

Cling to Christ: The Church at Pergamos

LHC: Message Sixteen (980607PM)

Week 16: Cling to Christ

(Revelation 2:12–17 — The Church at Pergamos)

This week as we approach the end of days, you can find hope as you cling to Christ!

SUNDAY: The Security of Christ's Plan

[We] are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

—1 Peter 1:5, emphasis added

This week we will tackle one of the hardest parts of Christian living—being *in* the world, but not *of* the world; loving the *lost*, but not loving the world system. That is the message that Christ's challenge brought to the church at Pergamos.

Geographically, Pergamos was a city eighty miles north of Smyrna, fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea, on a hill 1,000 feet above the fertile valleys. *Historically*, when John wrote in A.D. 95, it was an old city that had been the capital of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) for 300 years. *Culturally*, it was a university town, having the largest library in the ancient world, rivaling that of Alexandria. With 200,000 volumes, Pergamos was noted for producing the parchment (boiled animal skins) on which books were written.

Theologically, it may be that Satan himself had a personal throne in Pergamos as headquarters for his global rebellion during that period of time (Revelation 2:13). Satan, “*the ruler of this world*” (John 12:31), was served by his hierarchy of servants that followed him: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12).

Pergamos, the focal point of Satan's kingdom, was a sacred city to the pagans. Worship of the king of the gods of the Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus (Jupiter) was headquartered there. Pagans also worshiped Aesculapius, the false god of healing. False healing has always been a tool of Satan to persuade people that there is divine power coming upon them, for he consistently imitates God. Because all parts of life had a god attached in that city, a pantheon of gods was worshiped there.

Practically, Pergamos was an awful place to try to live for Jesus because it was the immorality center of the ancient world. Can you imagine being in a composite of the glitz of Las Vegas, the immoral filth of Mardi Gras, and the ease of access to evil on the Internet—all in one place? Pergamos was just like that due to the worship of Dionysus (Bacchus), the gods of orgies, wine, and debauchery.

And in that place was a church—the assembly at Pergamos—which testifies that God can grow His church anywhere, even in one of the most desperate places. Many Pergamite saints had been converted from Satanism, idolatry, false healing, and immorality. Because they became very secure in Christ, they flourished for Him right where He planted them, even sitting under the throne of Satan: *“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith”* (Revelation 2:13).

The church at Pergamos, however, had a problem. Some had lost their vital joys of being born again; they no longer had purity of life, intimacy with God, and nourishment from His Word. How did that happen? They had gotten too close to the world by mixing with it, marrying it, or loving the system. But Jesus lovingly offered a solution to their woeful problems, and ours: Repent of worldliness; do not be conformed to the world like unbelievers who are driven by earthly goals, desires, and values!

If you have lost your purity, Christ says, “Come back, and I’ll give you My white stone” (Revelation 2:17c). He wants to wash and cleanse you, and make you as pure and white as snow! *If you have lost your intimacy*, Christ says, “Come back, and I’ll give you My new name—a name which *“no one knows except him who receives it”* (Revelation 2:17d). He wants to draw you to spend precious and intimate time alone with Him! *If you have lost your nourishment*, Christ says, “Come back, and I’ll feed you with My hidden manna” (Revelation 2:17b; see also Jeremiah 15:16). He wants to nourish you in His Word!

How inescapable is the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, as He penetrates every heart, searching for each person’s condition. There is no sin too dark, no stain too deep, and no life too defiled that the blood of Jesus Christ cannot cleanse. The ultimate lesson from this church is that Jesus Christ wants us to cling to *Him*—and *not* to the world!

