

Christ's Last Word to His Church: Samson: A Study in the Impact of Chastening Upon a Compromised, Worldly (Thyatiran) Believer's Life

Revelation 2:18-29/Hebrews 12:1-11/Judges 13-16

All of us in Christ's Church are **called** from darkness to light at salvation; and we are **saved** from the power of Satan; and we are being **transformed** into saints of God. That process is called **consecration**. Last week as we looked at the Church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29), we saw that their consecrated lives were slipping because of compromise with sin and false doctrine.

Jesus called them to repent, to have a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. The letter to Thyatira is a challenge from Christ for His children of faith to do what is needed: **repent of compromising their lives of sanctification.**

Paul describes the deadly result of a compromised life. Please open to I Corinthians 3:15 where Paul warns all believers about the danger of getting to Heaven empty-handed, and what it means to suffer loss. In other words:

Don't Get to Heaven Empty Handed & Suffering Loss I Corinthians 3:15

Please stand with me and listen to this one verse, from God, through Paul, to each of us who will listen.

1 Corinthians 3:15 (NKJV) If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Pray

This morning, God's Word uses a well known person from the Bible to portray this description of being saved, yet so as by fire. This person is Samson, and he powerfully illustrates Christ's warning to Thyatira. The Scriptural biography of Samson teaches believers about suffering the loss that comes from a compromised life,

First, **Samson is a believer**, a servant of God, but one that was saved by fire, suffering loss. We know Samson is a believer because the New Testament tells us so in Hebrews 11:32.

Next, we can classify the struggles **Samson faced: chastening**; because the Lord

always chastens those who are really His, as Hebrews 12:1-11 clearly teaches.

Finally, we know **Samson suffered loss** because that is what Paul says happens to anyone who lives a compromised life like Samson, as I Corinthians 3:15 so hauntingly warns us.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling, and neglected his consecration: the Lord never let go of him.

His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time. But the warning from the Scriptures is:

Samson Shows Us How He Got to Heaven Empty Handed & Suffering Loss

Samson was one of the most amazing Old Testament personages. So many details God captured about his life are unique and profound in their meaning. Here are just a few truths about Samson's life:

- **God's Angels Announce His Birth:** He was one of only a handful of people whose births were announced by angels. Isaac, John the Baptist, and Jesus are the others. So he is in the top 1/10 of 1% of all the 3,000 people named in the Bible.
- **His Parents Sought God's Help to Raise Him:** His parents rank up there again with the fewest of the few. Only Joseph & Mary, Job, Abraham, Hannah, and Samson's dad Manoah are recorded as seeking and receive wisdom recorded in God's Word in how to raise their children.
- **He is Consecrated to God from Birth:** Now we are in special territory again. God picked from birth Jeremiah, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Paul. The calling that God placed upon Samson was to be a Nazarite: a person completely given to God for life. The inward response to this calling of obedience was to be a chosen life of pointing to the Lord by obedience. God gave Samson special supernatural strength.

The life of Samson is recorded in God's Word as a picture of the destructive power of sin, and the restoring power of grace. Samson often lived in the lust of the flesh; Samson often walked by the lust of the eyes; Samson often responded with the pride of life.

The dangers of compromise, the consequences of wandering from consecrated living, and the wonders of God's grace: are all seen in the incredible life of Samson.

- Experiencing great blessing and strength in one area of our lives does not make up for neglect and weakness in another area of our lives.
- Knowing the presence of God does not automatically overwhelm our will, we must choose to obey or we will disobey!

Few accounts in the Bible are as tragic as this one. Here is a man to whom God gave twenty years' time to begin to overcome the enemy, yet in the end, he himself was overcome by the enemy.

Samson's history is an illustration of Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 9:27, for Samson was a castaway. Hebrews 11:32 cites him for his faith in God's Word, but apart from this, very little can be said on his behalf. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV).

As we open to the book of Judges, God's Word traces the dangerous path that Samson chose, that led him away from blessing and into suffering loss because of his compromises with sin. Note the steps that led to Samson's sin and tragic end.

