

**JUDGES 16:1-31**  
**SAVED? OR LOST?**  
**SAMSON: CAN GOD BLESS A SELF-WILLED MAN?**

“Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. The Gazites were told, ‘Samson has come here.’ And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, ‘Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.’ But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

“After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, ‘Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.’ So Delilah said to Samson, ‘Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you.’

“Samson said to her, ‘If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.’ Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

“Then Delilah said to Samson, ‘Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.’ And he said to her, ‘If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.’ So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

“Then Delilah said to Samson, ‘Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound.’ And he said to her, ‘If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.’ So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom and the web.

“And she said to him, ‘How can you say, “I love you,” when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.’ And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. And he told her all his heart, and said to her, ‘A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.’

“When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, ‘Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.’ Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ And he awoke from his sleep and said, ‘I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.’ But he did not know that the LORD had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out

his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

“Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, ‘Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.’ And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, ‘Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.’ And when their hearts were merry, they said, ‘Call Samson, that he may entertain us.’ So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, ‘Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.’ Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

“Then Samson called to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.’ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines.’ Then he bowed with all his strength and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.”<sup>1</sup>

**S**amson was an unlikely hero; nevertheless, he was a hero. Whenever illustrators of children’s stories draw pictures of Samson, he is inevitably depicted as musclebound, a man of almost mythic proportions. From the accounts presented in the Word, I suggest that other than his flowing locks denoting him as a Nazirite, he was rather nondescript; it would have been impossible to pick him out of a crowd by his appearance. Likely, Samson could have served as a model for the proverbial hundred pound weakling who is always getting sand kicked in his face at the beach. The Philistines appear unable to account for his strength; they imagine there exists some dark secret accounting for his strength which is not at all apparent.

His life is a true tragicomedy—not a serious play with a happy ending, but a tragedy interspersed with comedic moments. As the youthful and indiscrete Samson blunders from one incident to the next, we find ourselves involuntarily crying out a warning for him to run. However, over a period of twenty years Samson moves deliberately toward a sorrowful end, at last discovering that playing fast-and-loose with God’s blessings invites sorrow and grief.

**SAMSON’S CALL** — To understand the life of Samson, it is necessary to remind ourselves of his call. The story is told in the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Judges. Samson was raised up by the Lord at a time when “the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” [**JUDGES 13:1a**]. As result of their proclivity toward sin, “the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years” [**JUDGES 13:1b**]. It is an axiom of the Faith that God does not bless evil. When we choose to sin against Him, refusing to be holy, He will deliver us into the hands of those who are opposed to righteousness. Perhaps this accounts for the wickedness plaguing modern society, driving even professed religious leaders to appeal to politics for deliverance.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Samson was appointed by God to serve in a time of national crisis. The nation had been humiliated by Philistine oppression for four decades. There was deep sorrow among the people; yet, there is no indication that most of the people were pleading with God for deliverance. Nevertheless, God was merciful, anticipating the people's need even before the people called.

Samson's parents were otherwise unknown in Israel. Manoah and his wife, from the tribe of Dan, were childless. They received an unsolicited, unexpected visit from the Angel of the LORD who announced that Mrs. Manoah would conceive and bear a son. This child was to be a Nazirite, wholly dedicated to God from his mother's womb. The somewhat lengthy account of this announcement concludes with the statement, "And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him" [JUDGES 13:24]. The boy grew, at last coming into his own as a man. Again, the Word of God simply states, "And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol" [JUDGES 13:25].

There are truths that I am compelled to point out before we move forward in the message. The first truth is that *Samson was set apart from his mother's womb*. I'm not suggesting that this is the case for everyone, nor even for most people. However, it is evident from Scripture that God does set apart for His own service some individuals. Perhaps more are set apart than we might imagine. Even a brief review of the Word will serve to remind us of this truth.

It is incontrovertible that Jeremiah was appointed a prophet to the nations before ever he was born. In the opening words of the prophecy Jeremiah penned, we read,

"The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’”

[JEREMIAH 1:4, 5]

It is unquestionably true that God had a task for Jeremiah; and Jeremiah was appointed and equipped even before the day of his birth.

The Apostle to the Gentiles makes a similar, startling statement in one of his earliest letters. Writing his apologia to the Churches of Galatia, Paul makes this stunning statement concerning his conversion to the Risen Son of God. "I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus" [GALATIANS 1:11-17].

In particular, focus on his testimony in the **FIFTEENTH VERSE**: "When He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not consult with anyone." Note that Paul testified that he was set apart before he was born. This erstwhile foe of the Faith of Christ the Lord was actually set apart from before his birth.

