

WHENEVER WE SHUN GOD'S WISDOM – WE WILL BE SHUNNED BY GOD'S BLESSING.

Clement of Alexandria was an early church father who lived from 150 – 215A.D. He wrote several books which helped formed certain theological beliefs... which we still hold dear today. ... Some of his focus was on the nature of Christ... the role of women in the church (which were scandalously liberal for that day)... and the nature of faith in the life of the believer.

As we begin our time today in the book of Judges... I would like for you to consider what Clement of Alexandria has written... about freedom of choice and God's blessing. Listen carefully to the very profound points that he makes...

It is not those that abstain from wickedness from compulsion, but those that abstain from choice that God crowns. It is impossible for a man to be steadily good except by his own choice. For what is made good by compulsion of another is not good; for he is not what he is by his own choice. It is the freedom of each one that makes true goodness and reveals real wickedness.

True goodness only comes when we select the option (without being forced in any way) to withdraw ourselves from wicked activity. And this is what God rewards... He crowns it. ... If someone forces us to abandon our evil behavior and tendencies... it is not true goodness... and we should not expect to be nicely compensated by God.

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When a person comes into a relationship with Jesus Christ... God places within us... for the very first time... the power to constantly choose to withdraw ourselves from participating in evil. But He doesn't remove our ability to choose. We now have the ability to consistently choose behaviors that serve God's purposes... through the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives... .. But we can also ignore it altogether. ... You see... God wants you and I to develop true goodness... which brings Him the greatest honor and glory.

Even a young believer... who carries deep feelings of hurt and anger... from being treated in ways in which **no one** should ever be treated... can choose not to let thoughts *linger* ... which are desirous thoughts of seeing the other person suffer for their wrongs... .. A believer who has long and torrid history of giving-in to pornography... can choose **not** to put themselves in situations and places where they have opportunity to feed their impure thought life... .. And because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life... we can choose not to lash out with our tongue... when others insult us or say awful things that are not true about us...

Now Samson is given to us as a picture of a man who was filled with the Spirit of God... yet he chose to live his *own* life... he chose to cater to his sinful nature. ...We are going to see in chapters 14, 15 and 16 of this Book of Judges... what trouble his choices got him into. ... He was in trouble most of his adult life because he made the wrong choices... but God *never* forsook him. God continually offered mercy to him.

Samson's life is the story of every one of us... who has ever given his/her life to the Lord. ... This is our struggle too. ... God has a definite plan for our life as well... We need to constantly choose to live according to that plan.

Judges 14:1-4

Samson leaves his own country... and goes about four miles southwest to this little town... Timnah, where his enemies the Philistines live - the enemies who have been holding the Israelites in captivity for twenty years. Now it is interesting here that Samson's whole attitude is demanding... It is one of, *"I have my rights... I'm all of 19 years old... I've got a right to have whatever I want... and I want a woman... I want that one... and I want you to get her for me... I am entitled!"*

He knew all the time that this was a direct violation of the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy 7 said, "You shall not intermarry with Canaanites when you come into the land for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, for you are a holy people to your God. The Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession." This was the same sin that put the Israelites in captivity in the first place (Judges 3:6) They forsook the Lord, they served the Baals, and they intermarried with the Canaanites, hoping for military alliances.

Samson... who had been set apart for special devotion to the Lord even before he was conceived... shows no interest in the things of the Lord. The only thing that interests him is what he sees... and he sees a Philistine woman.

Our world... which is ruled by the eyes... is not unlike Samson's. ... Commercialism sure knows this. ... On television... or in a magazine... or online... we see something and we want it. ... Little in our world regulates our desires... On the contrary... so much in our world validates our desires. "You really deserve this...!" ... And what we define as "NEED" is really only "desire." ... Virtually no desire deserves to go unsatisfied.

(LISTEN) – We may get our own way... but when we make choices apart from the Holy Spirit's leading... we will someday loathe that decision. The cry of our heart will be... "I knew better! Why didn't I listen?" **WHENEVER WE SHUN GOD'S WISDOM – WE WILL BE SHUNNED BY GOD'S BLESSING.**

The fact that God used Samson's disobedience to do His work... must not be interpreted to justify doing evil. ... Some may think that if Samson had not gone after this unholy woman... the beginning of Israel's deliverance from the Philistines would not have occurred. ... But the truth of the matter is... that if Samson had not gone after the unholy woman... the deliverance probably would have been more thorough... not as partial.

