

## DEMAS

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The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Demas has forsaken me.” (2 Timothy 4.10).

Some say that it may not have been that Demas had ceased to be a Christian, or that he had renounced Christ, but what is clear is that Demas was making worldly moves and pursuing his own selfish ends.

Demas has forsaken me.

Paul was deeply hurt by this desertion. There is no record of the two men ever meeting again or of any further communication passing between them. They had been good friends and shared time and spiritual things together. But Demas lacked staying power. He saw the real problems in being a Christian with all its pressures and potential persecution. And his companion Paul was always a controversialist; he was always in trouble with the authorities. Paul was unpopular in many quarters. People talked ill of him and made all manner of false accusations against him. He stood out as someone different. To be in his company or associated with him caused difficulties, embarrassment and criticism. It was not fashionable to be with Paul.

If there is anything that people fear it is someone who is different; someone who cannot be pigeon-holed and consigned to a pre-conceived category. They are dismissed as odd, abnormal and to be shunned. Such was the case with Paul.

Demas has forsaken me.

Forsaken me. Forsaken here means to desert or abandon and in a bad sense. There is pathos in Paul’s words. And just when Paul needs the loyalty of his friends this happens. In the same chapter he implores Timothy to waste no time in visiting him (2 Timothy 4.21); he is anxious to have his cloak, books and parchments (13). He is still distressed by the evil done to him by Alexander the coppersmith (14) and, to top it all, Demas has forsaken him.

Demas loved the present world with its apparently easy life and its attractions and that is why he forsook Paul. Paul preached deliverance from “this present evil world” and Demas saw in Paul and in his words restriction, the lack of independence and the impossibility of having a good time. Life was no fun with serious minded Paul and, in any event, people did not like him. It appears to me, therefore, that Demas forsook what Paul stood for, namely the Gospel of Christ. As J.N. Darby once said, concerning human relationships, “Emotional desertion precedes physical desertion.” It is almost certain that Demas had been backsliding for some time and losing his grip on Christian values. Demas became an opponent and a coward.

It is usually true that when someone lets go of the Christian faith they also relinquish Christian friends, and many give up the faith because the way is hard. The Lord Jesus said so. “Narrow is the way that leads to life but broad and easy is the road that leads to destruction.” (Matthew 7.13 - 14). As with many lapsed Christians since Demas, the broad way of the non-restrictive life engulfed him. There was no fun in Christianity, it being too serious. This is why Pentecostal, charismatic and modern churches have introduced entertainment into worship with pop music, dance, drama and comedy. This is not the Biblical concept of being ‘kept by the power of God’ but, rather, entertained by the power of the world.

Demas’s defection was a bitter disappointment to Paul. But it was not something new. He wrote to the Galatians, “Ye did run well but who has hindered you?” (Galatians 3.7). The Christians at Galatia began with enthusiasm but lacked the staying power, as is often the way in human relationships as

well as spiritual ones. Often the start of a new romance is wonderful, as are many new ventures, but once you are embarked on something, the novelty can wear off.

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And the strong implication is that he did not tell Paul of his plans first; he did not bother to sit down and discuss the problems or, if he did, he did not value Paul's wisdom. How true that is of life. Often people do not tell us the true reasons for their actions against us.

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When one is forsaken, despondency, loneliness and discouragement can follow. While the law in England, and other countries, make provision for actual bodily harm and a penalty for offenders but there is no law for those who cause emotional harm. Bodily harms usually heal; emotional ones can last a lifetime. The Bible is full of examples of mental cruelty, emotional assault and man's inhumanity to man. This is not God's Will. We are instructed to love one another and that includes family, friends, neighbours and enemies although that love may be just courtesy and respect. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is a maxim of common sense.

One of the most insidious evils in society occurs when someone turns on a friend and treats him badly or ignores him or says all manner of false things against him. Life is full of false friends and those who are treacherous. We have all have friends who declared their love for us and we expressed our love for them and they have deserted us and sometimes treated us very badly! This also happens in churches!

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Yet there was One who went about always doing good. He taught with authority. He healed all who came to Him. He showed mercy and forgiveness even to thieves and prostitutes. He was kind to all men and women. He had time for everyone. He was a Wonderful Man, the best Man this world has ever known or will know: yet He was betrayed by a friend and forsaken by many others. Because He was a good man His life showed up the hypocrisy of others. He and His perfection made men and women uncomfortable because of their sinful and worldly ways. They were jealous of Him and hated Him without a cause. People are afraid of someone who is decent and good, honest and kind because they may lack these qualities themselves and regard the good-living man with both suspicion and contempt, and dislike him even to the point of hatred. What often follows is that everyone joins in and condemns the good man for his integrity. It is the evil in men that despises the good. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3.19).