David the King wrote the 71<sup>st</sup> Psalm. In that Psalm, the Shepherd King makes an insightful confession. Perhaps the statement is restricted to David, but I understand the strophe I'm about to point out as being applicable to all people who hold to the Faith.

“Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;  
you are he who took me from my mother’s womb.  
My praise is continually of you.”

[PSALM 71:6]

I hesitate to speak of my own life, but I know me better than I know anyone else. Though I did not respond to God’s gracious call to life or accept His appointment to service until I was an adult, I did receive appointment early in my life. When but eight years old, an elderly evangelist approached me at an encampment I was attending. In the presence of many, that old servant placed his hand on my head saying, “God has revealed to me that this boy will be a preacher.” I remembered his words years later when I was set apart to the service of my Saviour; I often marvel at his words as I prepare the messages delivered to God’s people.

When my grandfather lay dying, one of his final instructions to my grandma was to ensure that she conveyed to me his Bible and all his sermon notes. “Mike,” he testified as he lay dying, “is going to be a preacher.” At that time, nothing could have seemed less certain than that I should follow the Faith. I was a “seventh day adventurer,” a “happy pagan”; I had no interest in the Faith. If the direction of my life at that time was any indication, there was no possibility that I would ever become a Christian, much less declare the message of life.

Of this I am certain, those men were permitted in some way that I cannot explain to peer through the curtain separating the present from the future receiving a revelation of God’s intent. After I had received God’s gracious call to life in His Son, I could look back and see that His hand had been guiding me despite my hostility toward Him. I suspect it is more common than many might imagine that God still designates some to service from their mother’s womb.

Yet another truth that must be stated is that *the source of Samson’s strength lay in his obedience to the LORD’s will*. I say this with a degree of caution. When Samson consorts with prostitutes and when he pursues marriage with a pagan, it should be obvious that God did not approve. However, Samson was a Nazirite from birth; and he appears to have maintained this vow, at least superficially. He did touch a dead body on that occasion when he took honey from the carcass of a lion he had killed. Still, he did not cut his hair, maintaining his outward adherence to the Nazirite vow. At a minimum, I suggest that he knew what was right and what honoured the Lord, though his obedience had been reduced to a formality. Like modern religious practise for much of Christendom, Samson performed prescribed rituals without actually looking beyond the actions to the reason for performing the acts or to see the One whom he was to serve and to honour.

The fourteenth chapter begins a series of harrowing misadventures culminating in the events recorded at the death of Samson. These misadventures include attempted marriage to a Philistine woman that resulted in betrayal when her family was threatened by leaders of the Philistine community, the slaughter of thirty men from her hometown, disappointment by his future father-in-law leading Samson to burn the standing grain and olive orchards of the town—crops that Dagon, grain god of the Philistines, was supposed to guard, the death of one thousand Philistines when they attempted to take Samson captive and several other fights resulting in the death of many Philistine warriors.

A third truth is that *Samson is proof that God can, and does, use imperfect people*. This should not be taken as permission for anyone to focus on self-gratification in a mistaken belief that God will ignore us when we choose to sin. This is what God says of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon in the Prophecy of Isaiah.

“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,  
    who formed you from the womb:  
‘I am the LORD, who made all things,  
    who alone stretched out the heavens,  
    who spread out the earth by myself,  
who frustrates the signs of liars  
    and makes fools of diviners,  
who turns wise men back  
    and makes their knowledge foolish,  
who confirms the word of his servant  
    and fulfills the counsel of his messengers,  
who says of Jerusalem, “She shall be inhabited,”  
    and of the cities of Judah, “They shall be built,  
    and I will raise up their ruins”;  
who says to the deep, “Be dry;  
    I will dry up your rivers”;  
who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd,  
    and he shall fulfill all my purpose”;  
saying of Jerusalem, “She shall be built,”  
    and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.””

“Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,  
    whose right hand I have grasped,  
to subdue nations before him  
    and to loose the belts of kings,  
to open doors before him  
    that gates may not be closed:  
‘I will go before you  
    and level the exalted places,  
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze  
    and cut through the bars of iron,  
I will give you the treasures of darkness  
    and the hoards in secret places,  
that you may know that it is I, the LORD,  
    the God of Israel, who call you by your name.  
For the sake of my servant Jacob,  
    and Israel my chosen,  
I call you by your name,  
    I name you, though you do not know me.”