The First Step on the Pathway to Spiritual Loss: Samson Wandered from His Godly Heritage (Judges 13:1-25)

Just think for a moment what God has done, and who you are today as a believer and follower of Christ. We are each a special, unique creation with a purpose from God.

God made each of us exactly as we were born; and there were no mistakes in our manufacturing. Then the Lord delivered each of us to exactly the right home with the right parent(s). That is also what Samson had:

1. **A Godly Home:** Samson was born into a godly home, to parents who believed in God and practiced prayer. Samson was God's special gift to them and a tool God wanted to use in Israel. Samson's father prayed, "Teach us what we shall do unto the child" (v. 8, 12). Samson's folks loved God and tried to instill this same love in their son.
2. **A Godly Giftedness:** God gave to Samson a special endowment of the Holy Spirit that made him a tool in the Hands of the Lord to accomplish His purposes as a Judge in Israel.
3. **A Godly Calling:** God told Samson's parents that their son was called by God to be a Nazarite (lit. a "separated one"), who was to be instructed in how to be completely surrendered to the Lord. Samson's parents were to teach him Numbers 6, where he would learn a Nazarite was never to drink alcohol; never touch anything dead; and to maintain the mark of his dedication by uncut hair.

But, despite this path God chose for him, Samson began to despise his wonderful

heritage as he grew up. Instead of surrendering himself to accomplish God's plan, Samson chose to live his own plan.

How tragic it is when God gives us a wonderful heritage and His great plan, and we treat it lightly. We now find the next step towards spiritual loss in Samson's life.

The Second Step on the Pathway to Spiritual Loss: Samson Disobeyed His Parents (Judges 14:1–4)

One of the first signs of spiritual decline can often be seen in the way a young person responds to their God-given parents. Samson clearly demonstrates his rebellion.

1. **Samson decided to go away from the Lord.** Note in Judges 14 that "Samson went down..." (14:1), this statement is true both spiritually and geographically. Instead of staying inside the borders God had given for finding a life's partner, Samson went down into enemy territory looking for a wife; and disobeying both God's Word and his calling: Samson fell in love with a heathen woman.
2. **Samson decided to ignore God's rules.** Because Samson's parents specifically asked the Lord how to raise him, Samson would have known the laws of separation God had given in the Pentateuch. But Samson chose to ignore God's Words in Genesis 24:1–4 (don't take a pagan wife); in Exodus 34:16 (beware of pagan wives); in Deuteronomy 7:3 (don't marry pagans); and never forget that the same command from God is restated for us in the New Testament in II Corinthians 6:14–18.
3. **Samson decided he was his own authority.** Note that God's Word captures that he told his parents; note that Samson was not honoring them by asking them. Even worse, when they reminded Samson about God's Word they had taught him, he defied them as he said: "Get her for me, for she pleases me well!" Samson was not restrained by the fact his choice displeased his godly parents. God does use Samson sin to strike the Philistines (v. 4). But, a godly person will not intentionally disregard a true Scriptural admonition from their godly parents who obey God's Word.

The Third Step on the Pathway to Spiritual Loss: Samson Compromised His Life (Judges 14:5–20)

In that culture, the parents arranged the marriage, and there was often a year between the engagement and the wedding. Samson met a lion, and God gave him the power to overcome it even though Samson was disobeying God's Word. After months of waiting, when Samson went to get married, he found that bees had built a honeycomb in the skeleton of the lion.

Though Samson had been taught that in Numbers 6:6–9 God said that a Nazarite was never to touch a dead body, Samson deliberately defiled himself for the sake of the

honey!

"How many Christians today defile themselves just to enjoy a little honey in the carcass of a lion"¹—perhaps it is the honey we desire of:

- Compromising or defiling lyrics of a popular musician; or the
- God-dishonoring message of a video game; or the
- Spirit-grieving scenes in a movie; or the
- Disobedient-direction of an ungodly friendship.

