

If We Live By The Spirit Let Us Walk By The Spirit

Series: If It Feels Good, Do It! (?)

by Ron R. Ritchie

Throughout these studies in the Book of Judges we have seen that the source of all the problems the Israelites faced during that period was that they insisted on resting in their own strength, not God's; thereby they ended up in captivity, held prisoner by Their own flesh. But we have also seen that when they called out to God he sent a deliverer, a judge, to lead them out of slavery.

Now Samson, the sixth major judge of Israel, is no different in this respect. There is a tremendous need to learn from him. He is really interesting because, as we saw last week, he was born to a mother who had been barren. He was called from his birth to be a Nazirite, to be set aside from birth until death to serve God. The normal Nazirite vow was for just a very short period of time, sometimes only a couple of months, then the vow could be broken and normal life could be resumed. But Samson is set aside from birth.

You and I have, in a sense, taken a Nazirite vow because we have been set aside, since we were "born again," until we die, set aside for God so that he might pulsate his life through us, fill us with his Spirit and use us for his honor and glory. Each time we do that we discover that our lives are filled and exciting, rich and adventurous. We are never bored. We cannot keep up with what is going on. At times we are so exhausted we can hardly stand it and we cry out and say, "Lord, I'm so tired." He says, "Yeah, but are you bored?" "No, just tired."

Samson was not only chosen to be a Nazirite, but he was chosen to be set aside for God to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. They were a tribe set aside by God to be a trap and a snare, a thorn in the lives of Israel, because Israel would not listen to God in the early days of the Book of Judges. The Philistines are always a picture of the flesh taking over from the Spirit in our walk with God. When we seek to live in our sinful nature it traps us as a thorn in our side; it irritates us, it does not bring the peace, the joy and the love we want. But God does not pick men merely to be spiritual robots. He indwells them and empowers them to choose between depending on their sinful nature or his Holy Spirit. Here is a saying I learned that really works out in my life: "We have never been given the power to do, only the power to choose. Whom we choose then determines what we do." If we choose the sinful nature, then we reap all the fruit of the sinful nature, which in its ultimate form is death, anxiety, fear, the pressure of life, the jealousy, the dissension, the quarreling, the immorality. That is what death is. You do not fall over. You live in death. You sense it again and again. When we come to a relationship with Jesus Christ, he places within us the power not to choose to live like that anymore. If we choose the Spirit then, he comes into our lives and lives through us. We reap life.

It's amazing, isn't it? This kind of life is filled with joy, a sense of purpose and a sense of wholesomeness. Scripture says we reap not only life, but peace. I love that. Just add that on there. "Peace. All is well. It's OK. So everything's falling apart. Shalom. It's all right. I'm in charge. Don't worry. Rest." That is what walking in the Spirit is about. When you choose the Holy Spirit he produces that kind of feeling within your life. Joshua understood this whole concept of choosing. After he had fought and won against thirty-one kings (Joshua 24:14-15), he called together all the elders of Israel and said, "I'm dying now. You are going to get new leadership." (This is just before the days of the Judges.) He said, "Choose this day whom you will serve. Will it be the gods of Egypt, or the Lord who brought you out of Egypt? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He made a choice and then he reaped all the joy of that choice.

Bob Dylan has a new record entitled, "Slow Train Coming." (It just won a Grammy Award.) One of the songs goes:

"You might be the Ambassador to England or France;

You might like to gamble, you might like to dance;
You might be the heavyweight champion of the world;
You might be a socialite with a long string of pearls,
But whatever way it goes, you're gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it might be the devil, or it might be the Lord,
But you're gonna have to serve somebody."

Bob Dylan has it right, down to the bottom line. We are all serving somebody. It is just a matter of which nature—whether it is our sinful nature, influenced by Satan, or our spiritual nature, influenced by the Spirit of God. One produces life; the other produces death.

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 it got him into. He was in trouble most of his adult life because he made the wrong choices, but God never forsook him.

Samson's life is the story of every one of us who has ever given his life to the Lord. This is our struggle too. Picking up on the Galatians 5 concept, we are going to see, in chapter 14, verses 1-3, the truth that our sinful nature sets its desire against the Spirit. Remember that Israel has been waiting for this deliverer for 18 or 19 years. Here is Samson now, in his first major solo activity, and this is what happens.

1. Our Sinful Nature Sets Its Desires Against The Spirit Judges 14: 1-4

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines, now therefore, get her for me as a wife." Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."

The same old movie. Samson is from the tribe of Dan, but he leaves 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 19. I'm set free now by the State of Israel. I've got my rights. I don't want a car, I want a woman. I want that one, and I want you to get her for me." 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.