Samson surely was directed by God to seek an occasion against the Philistines... and to lead the Israelites in breaking out from under their yoke. But Samson did not take the time to inquire of the Lord how... or in what legitimate ways... he might do this. ... We do not find him asking... as his successor Samuel did... "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." ... Nor did he seek divine guidance when his parents questioned his seeking a bride among the Philistines. ... All that mattered was that she looked good to him. ... I don't know about you... but I have little wonder... that Samson's

potential for a greater deliverance was reduced by his pleasure seeking choice. ... Samson only BEGAN to deliver Israel from their oppressors... unlike all the other judges... who actually delivered Israel.

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Never try to justify evil because some good MIGHT come of it. This only perverts the grace of God into that which sanctions evil conduct. ... It is true... that like Samson... God's purposes will be accomplished in spite of our disobedience... and bad choices. But don't ever think that you are free to use this as justification to go ahead and make a wrong choice. You don't win a drug addict to Christ by snorting cocaine with them. ... You don't evangelize someone you are attracted to by having sexual relations with them... Marrying a non-believer in hopes that they will one day give their life to Christ... does not nullify God's command forbidding the saved from marrying the unsaved. ... Now... in each of those cases... where someone HAS gone ahead and chosen wrong... and God did indeed bring someone to Himself through that relationship... this simply shows the grace of God working in spite of the wrong choice... as we see here with Samson.

God can... and does fulfill His purposes... in spite of our choosing amiss.

Psalm 76:10 (ESV)

Surely the wrath of man shall praise you;

When God isn't permitted to rule in our lives... He overrules and works out His will in spite of our decisions. ... Of course... we're the eventual losers for rebelling against Him... but God will accomplish His purposes either with

us or in spite of us. ... Samson should have been going to a war instead of to a wedding... but God used this event to give Samson occasion to attack the enemy. ... Because of this event... we are about to see Samson kill thirty men... burn up the enemy crops... slaughter a great number of Philistines... and slay 1,000 men. ... Samson hadn't planned these things... but God worked them out just the same.

With brilliant irony the narrator describes a free spirit... a rebel driven by selfish interests... doing whatever he pleases without any respect for his parents and with no respect for the claims of God on his life... but in the process he ends up doing the will of God.

Now... this brings up a natural question. ... If we are inclined to make an important decision solely on the basis of what we feel... something that looks good to us... and it really isn't the BEST choice according to God's plan for our life... would God... in His grace... ever give us some sort of warning... before we get in too deep. ... Yes... I believe that He very often does! ... In fact we see Him do that for Samson here in our passage...

When Samson and his parents went down to Timnah to make arrangements for the marriage... it appears that Samson left the main road (and his parents)... and went on a detour "as far as" the vineyards... and there a lion attacked him. ... A vineyard was a dangerous place for a man under a Nazarite vow. ... He was not supposed to have anything to do with grapes... or anything associated with the vine... according to Num. 6:1-4.

Before we read the next couple of verses from our passage... let me tell you what the majority of the Bible commentators say about this narrative

that we are about to read. (And I think they are right.) God sends a lion as a warning to Samson... that he was walking on the wrong path. ... And then God gives Samson the supernatural ability to bare-handedly kill this young lion...

God in his grace and his love for Samson is saying, *"I'm adequate. You're going the wrong way. I can defeat the Philistines in another way, one that will not compromise your walk with Me, one that will not compromise My character, one that will not compromise the people of Israel in any way."*

I think God brings lions into all of our lives to show us that He is adequate for whatever happens. ... These lions come rushing at us. ... Sometimes they are financial... sometimes they are emotional... sometimes they are spiritual. ... They come upon us so quickly we do not know what to do except to say, *"Lord, help!"* and the moment we say that... God fills us with the Spirit and we find ourselves adequate to defeat whatever lion comes.