As a Nazarite, and a leader of God's People, Samson had no right to be sharing in the paganism of a worldly Philistine wedding.

As Spirit-indwelt, consecrated servants of God: neither do we have any right to defile the Temple of the Living God that we are to be for the Lord. God's Word clearly tells us:

- ***Believers are not to marry Unsaved Partners:*** 2 Corinthians 6:14 **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.** For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?
- ***Believers are not to make their closest friendships in life with unsaved people:*** James 4:4-8 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that **friendship with the world is enmity with God?** Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
- ***Believers are not to be captivated by the love worldly things:*** 1 John 2:15 **Do not love the world** or the **things in the world.** If anyone **loves the world,** the **love of the Father is not in him.**

Church History records an event that illustrates how deeply the Apostles believed what they wrote down for God. One day while the aged apostle John was bathing in the public baths of Ephesus, a believer from the church told him that the gnostic, apostate, false teacher Celsius, who was constantly attacking the deity of Christ, had just gotten into the same pool that John was in.

The Apostle John jumped from the pool, wrapped a towel around himself, and ran from the Roman Bath. He did not want to even share a bath with someone who hated Christ.

Finally, Samson's Compromises Led to Disaster (16:21-31)

First, ***Samson was Dominated by Lust.*** That un-mortified passion led Samson to intensely desire a pagan Philistine woman as a wife, which was strictly forbidden by God's Law. In addition, that passion led him to fornication with prostitutes, like his time spent with Delilah, who betrayed him for money.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, Expository Outlines: Judge, in loc.

Second, **Samson was Driven by Pride and Revenge**. He was more moved by anger at personal affronts to strike out at the Philistines than he was moved by the suffering of the people he was supposed to lead (cf. 14:19–20; 15:7–8; 16:28).

Third, **Samson was Defeated by himself**. We can hardly imagine what Samson, with his great strength and his godly heritage, might have been for the Lord. If only he had lived out on a daily basis, the formal commitment to God, expressed in that Nazarite vow².

The rest of the story of Samson's life shows the tragic end of any believer who will not let God have his way with their life. From Judges 16:20 onward, Samson does nothing but suffer loss. His life is a fitting portrait of God's warning that: God is not mocked, what ever we sow, we reap!

1. **Samson loses his hair**, the symbol of his Nazarite dedication; for that dedication had long since been abandoned.
2. **Samson loses his strength**, but doesn't even know it until he is overpowered. Note the sad commentary in Judges 16:20: And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" **But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.**
3. **Samson loses his sight**, as the Philistines put out his eyes.
4. **Samson loses his freedom**, for they bind him with fetters of brass.
5. **Samson loses his usefulness to the Lord**, for he ends up grinding corn instead of fighting God's battles. What a picture of sin. First sin blinds, then sin binds, and finally sin grinds. Ask any person who has lived a life of alcohol, a life of immorality, a life of drugs: they will tell you no matter how alluring any sin looks, it eventually grinds.
6. **Samson loses his testimony**, for he was the laughingstock of the Philistines. Their fish-god Dagon, and not the God of Israel, was given all the glory.
7. **Samson loses his life**. Samson was a castaway; he had committed sin unto death, and God had to take him off the scene³. His loved ones claimed his body and buried him "between Zorah and Eshtaol"—the very place where he had started his ministry (13:25). That prayer of repentance, and Christ's coming sacrifice, would erase the penalty and record of his sin, but not the loss that it would bring

² These three points drawn from Richards, Lawrence O., *The Teacher's Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1987.

³ What about Samson's death? Was it suicide, and was it wrong? No, he died in faith the book of Hebrews tells us. Some Philistine temples had roofs overlooking a courtyard, above wooden columns planted on stone foundations. The central pillars were set close to furnish extra support for the roof. Here the victory celebration and taunts flung at the prisoner below drew a big crowd. The full strength of Samson, renewed by God, enabled him to buckle the columns. As a result, the roof collapsed and the victory was Israel's, not Philistia's. He died for the cause of his country and his God. He was not committing suicide, but rather bringing God's judgment on His enemies and willing to leave his own life or death to God. He was the greatest champion of all Israel, yet a man of passion capable of severe sin. Still, he is in the list of the faithful (cf. Heb. 11:32). Judges 16 in the John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

to Samson's rewards in Heaven.