[ISAIAH 44:24-45:4]

Of God, the Psalmist has said, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise you” [PSALM 76:10]. In the midst of divine judgements, the LORD God sent Moses to Pharaoh with this message, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, ‘Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth’” [EXODUS 9:13-16].

**SAMSON’S CHARACTER** — “Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her... After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.” I invite you to take time to consider Samson’s character. One commentator has written, “In the context of Judges, Samson is far from the standard of Christ. He is one of the most narcissistic persons in the entire Bible. Self-gratification is what drives this man. Never in the Samson narrative does he operate in anyone’s interest but his own. He does not care about God’s plan or any of the divine standards of either his place as an Israelite or his Nazirite status. He does not care about the will of his parents or the hearts of the ‘lovers’ with whom he consorts. All are to be manipulated for his sake.”<sup>2</sup>

In short, Samson holds a high opinion of himself. He is consumed with fulfilling his own desires, even at the expense of godliness. Indulging his own desires, he consorts with the enemy. Were there no women in Israel for him to marry? His father and mother pleaded with him to find a wife who shared his Faith [see JUDGES 14:1-3]. Despite the notation that his desire to marry a Philistine was from the Lord [see JUDGES 14:4], it is apparent that God worked in Samson’s life despite his self-will, and not because of his wickedness.

Did Samson really need a Philistine prostitute simply to gratify his lustful desires? What we witness is nothing less than disdain for righteousness and exaltation of his desires to the level of necessity. Many years after Samson judged Israel, a wise king wrote:

“Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with a whore?  
for dalliance with a promiscuous stranger?”<sup>3</sup>

[PROVERBS 5:20]

Surely wisdom such as that dispensed by Solomon in later years was available to Samson! Solomon warned,

“My son, give me your heart,  
and let your eyes observe my ways.  
For a prostitute is a deep pit.”

[PROVERBS 23:26, 27a]

Young men today will do well to heed these words of wisdom.

Would that Samson had received the wisdom delivered by Solomon, who wrote:

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<sup>2</sup> K. Lawson Younger Jr., **Judges and Ruth, The NIV Application Commentary** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2002) 327

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

“My son, be attentive to my wisdom;  
incline your ear to my understanding,  
that you may keep discretion,  
and your lips may guard knowledge.  
For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey,  
and her speech is smoother than oil,  
but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,  
sharp as a two-edged sword.  
Her feet go down to death;  
her steps follow the path to Sheol;  
she does not ponder the path of life;  
her ways wander, and she does not know it.

“And now, O sons, listen to me,  
and do not depart from the words of my mouth.  
Keep your way far from her,  
and do not go near the door of her house,  
lest you give your honor to others  
and your years to the merciless,  
lest strangers take their fill of your strength,  
and your labors go to the house of a foreigner,  
and at the end of your life you groan,  
when your flesh and body are consumed,  
and you say, ‘How I hated discipline,  
and my heart despised reproof!’”

[PROVERBS 5:1-12]

The early verses of this sixteenth chapter reveal a man who defied what he knew to be the will of God. His act of visiting a prostitute in Gaza is expression of Samson’s deliberate defiance of the Law of God. That he escaped is less a demonstration of God’s marvellous deliverance than it is an example of desecrating the gift of God! He lifted the gates of the city from their sockets, carried them, together with the two posts on which they swung and the bar that held them fast, and carried them a distance of over forty miles! Impressive? Absolutely! Yet, the best we can say is that his action was self-motivated with no concern either for God or for God’s glory.

Similarly, we read, “After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah” [JUDGES 16:4]. He did this, despite knowing that God had commanded His people not to intermarry with the pagans. God commanded, “You shall not intermarry with [pagans], giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and He would destroy you quickly” [DEUTERONOMY 7:3, 4].

However, in this instance Samson was himself deceived. He met a woman like himself who was driven by self-interest. “Love” was the last thing on her mind. Money is what loomed large in her mind. Samson was a means for her to gain what she wanted more than all else. Truly, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” [1 TIMOTHY 6:10].

The best we can say of Samson is that he was a self-willed man. Undoubtedly, he was called from his mother's womb to be a Judge over Israel. Remember, a Judge was not as we think of the term in our day; a Judge was one appointed by God as a protector of the nation. Judges were divinely appointed to deliver the nation from the oppression of her enemies. However, you will note that Samson never united the nation in turning back the Philistines who were then oppressing Israel. Nevertheless, he did harass these uncircumcised oppressors, leaving a trail of death each time he attacked them. The Philistines could never relax so long as Samson was alive. The days of Samson's life were days of constant distress for the enemies of God; they were always looking over their shoulders, never knowing where he might strike next.