My Prayer for You This Week: *We bow before You, Lord Jesus, our Savior. We want to discover the hope that You offer today. I pray that we will listen as You speak to us through this special letter to the church at Pergamos. Help us to find You as the hope to which we cling, the hope toward which we press, the hope which we truly possess as that which can never be taken away from us. And then, with that hope in mind, help us to prepare for the time when You will call us home. For You have told us that as Christians we can get ready so that we can die in a way that will glorify You. Help us to learn that precious and very blessed message of hope! Open our eyes and hearts we pray! In Jesus’ precious name. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Security of Christ’s Purity

*“Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they shall see God.”*

—Matthew 5:8, emphasis added

Beware of the new paganism in the twenty-first-century church. The majority of those who call themselves Christians follow a way of worship that would have offended the apostles and early saints. What do I mean? Would they not see the statues of Christ and saints as idols? Would they not equate the candles and incense burning with that of pagan temple worship? Would they not have trouble with the separation into orders of

priests and monks, and taking on the titles of pontiff, vicar, and “most excellent,” very offensive and contradictory to Christlike humility? The calendar of observances, holy water, purgatory, and so much more would not have been accepted because it all came directly from the pagans—whom the early saints tried to *convert*.

Christ’s letter to the church at Pergamos warns of the deadly sin of being in love and communion with that which God has condemned and will destroy. There is only one action to take when confronted with worldliness and apostasy: *separate from it!*

God says, *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness [believers] with lawlessness [unbelievers]? . . . For you are the temple of the living God. . . . Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you”* (2 Corinthians 6:14–17).

The proper thing to do when involved in something that is apostate is to get out of it. Where Christ’s name is dishonored, and there is false teaching and idolatry, *leave*. Separate from it physically; do not participate, for whoever *wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”*? (James 4:4–5).

Those are very sobering words. The Holy Spirit is inside of us, and is jealous for us. We are espoused to Christ as His pure bride. We are not to get our clothes soiled needlessly with the love of the world. Look at James 4:7–8: *Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

If we choose to go along with the flow of the world, there is something wrong (1 John 2:15). Because the Holy Spirit lives within us, we should not purposefully want to offend His holiness. Though we slip at times, and are weak, we will not wed ourselves to the world. Why? God will not let us. He will chasten us: *For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [chasing after pleasure], the lust of the eyes [chasing after stuff], and the pride of life [chasing after status]—is not of the Father but is of the world* (1 John 2:16–17).

This is a prophetic message for us today: God will destroy commercial and religious Babylon. This message is also to people of all ages who think they can reform an apostate religion by staying in it. In Revelation 18:4 Christ says, *“Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”*

Visiting the Great Physician may be painful, but you can trust His diagnosis. For only Jesus can see exactly what is good, bad, and dangerous. When He ran a diagnostic test on the saints at Pergamos, this was His analysis of their needs: *“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality”* (Revelation 2:14).

The Pergamite saints were saved—they claimed the true name, and they didn’t deny Christ in fierce trials. For that, they were to be commended. Nevertheless, Christ said, “You are in sin, and I have a few things against you . . .” His rebuke was related to *“the doctrine of Balaam”* which represents compromise. In Numbers 22–24, Balaam taught the Moabites that the way to defeat God’s people was through leading them to

compromise their obedience to God's Word. Hence the old adage: "If you can't defeat them, join them; defile them so that God will judge them." Christ therefore warned the church at Pergamos: "*Repent, or else I will come to you quickly . . .*" (Revelation 2:16a). What Christ said to the church then, He also says to the twenty-first-century church.

Many begin well in Christ, but then gradually slip away and lose their first love. Over the next few days, by observing the life of Samson, we will see a powerful scriptural example of the dangers of not staying alert to the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11–13).

Do you feel yourself slipping back into sin? Then Christ lovingly says to you, "Repent, and come back to Me today!"

TUESDAY: Samson Began Well

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

—Judges 13:24, emphasis added

God recorded Samson's life as an example of both the destructive power of sin and the restoring power of grace. His life is a testament to the fact that if you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption; if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap life everlasting (Galatians 6:7–8).

Samson was one of the most amazing Old Testament personages. So many details in his life are unique, and thus profound in their meaning. For example, God's angels announced his birth. He was one of only three people whose births were announced by angels (Jesus and Isaac are the other two). So Samson started in the top 1/10 of 1 percent of all the 3,000 people named in the Bible.