The most despised people in society are probably Christians, Jews and philanthropists. The first two groups because they are deemed to be special to God and the last group because they display good deeds. The Bible says that this world lies in the hand of the wicked one and therefore it makes sense that the world hates those who are God-fearing and who try to live by Christian standards. It is easier to be with the majority than to stand true to Christ and God's morality. It is easier to be 'of the world' than to seek eternal life in the world to come. Rome persecuted Christians because of their better standards, which condemned the lifestyle of the Romans; the Nazis persecuted the Jews because they are the 'chosen people of God'.

God sent the Eternal Word into the world. He showed us how to live, how to get on with everybody, how to conquer shame and guilt, how to be forgiven, how to be saved and have eternal life. He came to give us security for this life and for the life to come. And what did our forbears do? They nailed Him to a cross. What was His crime? That He was different and that He was a good man. And Pilate spoke for many when he said, "What wrong has He done?"

The prodigal son had the security of a good home and a loving father. But the world out there looked like fun and so off he went. Sex, parties and riotous living. A social life, great fun and no restrictions, the opposite of his boring life at home. He could do anything he wanted. No wise father to oversee him. Yet the young man made a real mess of his life although at the time he was too busy enjoying the things of the world to recognise his madness. Fortunately, he came to his senses and went back home. Backsliding and forsaking his father was a big mistake. Betraying people who have been kind and loving towards you is always a mistake. And, sadly, it happens regularly particularly to kind and decent people.

The prodigal felt guilty but made the right decision and returned to his father's love and security. Some people feel guilty and hide from the one they have hurt or betrayed. They can certainly hide from their victim but not from themselves. Guilt cannot be drowned or dissipated. It is like a cancer. Ultimately, that sin and guilt will bring down God's judgement and retribution unless the wrong-doer repents and makes restitution to the ones they have wronged. The only remedy for sin, mistakes and guilt is honest admission and re-acquaintance with and repentance towards the one they have wronged.

I am sure that Paul wanted Demas to be restored. Paul was a kind man, and nowhere is this better portrayed than in his epistle to Philemon. He would have welcomed Demas back. But Demas had now found new friends and a new lifestyle and it was impossible to break the mould. Weak people like Demas are manipulated and, for their own ends, they make so-called friends to serve their purposes. The world is full of people who have such friends whom they use as mere stepping stones. Demas's associates would most likely have told him not to go back to Paul and, further, would probably have assassinated Paul's character.

The character of a good man is always assassinated by the jealous, bitter and evil people of this world. They did it to Christ Himself and those who do not accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour are doing Him a great injustice and committing their own spiritual and eternal suicide.

But we have all backslid. The promise of God is to heal our backslidings and receive us again upon true repentance (Hosea 14.4). However much a platitude it may appear, when one is right with God, and thereby true to oneself, one can be right with everyone else.

The apostle John wrote, "Love not the world nor the things of the world" (1 John 2.15). If anyone prefers the world to the things of God the love of God is not in him. The world offers pleasure, love and pride but the world is temporary as are its attractions. 1 John 3.8 states that whoever commits sin (wilfully) is of the devil; that the Son of God came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. Men, and women, love the world, and most of those who love the world do not believe in Christ or, at least, do not accept His morality. They are anti-Christian in attitude and also liars (1 John 2.22).

Backsliding has been rightly described as deterioration. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "How is it that after you have known God you can return to the weak and beggarly elements and be in bondage again?" (Galatians 4.9). The anonymous writer to the Hebrews records God's words, "Now the just shall live by faith but if any men withdraw I will have no pleasure in him." (Hebrews 10.38). The church of Ephesus were hard working, patient and would not tolerate evil. They had discernment and identified and dealt with false apostles and liars. They were a wise and commendable church and yet they had deserted their first love (Revelation 2.4). Their love had become cold or cynical. There was backsliding and indifference. The message of the Lord was that they do something quickly.

Demas had the chance to halt his backsliding and return. I would like to think that he did.

We all know people, some of whom we love dearly and who give us great pain in our hearts because they have forsaken us. And some have forsaken the Lord Jesus whom they once had accepted as Saviour. They are on the way to experiencing the eternal wrath of God (John 3.36). It is the most

horrible thing in the world to perceive that this will happen to those you love. And yet they bring it upon themselves. It is rejection of Christ that brings eternal damnation. But still there is time and where there is a contrite heart there is a forgiving God (Psalm 34.18).

Thinking of the deep anguish of the soul of Christ in His being forsaken and my own recent experience the words of Paul live within me.

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Like Demas, anyone who denies his conscience cannot be open to God. As Shakespeare wrote, "Conscience makes cowards of us all."

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