

CHOOSING FEATHERS

A friend told us recently about a pigeon. A wealthy woman that he knows has a large room built in her home where birds, many birds, fly freely. Into this haven, she recently brought a large egg she had discovered. Not really knowing what the species of the egg might be, she placed it under a dove that was roosting. When it hatched, it looked just like a pigeon. But to paraphrase a political pundit from recent years, if it walks like a dove and talks like a dove, it's a dove. Now that it is grown, it flies, eats, and coos just like a dove. It even mates with them. Apparently, in its mind, it is a dove. It was born as a pigeon, but it will die as a dove.

Samson was born an Israelite, an heir to the promises of God. More than that, he was born a Nazarite, separated unto the service of God. But he hung around with the Philistines too long. He enjoyed the company of their women. He enjoyed their cities, although he tended to damage them somewhat. We doubt that an enemy of Israel was able to send warriors into the house of one of Israel's rulers time after time. He must have been at ease in the land of the Philistines, probably in the house of Delilah, during those times they sought to kill him. His life, his calling, and his hair started out differently from theirs. In the end, he not only wore their haircut and their clothing, he was their entertainment. He not only amused them, he brought the house down. He was born a dedicated heir to God's promise, but by his choice of companions, he died with the Philistines.

As Samson discovered, it is not a good thing to find yourself in the clutches of a destroyer from whom God has once saved you. Satan's goal for the children of God is not merely to destroy us. Total humiliation is his desire. In the case of the man delivered from demons and reclaimed, his end was seven times worse than his beginning. If we choose to entertain and dwell with the ungodly and their sin, we may force the pure and holy presence of God to depart from us. Like the love slave, we can separate ourselves from Him, but we can't take with us anything the master has given us. We can leave the presence of God, but when we do, we will not take with us the peace He gave us, the joy, the love, or the purpose for our lives. We will suddenly find ourselves bereft of the presence of God, the protection of God, and the company and strength of the children of God. And the enemies of God, whose camp we took our ease in, will laugh at us while we are being destroyed.

No one admires a conformist. Even in a society ruled by sin, yes men are used, but despised. Our heroes are the individuals who take a stand and win our respect. The world is desperately seeking the genuine, while we seem intent on trading it in on the counterfeit. It is sad when we trade in the values and convictions for which we are admired in an attempt to gain the approval or acceptance of the ungodly. We become just another hypocrite to be despised.

The old saying that birds of a feather flock together is a natural law instituted by the Creator. Like the pigeon, we can too easily forget what plumage we were created with when given Life. We can join ourselves to the company of truly ungodly men and women whose appearance, language, lifestyles, and pleasures initially disgust us. After we have been around them long enough, that will all change. What they are will eventually cease to offend us because exposure to it will dull our sensibilities. We will build up a tolerance to it. As time progresses, the things we hear, the language that forms a part of our environment, the pictures we look at, and the stories we are willing to listen to, will alter us. Vicarious or not, they will become a part of the intellect and soul that rules our bodies. Because it is familiar, our minds will supply vulgarity in response to stress, whether we voice it or not. Eventually, out of the abundance of our heart, our mouth will speak. 1 Corinthians puts this constant exposure to sin in this wise. "Be not deceived. Evil communications corrupt good manners." We won't bring them up, but rather, they will drag us down.

Familiarity with the ways of the world is a progressive trap of destruction for the people of God called to a life of separation. The first verse of the book of Psalms describes the trap. First the man walks in the counsel of the ungodly. Then he stands in the way of sinners. Then he sits in the seat of the scornful. It is the picture of a man settling in and progressively becoming more at ease in a strange land. A land where the songs of Zion can not really be sung. We saw a video excerpt once that showed a man putting his head into the open jaws of an alligator. He was sure that he had the situation under control. But he made a mistake that nearly destroyed him when the jaws snapped shut. Our question was not what the mistake had been, but rather what he thought he was doing in the first place. He knew what the alligator was before he started. Just as we know what Satan is. There are only two masters that men can serve. If the people whose friendships we choose are not serving God, then they are servants of Satan. What a terrible thing to be in the situation of Samson, who awoke and shook himself, but did not even recognize that the Lord had departed from him. Entering Satan's world without the presence of God is the equivalent of sticking our neck into places we not only do not belong, but know we have been warned to avoid. Why would we choose to place our heads into the mouth of a roaring lion?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does it matter more what you are when you are born, or what you choose to live as and die as?
2. What do you think Samson's biggest mistake was? Like Esau, did he grow to despise his birthright? Did he just foolishly take God's blessings for granted? Wrong place, wrong time? Femme fatale?
3. What are some of the blessings that God has placed on your life that you would not want to walk away from?
4. What are your chances in any war if the enemy discovers you, without any real protection, in the middle of their camp?
5. Have you ever known anyone who took a stand on a principle and was admired, even if they were disliked?
6. Have you ever known anyone to compromise what they believed in order to fit in with their "friends" who were not serving God? Did their friends admire them for their decision?
7. If you have a hero, what qualities make you admire them? Is one of them, by chance, that they stand by their principles and beliefs, even when such a stand requires a price to be paid?
8. How many compromises does it take before your witness has no credibility and you are just another hypocrite?
9. How many people have you known who thought that by hanging around with and fitting in with the ungodly, they would win them to Christ? Are they stilling serving God? How long did it take for them to sink to the level of those around them? By the way, it almost never works. Why is that?
10. Is there anything to which we can expose ourselves that does not become a part of our soul?
11. When we become desensitized to sin, and it no longer offends us, what does it take to restore us to enmity with sin?
12. When we have been in the presence of God and spent time worshipping Him, do we then find ourselves disgusted by sin when we encounter it? Is it really that simple?
13. How often have you done something really stupid that you absolutely knew was stupid before you did it? Would putting your head inside the mouth of an alligator qualify? Would stepping out from under the blood of Christ, into the territory of Satan, waiting to humiliate you for escaping from him the first time?

14. Who was it that said that there is no middle ground? That people are either serving God or Satan? Is there scripture for such a harsh stand?