So Samson goes and does his own thing in spite of all the truth he knew. His parents cry out and say, "Look, don't you know that you're getting involved with an uncircumcised Philistine? You are entering into a relationship with people who are not blessed by Abraham's covenant, the covenant that God made with our people. Circumcision is the sign that we are a chosen people unto the Lord." I am intrigued by the fact that Samson makes a move without checking in with the Lord. All 11 other judges give you the picture that they are waiting on the Lord. Deborah waits on the Lord; Gideon waits on the Lord and when God shows up he says, "Aw, you've got the wrong man." None of them is in a hurry to move against the enemy. Samson decides to do things in his own way and chooses this as an occasion against the Philistines.

Reading these first verses last week, I could not help remembering when, about six weeks ago, my sons and I were sitting around the table talking. It was then I began to realize that my little boys are growing up. Ron is almost 6'3", 170 lbs. He says, "You want to wrestle, dad?" I said, "Hey, I'm not dumb. It was OK when you were 12." He is growing up beautifully. (Roddie is still full of energy. He wants to wrestle too. He's still only about so big, 50 I've got a little security there. At least I know I'm going to win that one.) Anyway, I got a

little concerned. It's time. Spring, you know. The urge to merge. It's all there. It is all by God's design. You wake up and you get the sense that something is missing in your life and it is not your mother and father, so you have this desire to be married.

So I took my sons aside one evening and we had a delightful time, one that I will always remember. I was just sharing with them out of 2 Corinthians 6 the fact that light has nothing to do with darkness. We developed that whole section there about life itself, about choosing to live in darkness versus following the Lord, and then choosing our wives. My wife and I have been praying for the wives of our sons since the day they were born. Do you realize that at this very moment there are two women out there somewhere who are going to be my son's wives? They are going to be my daughters--in--law! (Who are you anyway! My sons are just as anxious as you. They want to know who you are. They asked me to find you.)

Anyway, we got to talking and I said, "Sons, I want you to do a couple of things. One, I don't want you to come home and tell me you are getting married. I don't think that's right. I don't think it's proper in the sight of God. I want you to come home and say, 'Dad, I'm thinking about getting married. This is who I'm thinking of marrying. What do you and mother think? That incorporates us as a part of the family. It incorporates us as part of the bigger family.'" (It is a much better deal now because I can talk to them. When they are in love, forget it! Blind! She could have zits all over her and he would say, "Hey, what a girl!" It wouldn't matter. Once you are in love it doesn't matter. You're just floating. You're a mess.) Now this is Ok: and it's fun to talk about it like this, but you do go blind, and I want to get them before they go blind. "I said, "If you come home and tel. me you've got this wonderful woman and she's everything you've ever wanted, she's a pleasant person and she's got a great family and her daddy drives a Rolls Royce--the only question I'm going to ask you is, 'Does she love Jesus Christ?' And if you tell me 'No, then I want to tell you now, while you're not blind, that I won't be at the wedding. I just want to go on record because the Lord is very clear about mixed marriages, and I want you to know I won't be there. I'll love you all your life and I'll be with you after the wedding. but I won't be at the wedding; I won't acknowledge the wedding.' All you can do is tell your children the truth and then wait on the Lord. You can't force the issue. It's not fun to talk to your sons like that, but see, I'm from a divorced family and my wife is from a divorced family. Everybody on our block is divorced. Our Career Class is filled with divorced people, and I don't want my sons to be in our Career Class as divorced men. Then I told them, "If you come home and tell me that the woman is everything you ever wanted, and she loves Jesus Christ, I hope you will give me the honor of marrying you."

But Samson didn't ask his mommy and daddy, "What do you think?" He said, "See that woman?" "Yes, son." "I want that one and I want you to give her to me." That was the way things were done in those days. So we see that Samson's first step out of the chute is to feed his own ego, his sinful nature.

Now we have an interesting problem here in verse 4:

However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.

There are two ways of looking at this verse. The first is that God initiated this action in Samson's heart, that is, God is saying, "Regardless of what is going on, regardless of the law, regardless of how I have done it in the past, I want you to break the law and go down and get this woman because I'm going to use it as an occasion against the Philistines." That is one way to look at it. There certainly is indication in the Book of Joshua (11:20), and in I Kings (12:15) about the fact that God moves in on the hearts of people. That is very true. In fact, Josephus, a first century Jewish historian for the Roman Empire, in writing on this very passage said,

". . . because this marriage was of God, who intended to convert it to the benefit of the Hebrews, he over-persuaded them to procure her to be espoused to him; . . ." (Josephus Book V, Chap. 8)