Amazing as it might seem, because they sought God's help raising him, Samson's parents rank up there with the fewest of the few. Only Joseph and Mary, Job, Abraham, Hannah, and Samson's dad, Manoah, are recorded in the Bible as asking for and receiving wisdom from God on how to raise their children. Samson's parents feared the Lord, and they wanted to instill that same awesome reverence in their son.

Although God has a special purpose for all His saints, only a few people in the Old Testament (Jeremiah, Samuel, and Samson) are identified as being chosen from birth for a particular purpose. (In the New Testament, John the Baptist and Paul were selected for that same distinction.) Before Samson was born, God declared that he was to be a Nazirite (Judges 13:5). Such a "God's man" was to be outwardly committed to total abstinence from wine, avoidance of dead bodies, and never cutting his hair. The inward response to this special calling was to be a chosen life; everything he did was to point to the Lord through obedience. God, coupled with the Nazirite vow, gave Samson a special supernatural strength.

Physically, Samson was only an ordinary Israelite, about 5' 2" to 5' 4" tall, with no outward sign of strength, just the mark of his consecration. Now picture that size man picking up the gates to a city, ripping them off their hinges, setting them on his shoulders, and walking away with them! The archaeological reports of the digs of the city of Gaza and all the Philistine encampments revealed that the city gates were twelve feet wide, set down into solid stone, and built into solid walls. They were massive

wooden gates, often covered with iron that easily weighed tons. Ancient Jewish tradition says Samson left the gates on a hilltop, just outside of town, as a mockery to the city. He definitely had supernatural strength!

To have grown up with Samson must have been a remarkable experience. His neighborhood pals would certainly have been awed at his immense strength, and his enemies must have fled quickly. Having him around would have been like having a one-man army. Yet he often lived in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Surprisingly, in the final analysis, God viewed Samson as a man of faith. What a picture of grace! At his darkest hour, in one moment of godly sorrow that led to a repentant prayer of faith, God brought him back to the place of blessing. Oh, what a wonderful truth! Our God is the God of the second chance! When I think of that fact, it makes me burst forth into singing, “Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!” I always like to say: “If Samson made it—anybody can.” He was about as far defiled as one can get, yet through grace, he became one of God’s dear heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:32).

Have you experienced the miraculous grace of the God of the second chance?

WEDNESDAY: Sin Blinds, Binds, and Grinds

*These . . . became **our examples** . . . that we should not lust . . . as they . . . lusted.*

—1 Corinthians 10:6, emphasis added

As a young man, probably in his teens, we get the first indicator that Samson greatly needed God’s grace. When he began to live by his own desires instead of God’s, and serve his own lusts instead of God’s Words, Samson was no longer heading in the direction in which the Lord had pointed him.

A string of women began 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 was a dangerous choice. The final, and deadliest woman, was Delilah. She was so deadly that even today her name has become synonymous with lust, deceit, betrayal, and ruin. C. H. Spurgeon’s summary says it all:

At last 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 passerby, 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.¹

Though Samson descended into the depths of a lust-filled life, and wandered far from his calling and consecration, the Lord never let go of him. (That should give us great hope for those we know who are born again, yet are wandering far from Christ.) His soiled life is recorded; his defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of Samson’s sin is a reminder of the powerful beauty of God’s grace.

Practicing sin blinds us, then slowly binds us with its fetters, and then, finally blinded and bound, we begin to grind through life. Talk to anybody who has come to Christ out of an immoral life, the drug culture, or the world of alcohol and bars, and you will find that it is not the exciting life that the media claims it to be. Living in that manner can never satisfy because it is always a passing pleasure. Only God can break the fetters that blind and bind us to grind out an existence totally captive to sin! God forgives—and He beautifully restores!