Samson had trifled with sin; he would now discover that sin extracts a higher price from God's people than any ever imagine. We watch him attempting to see how close he can come to embracing evil without crossing the line. The account is stunning, and we recoil as we read it. "When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.' Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' And he awoke from his sleep and said, 'I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison" [JUDGES 16:18-21].

Reading of Samson's final betrayal that permitted the enemies of God at last to gain the advantage over him, we see a picture of the believer who dares play with sin. I heard a sermon on one occasion from this particular passage of the Word. The outline was permanently engraved in my memory. *Sin is at first binding*. Then *sin is blinding*. At last, *sin is grinding*. I would that every person listening today would etch this outline in his or her memory.

*Sin is binding*—it holds us firmly in its tentacles. *Sin is blinding*—we are kept from seeing the end to which it leads. Then, *sin is grinding*—the addict will spend the remainder of her days in hard labour because of sin. If you doubt this to be the case, look carefully at the individual addicted to drugs or to alcohol. Perhaps you imagine such an example is extreme. I note that we are just beginning to learn of the devastation from addiction to pornography, especially in young men and young women. If the binding power of sin is not obvious, consider those who imagine they can engage in just a little bit of infidelity to his or her spouse. A lie inevitably leads to other lies to conceal the truth lying behind the first lie. In all instances, holding onto anger is as though one attempted to clasp a cobra to the breast without being bitten. Sin destroys those who harbour it; and sin will destroy all around that one who tolerates it.

Christians seem oblivious to the destructive power of sin. We seem to imagine that we can resist wickedness; however, there is no such thing as a little bit of sin. If you flirt with sinful behaviour, you know that God sees everything; and the warning that Moses delivered to Reuben and Gad is applicable to you, "Be sure your sin will find you out" [NUMBERS 32:23b].

Truly has the Wise Man warned, "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned" [PROVERBS 6:27]? Young men play with fire, taking it to their bosom each time they go on the Internet and look at pornography. "Be sure your sin will find you out." Young women dressing to reveal their physical assets, imagining that they do not dishonour God. "Be sure your sin will find you out." Professed people of God feed on infidelity and filth masquerading as entertainment. "Be sure your sin will find you out." God watches; God sees.

**SAMSON'S CLOSE** — “Samson called to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.’ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines.’ Then he bowed with all his strength and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years” [JUDGES 16:28-30].

Even in death, Samson demonstrated his extreme narcissism. He had been appointed to the office of a Judge over Israel. He is listed among the heroes of the Faith in the Book of Hebrews. There, the writer notes, “Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets” [HEBREWS 11:32]. Yet, Samson’s final prayer was not a prayer for God’s glory—he prayed that he might be avenged on the Philistines for his two eyes! The man who had judged Israel, the Nazarite who was set apart for service to God, prays at the last, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He had wanted to live with the Philistines all his life; at last he wanted to die with them. Samson, endowed with extraordinary divine gifts, wasted his life. No other conclusion is permitted by the account of his pitiful life.

The divine account focuses in the end on the man and not on God. God did answer Samson’s prayer. Samson demonstrates greater physical strength in this final act than at any other time in his tragic life. Indeed, he accomplishes more for the cause of the LORD God in his death than he did in his life. Unfortunately, he was again motivated by self.

Allow me to make a couple of observations drawn from the dismal life Samson lived. *Samson’s life serves as a warning against self-interest.* Jesus spoke to this very issue when He warned, “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” [MATTHEW 10:38, 39]. Apparently, this truth is expected to be central to the life of one following the Master. This teaching is presented in each of the Gospels and iterated on at least one other occasion as recorded later in Matthew’s Gospel. “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul” [MATTHEW 16:25, 26]?

Samson’s spiritual apathy is astounding, stunning, stupefying. Despite his endowment, divine calling and blessing were ignored as he squandered his life and indulged his sensualities. Spiritual apathy led to rebellion in Samson’s life. Similarly, spiritual apathy ultimately will lead any Christian into rebellion. When self-interest becomes the motivational factor in one’s life, ruin and devastation lies in store for that individual. Those who are richly blessed by the Master seem often most susceptible to temptations leading to their downfall. One need but consider some of the wonderfully gifted preachers of the past several decades, who though marvellously capable in declaring the Word were finally consumed by their own desires.

