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How to Avoid a Spiritual Failure

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In his final hours in Rome, awaiting an inevitable execution, a very lonely apostle Paul suffered some additional heartbreak. "Demas," he wrote, "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). We are left to speculate as to the particulars — what dread fears or powerful allurements led this faithful friend and co-worker to abandon the kingdom of God and to forsake his burdened brother. It was not as though he had fled the field at the first approach of trouble. During Paul's first imprisonment in Rome Demas had evidently been a steadfast companion (Philemon 24; Colossians 4:14). Now, unexpectedly, this heart-mauling betrayal and desertion.

Paul said that Demas "loved this present world." The "world" is many things. John describes it as a way of thinking where lust, materialism and pride abound (1 John 2:15-16). What was it that got to the faithful Demas? Was it fear of death or imprisonment? Or was it something more subtle like a nostalgic longing for the old easy ways free of constant warfare? We are not told which one of these undid Demas but one of them found its mark.

Breaking points can come to us too if we are not very careful. A deep hurt we cannot find it in ourselves to forgive. A disappointing marriage. Failures with our children. Lost health or prosperity. Anything we had never imagined happening to us. And often it's just plain prideful stubbornness. At any rate, don't ever say you'd never do what others have done. You've never been all the places you could be. Peter learned a valuable lesson about that (Matthew 26:31-35). It is far better that we know our own weaknesses and watch and pray that we enter not into temptation (Matthew 26:41). Satan loves an arrogant and self-confident man.

Another lesson to be learned from the failure of others is that those who at last go back, at first look back. Departures of apparent suddenness are really the end of a process. Our Lord warned that those who put their hand to the kingdom plow and look back longingly at the world are not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). The disciples who go back are those who first begin to cultivate again the values of the world and like the Israelites in the wilderness grow nostalgic amidst their trials for the fleshpots of Egypt. They forget, of course, the galling bondage that accompanies the life of sin. These are the ones who gradually cease to meditate upon God's word (Psalm 1:1-2), then become prayerless (James 4:1-2) as God and Christ seem far away. First men cease to study, then to pray, and, finally, to care.

Sometimes this all begins as a casual flirtation, a few little compromises dismissed as harmless. Too much time with worldly companions (1 Corinthians 15:33), too much interest in a job (1 Timothy 6:9-10), too much concern with being accepted and making our mark in the world (1 Peter 5:5). Finally, it becomes a passionate love affair that makes us heedless of the injury we do to our Savior, ourselves and others.

Satan is the master of the "short step" method. Slow change is more effective in producing spiritual collapse than sudden departure. The danger of alerting the victim to what is happening is eliminated. We can be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12-13). Warning flags need to start flying the moment we feel the slightest ebb in commitment. Beware the spiritual slow leak.

The unfailing answer to this kind of spiritual failure is the daily discipline of an uncompromising dedication which admits of no exceptions and makes quick and humble redress for every transgression. Burn all your bridges and press on to the heavenly mark (Philippians 3:7-14). And if, in spite of everything, you happen to stumble badly, don't let despair destroy you. Remember that everyone who has faltered has not ultimately fallen. We can all thank God for that. John Mark's disgraceful desertion in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13) was not the end of him because he didn't allow it to be. Paul sent for him during his last hours (2 Timothy 4:11) and the Holy Spirit chose him to record the gospel story. We don't have to be like Demas. In the mercy of God we have the privilege of being like John Mark or Peter, and, yes, even Paul.

Five Views of Salvation

Steven J. Wallace

Jesus stated nearly 2000 years ago, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mk. 16:16). To the simple, unbiased and unprejudiced mind, Jesus’ statement is very clear and easy to understand. It is as easy to understand a doctor’s statement, *“He who eats his food and digests it will live; but he who does not eat will die.”* All of us would easily understand that unless we eat and digest, we will die! However, for those who have allied themselves with human creeds and have been depraved with worldly wisdom, Jesus’ simple statement becomes confusing and contradicting. Although the Bible *ALWAYS* places water baptism (in Jesus’ name) before salvation, men have sought ways to undermine the authority and confuse the simplicity of our Lord’s teaching.

For example, **the Atheist** would say, *“He who believes and is baptized will **NOT** be saved.”* He has rejected the existence of God and the authority of the Bible. Unbelievers believe there is no God, yet one would have to be “God” himself to prove such a position. For one to know that there is no God, he would have had to have been everywhere, seen everything at once and know all things! Yet Jesus had him in mind when he said, *“. . . he who believes not shall be condemned,”* and again, *“. . . he who does not believe is condemned already”* (Jn. 3:18). Truly *“the fool has said in his heart ‘There is no God.’”* (Prov. 14:1).

The Universalist approaches the scripture with the bias that God is a God of only love and therefore He can never condemn anyone. They say, *“He who believes **NOT** and is **NOT** baptized shall be saved.”* While such a faith accepts the actuality of God, it rejects His word and leaves, nonetheless, a corrupt and misguided picture of Deity. Warning! *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (Jn. 12:48).

The Catholic comes along and teaches, *“He who believes **NOT** and is baptized shall be saved.”* I say this as a former Catholic who was sprinkled as a baby. Catholics baptize babies because of the erroneous view of inherited sin (Ezek. 18:20); however, Bible baptism was NEVER administered to babies. Jesus taught that babies are safe (Lk. 18:15-17). Notwithstanding, subjects of Bible baptism must have first believed (see again Mark 16:16), yet faith comes by hearing the word of the Lord (Rom. 10:17). How can a baby believe when they cannot understand the word of the Lord? Can they also confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37)? False doctrine makes us believe unbelievable things!

Then **the Baptist** comes and says, *“He who believes and is **NOT** baptized shall be saved.”* Yet is this what Jesus said? Is it Deity’s view? No amount of human manipulation will change the eternal truth of Mark 16:16. Beware of such **“NOTS”** in the devil’s **“tale.”**