

2 TIMOTHY 4:10

SAVED? OR LOST?

DEMAS: CAN WE QUIT WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH?

“Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.”¹

“**W**ell begun is half done.” This old adage was part of the common wisdom during an earlier day. I certainly heard the saying frequently during my childhood. Children would hear this old saw as they were trained to become self-starters. As is true for many such sayings that are part of the common lore, the old saw is only conditionally true. Regardless of how well one begins, if the individual quits before completing the race, he still loses. If one is to be considered a winner, he must complete the task assigned. Christians must complete the race. Moreover, they must strive to excel throughout the contest. As the Apostle has written, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:24]. Run to obtain the prize. The prize is awarded only at the end of the race.

How tragic, how pitiful is the Apostle’s summation of the manner in which one erstwhile Christian quit the race. Demas precipitously resigned his appointment before the Lord, quitting when the going got rough. Unlike Epaphroditus [see PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30], though he enjoyed a good reputation among the servants of the Risen Saviour, Demas shredded his reputation; he quit when the going got tough. In his final missive written to Timothy, Paul has written of this erstwhile servant of the Living God, “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” [2 TIMOTHY 4:10]. That one sentence tells us more about the character of a once-honoured worker than he might have wished to be revealed.

There is no indication that Demas was a lost individual. While there will always be weeds planted together with the Lord’s wheat, there is no indication in any of Paul’s letters that he questioned Demas’ salvation. Let’s be clear that just because an individual should cease to serve Christ, cease to walk in harmony with the people of God or cease to live boldly for the cause of Christ does not mean that the person is unsaved. If such a person is a Christian, God will call that one to account. A believer does not cease to be saved because she is disobedient. She does, however, expose herself to divine discipline—and that discipline can be severe.

While we do not know the outcome of Demas’ life or how God dealt with him following his defection, his life can still serve as a caution to those who long to honour the Lord Christ. Join me in a review of the life of Demas. He serves as a caution against quitting when the going gets tough. The question that looms before us is, “Can we quit when the going gets tough?”

DEMAS: HIS SERVICE — Many Christians counted Demas as an honoured servant of the Risen Saviour. This will frequently be stunning information for Christians today. We are fully aware of the final statement concerning Demas; but that dark statement must be balanced against the instances when he was commended for his service with the Apostle. For instance, during his first imprisonment, Paul wrote a letter to the Christians of Colossae. As he drew that letter to a close, he included this statement: “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas” [COLOSSIANS 4:14]. Note that Demas was with the Apostle during his first imprisonment.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Supplemental to that statement is Paul's recognition of Demas in his Letter to Philemon. The Letter to Philemon was written at the same time as the Letter to the Colossians was written. In that personal letter to Philemon, Paul recognised those who were sharing his imprisonment. He wrote, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers" [PHILEMON 23, 24]. The aged saint not only names Demas as being present with him, but Paul identifies him as a "fellow worker." Demas is named with other individuals whom we know to have been esteemed by the Apostle. While we may not say much about Epaphras or Aristarchus, we are on solid ground in giving recognition to Luke and Mark. These writers of the Gospels that bear their names were not only fellow workers together with the Apostle, but their service was highly valued. The labours of these two saints continue to bless the saints throughout this present church age.

Let's recall how Paul came to be imprisoned. Paul had been seized by Roman soldiers when his life was threatened by Jewish agitators. He had gone to Jerusalem with gifts for the impoverished saints. When he arrived, he met with James, the Pastor of the Jerusalem congregation, together with all the elders of that church [see ACTS 21:17, 18]. These elders spoke of their concern arising from the impact of Paul's visit to Jerusalem. Though these early believers were Christians, they nevertheless adhered outwardly to Jewish customs. The decision to keep the Law was in part an effort to avoid provoking the Jews among whom they lived.

Paul was saddled with an undeserved reputation as a provocateur. Thus, the elders were concerned that his presence would bring trouble. "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come" [ACTS 21:20-22]. Unquestionably, these elders were frightened; and they responded to their fear rather than appealing to God. Don't be too quick to condemn them! Most of the decisions made among the people of God to this day are made out of fear rather than being made out of obedience.

The elders suggested a plan they hoped would demonstrate Paul's commitment to Jewish religious practise. If he would do what they suggested, it would demonstrate that he wasn't attempting to destroy the ceremonial law. This is the conversation Doctor Luke recorded, "Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality" [ACTS 20:23-25].

Paul did purify himself along with the men who were to be purified according to the Law. He followed the ritual requirements prescribed in the Law. However, trouble erupted as the ritual period was almost completed. "The Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place'" [ACTS 20:27, 28].

The fact that the definite article is used in reference to the Jews that raised the outcry indicates that they were likely from Ephesus and that they knew both Paul and Trophimus. The account informs us, "They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the Temple" [ACTS 20:29].

