accustom ourselves to such thoughtful and loving consideration of others as will transform our very manner, and make us, as the divine picture so beautifully characterizes it, "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." "Of the same mind one toward another." A very large part of our Christian life consists of our social and domestic relations and intercourse. It is in the little touches of love, kindness and mutual consideration that the spirit of Christ shines out most constantly; and the lack of it is often most painfully manifest.

9. Sensitiveness to the feelings of others is a beautiful quality often found wanting in good people. If they meet a poor consumptive, they will be very likely to tell him how dreadful he looks, throwing over him the shadow of the grave, until he feels as if he had been at his own funeral. If there is a sore place anywhere they are sure to step on it. If you have some peculiar and deep affliction, they are very likely to refer to it in some coarse and thoughtless manner, until you find relief in silent tears, and hasten to shorten the painful interview. True Christian sweetness adjusts itself to others. It rejoices with them that do rejoice, and weeps with them that weep. The law of love is its great impulse, and it is ever watching with kind consideration to avoid offences on the one hand, and on the other to contribute to the happiness of all with whom we come

in contact.

10. Tact is an indefinable quality, but we are very distinctly conscious of it when we see it, and we are often painfully sensible of its absence. Its possessor has a charmed life, and a golden secret that melts away difficulties, misunderstandings and angry countenances, as the gentle sunshine. A good-natured remark, a playful witticism, a happy change in the subject of conversation, a word that provokes a smile, how often these things have prevented the gravest misunderstandings and solved the hardest problems. In dealing with souls it is essential to study our cases and adapt ourselves to conditions. "He that winneth souls is wise." A brusque address, an intrusive remark, an offensive question, or a lot of tiresome talk, will do far more harm than good to the soul that you seek to benefit, and often retard for years the work of conviction that may have already begun. How delicately Christ dealt with the woman of Samaria, the publican of Jericho, and the dying thief upon the cross! If His Spirit dwells in us we shall have His wisdom and skill.

11. In dealing with the faults of others there is room for the graces of Christian character. On the one hand there should be divine tenderness and gentleness. We are never fit to speak to others of their faults until our hearts are overflowing with love and free from resentment. Divine tact will always find some good thing to commend before we blame or criticize. On the other hand, there is a holy firmness and a righteous indignation which are just as becoming and necessary under certain circumstances, and which only the grace of the Holy Ghost can keep from becoming natural temper or unholy excess.

12. Loyalty to truth, to God, to the cause to which we are committed and to the friends that God has given us, -- these are qualities essential to the highest Christian character. They are rare, and their price is above rubies; they are the elements that constitute heroism and lead to the noblest sacrifices and the brightest examples of human friendship or public patriotism.

13. Self-sacrifice. This is among the things that are lofty, and this alone can lift us to the noblest heights of character and conduct. The mountain tops of sacred biography all reach their summits on some Moriah height where something has been sacrificed for principle or for God: where Abraham gave up his Isaac, or Mary poured out her costly ointment, or David's heroes dashed through the ranks of their foes, and gladly risked their lives to bring back to their king their helmets filled with the water of Bethlehem's well for which he longed. This was the glory of the great Apostle, and the only way in which he could expect to earn a prize. For preaching the Gospel he tells us there was no glory. That was simply duty. But for preaching the Gospel without charge there was a chance of winning a crown, and this was the glory of his life. God will give to every true life such opportunities for sacrifice and reward if we only desire to meet them. Thus alone can the jewels of the eternal crown be won.

14. Devoutness. This is the spirit of prayer, communion, devotion to God and seraphic love; the spirit of John the divine; of Fenelon, the medieval saint; of Madame Guyon; the loving heart of Samuel Rutherford; the holiness of Edward Payson; the spiritual zeal of Robert Murray McCheyne -- lives that lived in the light of an open heaven and breathed the sweet fragrance of the land of Beulah. Devoutness is one of the things that are venerable, the things that are lovely, the things that are of good report which the humblest saint may emulate.

15. Enthusiasm. No soul can greatly influence others unless it is itself on fire. Personal magnetism is borne of intense feeling and profound interest in the object that we have chosen. It is a shining quality, and a resistless force in Christian character. It gives impulse to our work, and wings our thoughts and words

with heavenly power.

16. A holy ambition, a heavenly aspiration, a life of hope and lofty endeavor will lift us above earthly and common things, and make our lives sublime. We are the children of eternity. We are the heirs of glory. We have in prospect a crown that fadeth not away, and an existence transcendently grander than the highest possibilities of earthly hope. How noble, how glorious, how aspiring we should be! What a grandeur it should add to our thoughts, conceptions, imaginations, to our very faces and bearing, as we press on to the glorious prize with the Spirit of the Master reflected in our countenance, and the light of the opening heaven shining on our transfigured brow. So "let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us," even "the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning," with the dew of His youth. So let us prove not only the things that are true and just and pure, but whatsoever things are lofty, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, let us think on these things; and let us put on not only the clean robes of holiness, but the wedding robes of beauty and glory for the Marriage of the Lamb.

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