The lion comes in the form of Satan. First Peter 5 says, "be alert, be sober, watch out. Your adversary, the devil, is coming at you like a roaring lion"--licking his chops to get to you. But God is adequate to meet your needs, regardless of what is happening today in your life.

The Holy Spirit gave Samson power to defeat the enemy (a lion)... but Samson persisted on his path of disobedience into enemy territory and an unlawful wedding... failing to see how God wanted him to defeat the enemy Philistines.

Judges 14:5-9

The lion had been a warning from God. But it was also a demonstration of God's mercy toward Samson. ... God delivered Samson... even though Samson was in the wrong place (a vineyard) ... and was heading for another wrong place (Timnah)... to commit an unlawful act (marry a pagan woman.) ... But even God's mercy was not enough to stop 'Ol Samson.

Again... Samson plays with fire... drawing near to a carcass he's not supposed to touch. The Nazarite vow he was under forbade him from coming in contact with anything dead. ... But Samson ignores that. ... Maybe he wants to do nothing more than admire his work of killing that lion. ... But then he notices the surprising presence of honey in the carcass. Samson sees the honey... he wants it... and he takes it — just like an American consumer... he throws out all signs of danger and poor decision-making. ... Ever so nonchalantly... he eats as he goes along. ... He wants to take the woman he's not supposed to marry... and on his way to do so... he takes some honey he's not supposed to eat.

Right now... we are in the midst of the Holiday Season. ... It is a time of indulgence... isn't it...? ... You and I can be quite adept at ignoring the lion that God perhaps has already sent our way. ... Maybe previous Christmas seasons you went far outside your budget in gift buying and holiday shopping. By the time January and February rolled around... the lion roared in the form of the credit card bill. By God's grace though... you have somehow managed (or were delivered from) that uncomfortable debt. But here we are... it's the holidays again... The temptation is just as strong as it was before last year's indiscretion. You want to just keep buying and buying... making purchases with money you don't yet have.

Maybe you have faced a lion of poor health. God has mercifully brought you through a problem... brought on from unhealthy eating... But now you have some great seasonal delights before you. ... *“I’ve already eaten more Christmas fudge than I should... but it is sooooo good!...”*

Maybe last year... Christmas was spoiled for you because of the rudeness and obnoxious behavior of Uncle Jack. ... Perhaps he deserved the blunt comments that you made at him. ... It was an uncomfortable few weeks as the family divided up and took sides... but Uncle Jack and Aunt Eunice have agreed to come for Christmas again this year. ... Will you show him the same kind of grace that Christ extends to you – every day...?

Do you have a lion that God has sent to keep you from going down the wrong path...?

Whenever we make choices apart from the Holy Spirit’s leading... we will someday loathe that decision. The cry of our heart will be... “I knew better! Why didn’t I listen?” God even sent me a lion! ... **WHENEVER WE SHUN GOD’S WISDOM – WE WILL BE SHUNNED BY GOD’S BLESSING.**

Each time that it is mentioned that either Samson or his parents went to Timnah... in verse 1... verse 5... and verse 7... it says they went **DOWN** to Timnah. ... They indeed had to go down rocky mountain gorges. ... Their geographic path was downward... but so was the spiritual path they were taking. ... Samson's path is a reminder of Jonah's journey. ... Jonah went down to Joppa... down into the ship heading to Tarshish... down to the bottom of the sea. ... Samson and Jonah both rebelled against God. ... Their rebellion was against God and it spiritually pulled them down.

Rebellion against God always leads downward.

The world will say, "*That's right Samson! Do what you want! You have the right to do anything you desire!*" ... As Christians... we cannot trust unbelievers to tell us what direction we should be going. ... This world does not know what direction it is heading. ... The mentality of this world is the epitome of confusion and chaos. ... Their up is God's down. ... Our plumbline for decisions is not to be based upon society's opinions... but upon the Word of God. ... This is the reason Samson's parents protested their sons choice - because it was contrary to God's Word. ... Their protest... however... was rather lack-luster... His parents briefly argued against the sin... but then went along with it. They opposed the marriage and disobedience by talk... but not by walk. They went down to Timnath to arrange the marriage.