As you no doubt remember, the account relates how a mob seized the Apostle; they were intent on killing him because they believed he had desecrated the Temple by bringing a Gentile into the inner court. Had the Tribune not been informed of the raging Jewish mob prompting him to intervene with a cohort of soldiers, Paul would undoubtedly have been murdered. The arrival of the Tribune saved the Apostle. Before he was carried into the barracks for interrogation, Paul requested and received permission to address the crowd. When the mob heard him speaking in Aramaic they listened until he spoke of being sent to the Gentiles. At this, the mob again broke into angry shouts that he needed to die [cf. **ACTS 21:30-22:22**].

When a plot by Jewish zealots to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul became known, the Tribune sent him under armed escort to the governor, Felix. Paul testified on several occasions before Felix, and even before his successor, Festus. After more than two years of incarceration, Paul at last appealed to Caesar, as was the right of a Roman citizen. Later, he would testify even before King Agrippa and Queen Bernice [see **ACTS 23:12-26:32**].

What is important to understand is that through all these events, God was in control. The Apostle would go to Rome, and he would appear before the Caesar. His incarceration was not accidental—God was at work transforming what Paul’s enemies intended for harm. God worked, bringing glory to Himself, and Paul stood firm. The events covering a period of several years were a practical demonstration of the words Paul had penned from Corinth to the Christians in Rome: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [**ROMANS 12:1, 2**].

Paul could easily have quoted the words of Joseph when he assured his brothers after the death of their father. “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” [**GENESIS 50:20**]. When Saul of Tarsus was arrested by the Risen Son of God, Jesus sent a disciple named Ananias. Ananias was informed concerning Paul, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My Name” [**ACTS 9:15, 16**]. God’s promise was at last being fulfilled.

Then, the Acts of the Apostles concludes with this statement concerning the Apostle. “[Paul] lived [under house arrest] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” [**ACTS 28:30, 32**]. During this time, Demas, among others, was with the Apostle, serving God and assisting Paul as needed. In this imprisonment, it was obvious that there was no substance to the charges against the Apostle. In fact, the Jews were unable to present a cogent, or even a coherent charge of what wrong he might have committed. Though the Apostle was gaoled, there was no particular danger in being associated with him. He was not significant in the eyes of the government, and thus he faced no governmental threat.

Now, caught up in the sweep instigated by Nero to discover and seize followers of the Way, Paul faced a very real threat. He had stood trial and sentence had been pronounced. This accounts for his statement in his final missive to Timothy, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” [**2 TIMOTHY 4:6, 7**].

Paul had been deserted; many of those who had stood with him in his previous trial now fled. Self-preservation drove many that should have stood with him to flee. Among those who deserted the prisoner was Demas. Of this erstwhile companion, the Apostle wrote, “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” [**2 TIMOTHY 4:10**].

DEMAS: HIS CHARACTER — It is almost impossible to assess character until after the final act of life has played out. If Demas' life is assessed only during the period of the Apostle's first incarceration, he appears to be a solid, mature Christian. However, when the going got tough, his true character was expressed. It is the Apostle's assessment—superintended, it must be noted, by the Spirit of God who ensured that what the Apostle wrote was accurate—that Demas was “in love with this present world.”

Let's tease apart the original language in order to learn something of what might have caused Demas to leave. The Greek participle that is translated “in love with” is what grammarians identify as *ingressive aorist*.² The verb would mean something akin to the English construct, “having fallen in love with”; as such, it conveys the idea that this love was continuing. Paul is saying that Demas had deliberately made the decision that the certainty of immediate comfort delivered by present world was preferable to any supposed comfort that would come from the promise of Christ's return. You have heard me caution against sacrificing the permanent on the altar of the temporary; that is precisely what Demas had done.

Keeping in mind the grammar of **2 TIMOTHY 4:10**, contrast that with the only other place where Paul used the same participle. In **2 TIMOTHY 4:8**, Paul wrote of Christians who anticipate the return of the Master. “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all *who have loved* his appearing.” In this instance, the participle is present tense, indicating that the believers who are awaiting Christ's return do so in a settled state. Perhaps there was hope in the Apostle's words that Demas would yet return to where he belonged. Paul is emphasising that at the moment he was writing, Demas had fallen in love with this present age.

The phrase, “this present world” would be more literally translated “this present age.” The Apostle sees “this present age” as the tangible world of time and space. “This present age” is always limited to the moment; “this present age” is concerned solely with the immediate and the temporary. This present age must disappear—it is not permanent. “This present age” defines society without God, a concept that is only too well known in this day. Make no mistake, the tangible comforts of this present world are seductive—they strongly appeal to our fallen desires. Nevertheless, those comforts will soon enough disappoint, for they must disappear.