The Message from Samson's Life: How to Get to Heaven Empty Handed & Suffering Loss

What happened to Samson in New Testament terms? To answer that, and as a warning to every one of us called to life-long consecration to the Lord: here is a series of verses that explain to us that there are choices we make as believers that can cause us to one day, suffer loss. Remember:

1. **We are CONSECRATED: All New Testament Believers are Consecrated to the Lord Like Samson Was.** 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that **your body is the temple⁴ of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.
2. **We are ANSWERABLE: We Will Each Answer To God For What We Did With Our Body.** 1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, **he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** 1 Corinthians 9:27 But **I discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should **become disqualified**.
3. **God is INVOLVED: God Will Not Stand By As We Sin.** 1 Corinthians 11:30-31 For this reason **many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep**. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.
4. **God gives WARNINGS: Chastening Proves God's Love.** Hebrews 12:5-6, 8 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 **For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.**" 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, **then you are illegitimate and not sons.**
5. **We can go TOO FAR: Going Too Far Too Often With Sin Will Be Deadly For Believers.** 1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. **There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.** 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.
6. **Some are DEAD: God Kills Believers Who Won't Repent In Time.** Revelation 2:22-23 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, **unless they repent of their deeds.** 23 **I will kill her**

⁴ The Holy Spirit is so specific, we are not the Greek word: *hieron* 'the whole temple building', but the Greek word: *naos*, the Holy of Holies.

children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Our God of the Grace of New Beginnings

Apparently during the grinding at the mill, Samson repented of his sin. God offered him one more chance to act by faith.

His hair had begun to grow and Samson remembered his calling. He asked God for strength to win one more victory over the enemy. God answered his prayer, but in defeating others, Samson lost his own life.

Samson will always stand out in Scriptures as an illustration of people who have power to conquer others, but who cannot conquer themselves.

- He could set the Philistine fields on fire, ***but could not control the fires of his own lust.***
- He could kill an attacking lion, ***but would not put to death the passions of his own flesh.***
- He could easily break the bonds that men put on him, ***but the shackles of his own sin gradually grew stronger on his soul.***
- He could have led the nation, ***but he preferred to work independently, and as a result, left no permanent victory behind.***
- He could have been remembered for what he built up, ***but instead everyone but God only remembers what he destroyed: lions, foxes, fields, gates, soldiers, women's purity, and his own life and ministry.***

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time.

This morning, if you are headed away from God, down the road of compromise with sin, why not repent this moment.

Right there where you sit cry out to God and say, I don't want to waste my life, and arrive in Heaven only to see my life burned up and I am empty handed before your Judgment Seat.

Our God offers the grace of New Beginnings. Reach out and surrender to Him Today.

Appendix:

To have grown up with Samson must have been amazing. His neighborhood pals must have stood in wonder at his immense strength. His enemies must have fled quickly. It was like having a one-man army.

As a young man probably in his teens, we get the first indicator that Samson was not going the direction the Lord had pointed him. He begins to live by his desires and not God's. He begins to serve his own lusts and not God's Words. A string of women begin to parade through his life. In fact seven times Samson was guided by the lust of his eyes when he "saw a woman that pleased him". Each instance was a dangerous choice.

The final, and deadliest woman is Delilah. Her name has become synonymous with lust, deceit, betrayal and ruin. She tries to find the secret of his strength for an enormous bribe. Samson knows it is his hair; and in a series of three lies he slowly gives clues.

Spurgeon's summary says it all:

At last⁵ he falls into the hands of Delilah. She is bribed with an enormous sum, and she endeavors to get from him the secret of his strength. He foolishly plays with his own destruction. At last he lets out the secret, his strength lay in his locks. Not that his hair made him strong; but that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favor to him.