That is, because this marriage was of God, who intended to convert it to the benefit of the Hebrews, Samson insisted on marrying her. It was almost as if Samson had no choice. It is almost as if God moved in his heart and that was the way it went. But I submit to you that Samson initiated the action, that God never asked Joshua or Deborah or Gideon to violate his law in order to defeat the enemy, that God would not set out a law

about intermarriage and teach it all the way through the journey in the wilderness and into the land and then turn right around and flip it all out and say, "That's OK for you, Samson, because I have a way of defeating the enemy." I think Samson moved on his own but God overruled evil with good. Isn't that the truth in your life? You are going down this path and you are just going to do your thing in your own way and God says, "Fine," then he just turns your whole life around in this way and everything turns out and his plan is accomplished. Just like Jonah. I always love it when Ted Wise says that all of us would have gone to Tarshish! Not one of us would have gone directly to Nineveh. We are not made up that way. We are always fighting God and all his plans for us. When God has a plan he uses good men and disobedient men to accomplish his overall purpose without violating his character of righteousness and holiness. So Samson is responsible for his own actions.

Now right in the middle of this he gets an opportunity, in verses 5 and 6, to trust the Lord. God reminds him who he is, and it seems that Samson walks by the Spirit.

2. Walk By The Spirit, 14: 5-6

Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a kid though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.

Samson is going down to get this woman, in violation of the law of God, and God throws a lion right in his path. The lion comes roaring out and in the midst of that incredible crisis the Spirit comes upon Samson. Never having done this before, he takes the lion and tears him apart. 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 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. I 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.

Samson had the same problem you and I have. Let's be totally frank now. In your physical condition today if you saw a lion coming at you out of a bush, what would you do? You have to make a choice. What would you do? Well, as I have told you many times, I was raised a devout coward. I know exactly what I would do in my flesh. I would run so fast the lion would die of a heart attack just watching me! He wouldn't believe the speed of an old man like me going down the road. So the normal tendency would be to run. But Samson did not run. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him," and the Spirit gave him the wisdom and the power to know what to do and he defeated the lion. We have to go back and choose the Spirit and the Spirit then enables us to face life and all its lions.

3. What The Sinful Nature Does Is Quite Plain, 14: 7-20

Now we move into verses 7 through 20 and we find that what the sinful nature does is quite plain. What I am saying here is that, according to Galatians, when you see your sinful nature it is so obvious to you. It is quite plain. You can see how it is working in your life. You are never pleased with it, you are always sick about it, but you can see it. As a Christian, you cannot say, "I don't know what I'm doing." You know exactly what you are doing. So do I. You know when it is sin and when it is not sin. You try to justify it for about ten minutes, but it does not work. It is sin. Call it sin and get back and choose the Spirit.

The Scriptures are filled with descriptions of the characteristics of the flesh, ranging from adultery to witchcraft. Paul explains (in Romans 8) that the sinful nature's root problem is this:

For the mind set on the flesh [sinful nature] is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, [Why?] because the mind set on the flesh [sinful nature] is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so. (Rom. 8:6-7)

. . . And those who are depending on the sinful nature cannot please God

Samson was set aside to fulfill God's purpose, but he depended on his sinful nature and he could not please God. I'll show you how it happened, in four steps. First, what the sinful nature does is quite plain.

1. Full of Deceit 7-20

So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson. When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; [apparently some time had gone by] and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.

Samson knew what the Scriptures said. Both he and his mother were Nazirites. They were warned about unclean things: "Do not get involved in things unclean." Levitical law says, "Whatever walks on its paws among all the creatures that walk on all fours are unclean to you." (Certainly a lion would qualify there.) "Whoever touches their carcasses becomes unclean until evening." (Lev. 11:27) So Samson wants this marriage with a Canaanite (which is illegal in the sight of God), then he becomes unclean, and then he does not tell his parents, thereby making them unclean. Isn't that amazing? Deceit! That is what the sinful nature does, and those who depend on the sinful nature cannot please God.

Deceit is kind of hiding the truth. It is not quite telling all that you could tell when somebody asks you a question. Recently I borrowed my friend's saw. He is quite a master carpenter; all his tools are absolutely perfect, well cleaned and oiled. His shop is so together, while mine is well, just kind of "there." In my shop it really doesn't matter whether you hang things up or not. They're not people; you don't have to clean them up. But with my friend everything is just right there. He has a job to do and his paint brush is just "there;" his nails likewise. Sometimes I go in "blind." I don't want to see his shop because I feel guilty.