THURSDAY: The Consequence Engine in Action

I discipline my body . . . , lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

—1 Corinthians 9:27, emphasis added

The life of Samson depicts the awful consequences of living a life of compromise with the world and the flesh. Judges 13 records one of the most incredible accounts in the Bible; few are as tragic as this one. God had given Samson twenty years to begin to overcome the enemy, the Philistines. However, in the end, Samson was overcome by the greatest enemy of all—himself. Samson’s history is an illustration of Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 9:27 (see above). Heaven remembers Samson as a man of faith, but earth remembers him as a man who was *disqualified*. Although Hebrews 11:32 cites him for his faith, apart from this, very little can be said in his defense. The lesson to each of us is this: *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

What steps led to Samson’s sin and tragic end?

Samson wandered from his heritage. He was born into a godly home. The Angel of the LORD (Jesus Christ pre-incarnate) appeared to Manoah’s wife and said, “*You shall conceive and bear a son. . . . Please be careful [before his birth] not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. . . . And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*” (Judges 13:3–5).

Samson had a godly giftedness and calling. God gave him a special endowment of the Holy Spirit that made him a conqueror (Judges 13:25). When he was old enough to

understand, his parents informed him that God had called him to be a Nazirite, a “separated one” wholly surrendered to the Lord. When grown, however, Samson despised his wonderful heritage. Instead of putting himself in God’s hands to accomplish his God-given task, he tragically chose to live to please himself.

Samson disobeyed his parents, which gave clear evidence of his spiritual decline. He knew that the God-given Jewish laws of separation meant marrying only within the covenant people, but that didn’t matter to him. Samson went into enemy territory and fell in love with a heathen woman. He *told* (not *asked*) his father: “*Get her for me, for she pleases me well*” (Judges 14:3). Samson’s focus was totally outward: he only viewed the woman’s body, but never saw her inner spirit, soul, or character. He was living for the moment, for the lusts of his flesh (see Genesis 24:1–4; Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3; and 2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

By disobeying his parents, Samson was choosing to be his own authority. He therefore ignored their admonition: “Don’t do that, Samson!” It did not bother him that his desires displeased his parents. God overruled in this circumstance, however, because He knew Samson’s propensity for sin, and was going to use his lust as a vehicle of His judgment on the Philistines (Judges 14:4). However, I can imagine God holding Samson accountable for his actions, saying, “Be not deceived, for I will not be mocked. What Samson sowed, he is going to reap.”

What valuable lesson can we learn from this? Christian young people need to stop and consider carefully when they find themselves defying godly parents who know God’s Word. It is a fearsome matter when God is against someone who refuses to repent.

FRIDAY: When God Is Against Us

*“Whoever . . . wants to be **a friend of the world** makes himself **an enemy of God.**”*

—James 4:4, emphasis added

Yesterday we looked at two steps Samson took that eventually led to his sin and tragic end: he wandered from his heritage (Judges 13), and he disobeyed his parents (Judges 14:1–4). Now let us look at some other steps that led to Samson’s total downfall.

Samson compromised his life. He was supposed to be a man of the Word, to be a mighty judge, but he sought to be unequally yoked instead. So the Lord sent Samson some ominous warnings. The first was a big one. On his way to visit his bride-to-be, a young lion came roaring against him. The lion was representative of the devil who *walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8b). What a picture! The devil wanted to use him for his purposes, for he knew that Samson was going in his direction by following his lust.

As the lion attacked him, look what happened: *And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand* (Judges 14:6). Talk about an amazing super-human strength! Even though Samson was not walking completely in God’s will, He provided the power to overcome the lion—but he did not get the Lord’s message.

When Samson went back later to complete the marriage, he was tested again. Although Nazirites were never to touch a dead body, for the sake of a little honey in the lion's carcass, Samson defiled himself. (Many Christians today likewise defile themselves just to enjoy "a little honey in the carcass of a lion"—perhaps with a questionable book, movie, or friendship.) Sad to say, Samson passed that sinfully gained honey along to his parents, and then made a joke about it to entertain his friends!

Samson ignored God's warnings. When Samson burned the fields of the Philistines, they retaliated by burning the woman he had loved, her father, and their house (Judges 15:6 and 14:15). After he avenged their deaths, his own people turned against him and delivered him to the enemy (Judges 15:11–13). Although Samson was rescued by God, this test had been another warning to show how weak he really was.