While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him. His hair is cut away; the Philistines begin to oppress him, and his eyes are burned out with hot iron. How are the mighty fallen!

And now he comes to the very city out of which he had walked in all his pride with the gates and bolts upon his shoulders; and the little children come out, the lower orders of the people come round about him, and point at him - "Samson, the great hero, hath fallen! Let us make sport of him!" What a spectacle!

Why, he must be the sport and jest of every passer by, and of every fool who shall step in to see this great wonder - the destroyer of the Philistines made to toil at the mill. That he should have lost his eyes was terrible; that he should have lost his strength was worse; but that he should have lost the favor of God for a while; that he should become the sport of God's enemies, was the worst of all.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling and consecration – the Lord never let go of him. His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and

⁵ Delivered on Sabbath Morning, November 21st, 1858, by the REV. C. H. SPURGEON at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens. Sermon # 224.
<http://thebiblerevival.com/teachings/books/0008/0224.htm>

God uses Samson one final time. As John MacArthur so eloquently describes:

The greatness⁶ of God's grace is seen in His choosing the undeserving to be His people and the unqualified to do His work. It should be a marvelous encouragement to every believer to know that, just as Elijah (James 5:17), the apostles had a nature like ours. Because there was no other way, God chose to bestow sanctifying grace on those who believe in His Son and by His own power to transform them into men and women of great usefulness.

We are tempted to become discouraged and disheartened when our spiritual life and witness suffer because of our sins and failures. But God picks normal people and pours His grace on them. Satan wants our sins and failures to convince us to give up. But one look at the people of the Bible should defeat that temptation. The work of God is performed by weak individuals like us, surrendered to the God whose power is perfected in man's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). God has always had only weak and sinful humans to work with.

Apart from the brief ministry of His own Son, the history of God's work on earth is the history of His using the unqualified. The twelve disciples who became apostles were no exception. Even from the human standpoint they had few characteristics or abilities that qualified them for leadership and service. Yet God used those men, just as He did Noah, Abraham, and the others, in marvelous ways to do His work.

Fourth, Samson Ignored God's Warnings (15:1-20)

This chapter records several victories, but each has a cause for Samson to think, almost a subtle reminder from God that he was headed the wrong way. The chapter finally ends with Samson weakened, dangerously thirsty, and exhausted.

- Samson burned the fields of the Philistines, but they turned around and burned the woman he had loved (15:6 with 14:15).
- Samson avenged the death of his wife, but then his own people turned against him and delivered him to the Philistines (vv. 11–13).
- God delivered him, but then God warned him by showing him how weak he was.

The Scriptures only record Samson praying twice: here at the end of chapter 15 for water (vv. 18–20), and at the end of his life in 16:28, for strength to destroy the Philistines.

Samson's parents were marked by their prayers for God's help, but Samson seems to have mostly ignored their example. God warned Samson in this chapter, by these events, but he would not heed the warning.

⁶ From Matthew 10 in MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

Fifth, Samson Played With Sin (16:1-20)

Samson had already gotten into trouble with one woman, but now he tried again, this time going deep into enemy territory to Gaza.

Again, God warned him by allowing the enemy to almost catch him, but Samson still refused to repent. It was then that Delilah came into his life and led him to his doom.

The Valley of Sorek was close his hometown, but Samson's heart was already far from God. It should shocks us to read of this consecrated servant of God, called to be a Nazarite, sleeping on the lap of a wicked woman. But that is where compromise always takes us, away from God. Samson, like others who follow his way of disobedience chose to go his own way.

Three times Delilah enticed Samson, and three times he lied to her. Each time, the Philistines came rushing in. Samson should have realized he was in a dangerous trap. But as God tells us in Proverbs 7:21–27, the seducing woman holds great power over the listening man. Samson yielded because he slept when he should have fled.

We all need to heed Christ's warning in Matthew 26:40–41 to watch and pray "lest we enter into temptation". It is always deadly to our spiritual lives when we play with sin.