So I said, "Jack, could I borrow one of your hand saws? Mine won't cut this piece of wood." He said, "Sure, what kind of wood?" and he goes and makes sure it's the right saw for that kind of wood. (I mean I would have done it with a hacksaw. It really didn't matter.) He gives me his best saw. So I go home and I'm sawing away when I hear it--"Ding!" I don't believe it--a nail! There wasn't supposed to be a nail in this piece of oak. Now I knew what had happened. (If you work with tools you know that that eliminates that saw until you resharpen it.) Well, fortunately for me, he went to New York the next day for two weeks. So for two weeks I had that saw. I laid that thing out and I said, "I know what I'll do. I'll just hand it back and say thanks." "But the Lord said, "What?" I said, "Hold it! I'm working it out." Every time I got in the car I'd see that saw and I'd say, "Boy, I've got to get that thing sharpened. That would be the right thing to do; get it sharpened. Get this thing off your back. Don't worry about it. So you made a mistake."

Two weeks pass. He is home. I go out to the garage, get in my car and there's the saw on my work bench. Ah, what am I going to do? I know. I'll just walk over and say, "Hey Jack, thanks for the saw. Can I put it back for you?" I couldn't do it. Because of this passage I was forced to be honest, although I was not thinking this drastically yet. This thing was going to cost me money and I don't like that. So I took the saw over, thinking to myself, "He'll never notice. He'll never see it. I'll just . . . No. I can't do that." I said, "Hi Jack. Did you have a great trip? I've got the saw here." "Bring it upstairs." "Well, I nicked a nail, but it doesn't look like anything's wrong." He said, "Sure something's wrong. Look, there's the two teeth you knocked out." I said, "Jack, I'll be responsible. I just wanted to make sure. I'd like to get it sharpened." "Oh no," he said. "I'm going to get all my saws sharpened anyway. I'll just throw that one in."

Do you see what is going on? Do you see what deceit is? Deceit is just, "Hi. Here's the saw Jack. Thanks a lot." Then put the saw away. It's not telling the whole truth. Now that is what Samson did here. He starts the

compromise with the marriage. He gets his parents unclean. Then he goes into this whole deceit thing.

Following that very quickly, Samson moves from there, and now what the sinful nature does is quite plain. He gets involved in

2. Selfish Ambition 10-14

Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. And it came about when they saw him that they brought thirty companions to be with him. Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Propound your riddle, that we may hear it." So he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet." But they could not tell the riddle in three days.

Now the reason I call this selfish ambition is because where does a Nazirite who has no job (according to chapter 13) get thirty suits? He just doesn't have them. There is no indication that these people are rich. There is no indication that they are together financially. They have to pay most of their earnings in taxes to the Philistines. I think Samson set a trap, like a cat playing with a mouse. He plays with them and he hedges a bet. He knows he is going to win so he makes up this riddle which he knows they cannot get because he made it up and he is the only one with the answer. So if they say to him, "Well, we think the answer is such and such," he can say, "Oh no it's not," and just make up another answer. He wants thirty suits. He's got a big ministry ahead_traveling evangelist! Sweats in every meeting so he has to have a change of clothes! Those who are depending on the sinful nature cannot please God.

Now what the sinful nature does is quite plain.

3. Creates Dissension 15-18

Then it came about on the fourth day [your translation might say the fourth day but I believe the text says the seventh] that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may tell us the riddle, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. [Not a lot of pressure, but some] Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so? And Samson's wife wept before him and said, [Here we go with the classic line] "You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told it to me." [You didn't take me into consideration. Everything happens at the office and you don't share anything.] And he quid to her, "Behold I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you," [Look, I didn't tell you and I didn't tell my mother and father, so why should I tell you? It's my riddle, my game. Gonna be my suits.] However, [she's not dumb]she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. [Some feast, huh? "How's your wife?" "I don't know, she's drowning in the tent."] And it came about on the seventh day that he told her because she pressed him so hard [I'd love to have the hands raised on that one.] She then told the riddle to the sons of her people. So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down. ["Ay, seven days are up. We got it. Here's what it is." "Go ahead. I don't think you got it, but go ahead."] "What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?" [Boy, those are the exact words he told his wife.] And he said to them. "If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have found out my riddle."

Samson has just lost a bet he designed to win. Now those depend on the sinful nature cannot please God.

But there is one more sin that he involves himself in. What the sinful nature does is quite plain.

4. A Fit of Rage 19-20

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil, and gave the changes of clothes to those who

told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house. But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.

I think what happens here is that the Lord stepped in and bailed Samson out of a most ridiculous situation that he chose. He was going to wipe out the Philistines because of their sins against God, and God allows him to do this. But this little trip to Ashkelon where he killed these men is going to create, in chapters 15 and 16, incredible problems, and Samson has to reap some of the fruit of this anger. This is not God's way of warring. Samson kills the Philistines, takes the suits, pays the debt, loses his wife and loses her dowry. The moment he went down from his home town he kept going down spiritually because he did not depend on the Lord. The Lord stepped in once and showed him it could be all right, that he could defeat the Philistines in God's way, but he did not choose it.

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.

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