I heard a greatly gifted servant of God excuse his behaviour on one occasion, saying, “God and I have an understanding.” He believed that so long as he preached the Word to large crowds, God would excuse his behaviour. I have personally known several powerful servants of the Living God who threw away every advantage and every blessing in order to serve their own interests. None of us are immune to such attitudes. Each Christian must put Christ and others first if he or she will continue to be a blessing to the people of God.

In the end, we must not ignore the fact that *Samson's drive to feed his unrestrained sexual appetite led to destruction*. Before ever Samson died, his service had degenerated into mere form. Sexual purity clearly did not factor in Samson's life. Recall God's warning against adultery, "You shall not commit adultery" [EXODUS 20:14]. If there was any doubt that this warning did not involve the inner person, Jesus' statement in MATTHEW 5:27, 28 destroys all doubt. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The divine warning against adultery involves the inner person. It is not possible to commit adultery, to be lascivious, lewd or lecherous without thought, intent and motive of disobedience to the divine command. God demands purity in our mind as well as in our acts.

Perhaps it would not have been necessary to emphasise the danger of pornography in an earlier day. However, in a day in which Internet pornography has become ubiquitous, a daunting number of God's servants have surrendered to what they imagine to be a private indulgence. There is nothing private about looking at pornography. Someone's daughter, someone's son, has been degraded to provide for your prurient voyeurism. You had to make the conscious decision to gratify your desire at least for that moment you sought to gratify your lechery. As Christians, we must protect our hearts, guarding our minds so that we will not shrink before Christ Jesus at His coming. It is necessary that we renew our minds, just as it is written: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" [ROMANS 12:1, 2].

Some years ago, Richard Foster wrote a book that challenged the church world. The title of the book was arresting—"Money, Sex & Power."<sup>4</sup> Foster brought into the open the primary areas in which Christians fail in the life of righteousness. These three powerful areas are not mutually exclusive; rather, they intertwine, conspiring against godliness. The numbers of gifted saints who have fallen from their secure position because of these seductive temptations are legion. Only the resort to God's Word and His will protects the heart of the believer.

Ultimately, Samson prayed for vengeance. God answered that prayer, not to avenge Samson's eyes, but to vindicate His Name. It was because the Philistines praised their God that the LORD God judged them by the hand of Samson. What we see is not so much a demonstration of Samson's strength as it is victory by the Living God in a contest against Dagon, grain god of the Philistines. Unknowingly, the Philistines had raised the contest to a level that ensured their destruction—it became the LORD God versus Dagon. They assumed that Samson's strength was conveyed in some magical manner through his long hair, never realising that the LORD God had given Samson his strength. The Philistines assumed Samson's hair was a fetish of some sort, never understanding that God enables His servants to accomplish what He wills.

When Samson cried, "Let me die with the Philistines" [tāmôt nāpšiy 'im-pēlišṭīm], God demonstrated His power once more. For twenty years Samson had been blessed; in all that time not a single evidence can be adduced that he sought God's glory. Samson serves as the example of a self-willed man despite God's blessing. Was Samson saved? Undoubtedly this was the case. However, like many of the saints of this day, he squandered his life, never achieving the potential that we would have wished. Let Samson's life be a warning to you, beloved saints. Either your life will honour God and glorify His Name, or you shall assuredly spend your strength in futile pursuits destined ultimately to fail.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Foster, **Money, Sex & Power** (HarperCollins, 1987)

I have spoken to those who profess to follow the Lord Christ. Let me caution that it is possible that some have deceived themselves. Perhaps they imagine themselves to be redeemed because they once said a prayer, because they united with a church, because they were dipped in the sacred bath—know for a certainty that nothing will suffice for God's gift of life except faith in the Risen Son of God. If your supposed faith has never resulted in a transformed life, if the Spirit of God does not live in you, you have deceived yourself.

We are taught in the Word of God, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" [**ROMANS 8:1-9**].

Let this word of warning suffice for the people of God. If you are outside the grace of God, then let this be the day when you turn to Him in faith. God calls on all people to receive as Master of life the Risen, Living Son of God. This is the call of God, "If you agree with God that Jesus Christ is Master over your life, believing with all your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free"—free from self-will, free from surrender to your base desires, free to honour the Son of God. "It is with the heart that one believes and is set free and with the mouth that one openly agrees and is set free." The Apostle concludes this call by citing the prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" [see **ROMANS 10:9-13**]. And that is our prayer for you. Believe and be saved. Amen.