Samson's parents arrange this marriage according to the local customs. This included a 7 day feast... for which the Hebrew word that is used here... "mish-teh"... literally means "drinking party." ... So ... apparently ... one more element of Samson's Nazarite vow was broken. ... And Samson... as any good host would do... provides a popular form of entertainment. Riddles were the favorite party game... of that culture.

Judges 14:10-14

Sad to say... he constructed the riddle out of the experience of his sin! ... He didn't take seriously the fact that he had violated his Nazirite vows. ... It's bad enough to disobey God... but when you make a joke out of it...

you've sunk to new depths of spiritual depravity. Samson continues to go DOWN to Timnah...

Samson propounds a riddle that looks like his odds are pretty certain for a victory. ... But a sure thing is never a sure thing when you are flaunting God! ... **WHENEVER WE SHUN GOD'S WISDOM – WE WILL BE SHUNNED BY GOD'S BLESSING.**

Judges 14:15-18

What's sweeter than honey...? - A woman's words. ... What's stronger than a lion...? - A woman's tears. ... Indeed... the lion and the honey within it were warnings. The woman is too strong for Samson to overpower... and too sweet to resist... God was saying "stay away from her!" ... In Samson's case... justice is poetic—literally. ... Having seized what he desired... Samson composed a poem... and then the poem is composed against him. This is definitely "poetic justice."

Samson knows he had lost... and... once again... in riddle-like fashion... he accuses them of cheating by having plowed with his heifer (a young cow) — conspiring with his wife.

A word to the wise... Men! ... Never... under any circumstances... in jest or in seriousness... to any person... at any time... refer to your woman as your "heifer." ... And yes... this was just as insulting in Samson's day and culture as it would be in ours...

But getting back to our point. ... We don't often realize this about our American consumerism. ... But whenever we see... want... and take...

irrespective of the will of God... .. just like Samson... we will reap what we take. ... Whatever was sweet in the mouth... becomes bitter in the belly. Especially if we celebrate the satisfaction of our desires... in the manner of Samson. We are simply sowing the seeds of our own destruction. ... Short-term satisfaction often leads to long-term disappointment and degeneracy.

Our poems of defiance... so to speak... through which we boast that we can get away with anything... come back to haunt us. ... MIT Professor Jonathan Grubber might be able to vouch for this. ... Our “companions,” whoever or whatever they may be... who serve our interests now... turn out to be our enemies.

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Judges 14:19-20

For the second time in Judges 14... the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson... this time for the sake of killing thirty Philistines to make good on his bet. ... Remember... the Lord said that Samson would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Samson’s sinful desire for a Philistine wife was used toward that end. ... Samson has no interest in delivering Israel from the Philistines. At this point... he’s only interested in taking out his anger on the Philistines.

A righteous deliverer Samson is not. ... Yet the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him — and uses his unrighteous desire for a pagan woman... to further His righteous purposes. ... God is not the author of evil... on the contrary... He overcomes it and makes it serve his purposes... .. In a world

polluted with sin... salvation is messy business. Just look at the cross. ... Watch and see how God overcomes the evil of Judas' betrayal... the evil desires of the Jewish leaders... and the cruelty of the Roman oppression... to accomplish His plan to redeem you and I.

Samson's life is the life of all of us who have given ourselves to the Lord. It is a life of choices, choosing between the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. I believe that Samson made the wrong choices but God overruled them to fulfill his ultimate purpose of ridding the land of the Philistines.

The Scriptures are really clear for us today: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death the sinful nature with its passions and its desires." We have that ability now because of the Spirit. If we live by the Spirit, then let us also walk by the Spirit.

Have you come to know the perfect deliverer...? Jesus Christ...?

There is not a more important decision that you will ever make... than to give your life over to Him. ... You do this first by recognizing your need for His mercy... that you don't deserve and can never earn His salvation. You have to recognize that although you are not worthy in any way... you can even still receive it... as an undeserved gift. It's called grace. It is because Christ has paid the penalty for all your sin... when He died on the cross...

And the last thing I want to say this morning is this...

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