Judges 15 is a chapter of seeming victories, yet it ends with the "strong man" utterly exhausted for lack of water. That need prompted one of the two prayers Scripture records Samson made: for water (Judges 15:18–20), and for strength to destroy the Philistines (Judges 16:28). Samson's parents had been prayerful people, but he never followed their example. Thus, he still would not heed God.

Samson played with sin. (See Judges 16.) His heart was far from the God he should have known, and loved, and served. Even though he'd already gotten into trouble with one woman, he now tried again. This time his lusts took him deep into enemy territory to Gaza. Pride had taken hold of him; after all, he was "Superman," so he marched right into the epicenter of the Philistine army to pursue another woman.

This time, God warned him by allowing the enemy to almost catch him, but Samson would not repent. Then Delilah came into his life and led him to his doom. Three times she enticed Samson, and three times he lied to her. Each lie he told took him one step closer to having the truth about his strength revealed. When the enemy attacked him afterward each time, he should have realized he was in danger. (Read Proverbs 7:21–27 to see why Samson yielded.) He was asleep when he should have been awake. How dangerous it is to play with sin!

What was Samson's problem? He was *dominated by lust*. That passion led Samson to desire a Philistine woman as a wife, which was strictly forbidden by God's Law. That passion also led him to liaisons with prostitutes like Delilah (who betrayed him for money). Many times men will say, "I'm doing that because I love her." But that is not really true: love can wait; lust can't. Do you know the difference between love and lust? Can you wait? If you can't, it's lust. Love always waits.²

Samson was also *driven by pride and revenge*. He was more moved by anger at personal affronts—which caused him to strike out at the Philistines—than by the suffering of the people he was supposed to lead (cf. 14:19–20; 15:7–8; 16:28).

In the end, Samson was *defeated by himself*. Imagine what Samson might have been if, with his great strength and godly heritage, he had daily lived out the formal commitment to God expressed in that Nazirite vow!

The Tragic End of Disobedience: The rest of the story shows the disastrous end of the believer who will not let God have His way with his or her life. From Judges 16:20 on, Samson does nothing but lose: he lost his full usefulness to the Lord, his

testimony, and ultimately his life. And all this started when Samson despised his blessings and defied his parents!

Samson ended up as a castaway: he had committed the sin unto death, so God had to take him off the scene. But before he died, God allowed Samson one last act of faith—and a huge victory over the Philistines. (Although his usefulness had been diminished, it had not been completely lost.) That victory was a great triumph in a life littered with tragedy.

What can we learn from Samson's tragic life? There is no such thing as being able to safely play around with a little bit of sin. Remember: sin first blinds, then binds, and finally grinds. No matter how alluring it may seem, habitual sin grinds away at the soul, like gravel in the mouth (Proverbs 20:17).

If you willfully choose to operate in your own strength, and fail to heed God's warnings, He will let you operate without walking in the Spirit, and you will reap what you have sown.

SATURDAY: A Day of Reckoning

*We must all **appear before the judgment seat** of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, . . . whether good or bad.*

—2 Corinthians 5:10, emphasis added

Just as the assembly at Pergamos faced the judgment of God for sin that was never dealt with in their lives, so will we if we don't repent. Because God *hates* sin, we need to flee from it and fear the holiness of God.

As a warning to everyone called to lifelong consecration to the Lord, let's look at what happened to Samson in New Testament terms. Here are some passages, which explain that there are "sins unto death."

All New Testament believers are consecrated to the Lord, like Samson was: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit is so specific. There were two words in the ancient world for "temple": we are not the *hieron*, which means "the whole temple building"; we are *naos*, which means "the most protected part," the sacred chamber where God dwelt, or "the Holy of Holies." Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Don't offer excuses or try to justify your sin, because God says you and I are to be consecrated.*

We will each answer to God for what we did with our bodies: *Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because . . . the fire will test each one's work. . . . If anyone's work . . . endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:13–15).*

Have you ever heard the term of getting into heaven "by the skin of your teeth"? There are people who are going to be in heaven, but that is all. They are going to suffer the loss of their earthly life because they were "Samsons" who lived for the lust of their eyes, the lust of their flesh, and the pride of life. The sins that God has forgiven will burn away, and anything not for God's glory, in obedience to God, will also be burned away in

God's refining fire. God, therefore, wants us to redeem our time as carefully as possible. Although life is more than Bible reading and prayer, everything we do should still be done for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

God will not stand by as we sin: *For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged* (1 Corinthians 11:30–31). What is “sleep”? Biblically, “sleep” refers to the death of the body, but the spirit is with Christ. Some believers get weak, sick, and die—not because they're at that age when it is time for it to happen (and it is a glorious home going), but because they did not deal with their pride, lust, and fleshly appetites.

God gives us warnings and chastens us to prove His love: *“Whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrews 12:6). Those who will not separate from the love of the world will be chastened. One might say, “Well, I'm living it up and doing what I want and nothing is happening.” Hebrews 12:8 should speak to you then: if you are *without* chastening, then you are illegitimate and *not a child of God*. God says that *all* His sons and daughters will be disciplined if they continue to live in sin.

Going too far in sin can be deadly for believers: *There is sin leading to death. . . . All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death* (1 John 5:16b-17). What that unusual language means is this: if you go too far, too long, God will say, “That is enough!” He will then take you out of the world. What happened to Samson? He went too far, too long, and God took him out. He tragically sinned to the point that God felt his ministry must end, even though he had repented.

God kills believers who won't repent in time: *“Unless they repent of their deeds. . . . I will kill her children with death”* (Revelation 2:22–23). God has a time period. He waits, chastens, weakens, and sickens His continually disobedient children. And when that does not bring about godly sorrow that leads to repentance, then God kills believers who will not repent: *“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”* (Revelation 2:23).

Apparently, during the grinding at the mill, Samson repented of his sin. The Philistines had made this sightless former hero their center of attraction, like an amusement park. But while that was going on, God offered him one more merciful chance to act by faith. His hair had begun to grow, Samson remembered his calling, and he asked God for strength to win one more victory over the enemy (Judges 16:28–30). He accomplished more in that one prayer than he did in twenty years of fighting. He defeated the Philistines, but in defeating others, he lost his own life.

Samson illustrates 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 could 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. And He could have led the nation, but he preferred to work independently and, as a result, left no permanent victory behind.

Samson could have been remembered for what he built up, but instead everyone except God only remembers what he destroyed—lions, foxes, fields, gates, soldiers, women’s purity, thousands of God’s enemies, and his own life and ministry.

Make a choice to live in hope: Samson’s life is a powerful reminder of God’s grace. Even if you have lived like Samson, it is not too late to turn in faith, repent, and look to God. If you are a lost person, turn to Christ while you can still hear His voice, and then cling to Him. If you are a believer, you have not gone too far yet to miss God’s grace; respond and cling to Him while there is still time. But if you willfully choose to continue in your sin, you *can* go too far: there is indeed a sin that leads to death. Sin destroys, but God beautifully restores! If the God of the second chance has spoken to your heart today, I encourage you to pray or sing this song in faith to the Lord.

I Need Thee Every Hour

*I need Thee every hour, Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine Can peace afford.*

*I need Thee every hour; Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power When Thou art nigh.*

*I need Thee every hour, In joy or pain.
Come quickly, and abide, Or life is vain.*

*I need Thee every hour; Teach me Thy will,
And Thy rich promises In me fulfill.*

*I need Thee every hour, Most Holy One;
O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son.*

*I need Thee, O I need Thee; every hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior—I come to Thee!*

—Annie S. Hawks (1835–1918)

Refrain added by Robert Lowry (1826–1899)

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, Sermon Delivered on Sunday Morning, November 21, 1985 at Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, accessed online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons04.lx.html>.

² Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher’s Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987).