The precise phrase, “this present world,” is found nowhere else in the New Testament. However, in these Pastoral Letters the Apostle used a similar construct on at least two other occasions. In **1 TIMOTHY 6:17**, Paul wrote, “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.” The Apostle instructs believers not to become overly dependent on the elements of this present age because the riches of the moment are transient at best.

Then, in the Letter to Titus, the Apostle wrote, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” [**TITUS 2:11-14**]. Christians are to focus on the age to come, refusing to be seduced by this present age. I cannot caution you strongly enough that the benefits of this present age, though transient, are powerfully seductive to the Child of God.

² I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, **A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles**, **International Critical Commentary** (T&T Clark International, London; New York 2004), 815

The concept of “this age” contrasted with “the age to come” permeates the Pastoral Letters. At one point, while ascribing praise and glory to the Master, the Apostle has written, “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the Only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen” [1 TIMOTHY 1:17]. Then, in his final missive to Timothy, Paul reveals his confidence in Christ and His power to deliver believers when he writes, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His Heavenly Kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” [2 TIMOTHY 4:18].

The King of the ages dwells outside of time and beyond this moment we call “now.” Christ created this present age and He holds it in His hand. Recall Paul’s description of the Master. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” [COLOSSIANS 1:15-17].

What has all this to do with Demas? Demas fell in love with this present age; he forgot Whom he served and why He served that One. This erstwhile servant of Christ, who once was so highly esteemed by the Apostle Paul, reasoned, quite deliberately, that self-preservation was of greater importance than was honouring Christ. He chose self-promotion as being of greater worth than proclaiming Christ. He decided that self-love was more important than love for the Saviour. Demas had now displaced Christ from the centre of his being.

In acting thusly, Demas chose to live like too many professing Christians of this present day. I have known, and perhaps you have known as well, apparent Christians who professed deep love for the Master. Perhaps these individuals even appeared to align with the Master for a period. Perhaps they were active in some particular service among the faithful. Superficially, they gave every evidence of being powerfully employed in the Lord’s service. However, there came a time when identifying with the Master could expose them to ridicule, or perhaps they were about to be called upon to suffer for the Faith, or perhaps they simply grew tired of attempting to walk with the Saviour. At that time, these individuals made a decision that their own interests superseded the will of the Master.

Jesus spoke of superficial Christians in the Parable of the Sower. You no doubt will recall how he spoke of a sower working the field. As he sowed the seed, some fell along the path, some was strewn on rocky soil and other seed fell among the thorns. The most did fall on soil prepared to receive the seed. Nevertheless, the seed falling on the path was quickly eaten by the birds. The seed that fell on rocky soil immediately germinated, but died just as quickly having no depth. The seed among the thorns was soon choked out by the growing weeds. However, that which was sown in the good soil sprouted and yielded a rich harvest.

When the disciples asked what the parable meant, Jesus explained, “The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” [MARK 4:14-20]. Perhaps Demas is described by one of these types of soil.

The Apostle's brief assessment provides even more insight when he writes, "Demas ... has deserted me." This translates a triple compound verb composed of words meaning "to leave," "down" and "in." As an aside of some significance, this is the verb Jesus used on the cross when he cried out, "My God, My God, why have you *forsaken* Me" [MATTHEW 27:46]? When Paul chooses this word, he is stating that Demas chose to forsake him because the circumstances appeared ominous. One whom the Apostle had trusted had let him down. Let the horror of that thought sink in—one on whom the Apostle depended had left him in the lurch! Paul was confined; he lacked freedom to move about to fulfil the ministry of the Word. He had depended on Demas because of the relative freedom Demas enjoyed.³

Deserting the servant of the Lord, Demas had deserted the work of the Lord. His desertion grew out of his own selfish interests. The word Paul chose conveys the idea of abandonment or desertion. While the verb is neutral in the sense that the leaving may be positive or negative, there can be no doubt that in this instance the Apostle means this to be a bad act by an individual previously recognised as suitable for divine service. Demas had been specifically appointed to accompany the Apostle and to exercise his gifts to advance the cause of Christ.

Why did Demas choose to go to Thessalonica? We don't really know, but from earliest days of the Faith, the suggestion has been advanced that Thessalonica was his hometown.⁴ He was mentioned together with Aristarchus the Thessalonian [cf. PHILEMON 24 with ACTS 20:4; 27:2]. It does appear reasonable to suggest that Demas was from Thessalonica, and he chose to return home. Reading between the lines, it would seem that Demas had not just simply melted away, though that is possible, but that he attempted to cover his tracks by telling the Apostle that God was calling him to return to Thessalonica. If this is the case, and I admit that this can only be speculation, then he was first in a long train of servants of God who averred dedication to Christ, only to suddenly receive a call to go someplace that appeared easier.

I first came to my adopted home in order to assess how our school could prepare Canadians for service in Canada. A growing number of Canadians were seeking to study with us in Texas. We had observed that most Canadians who came for studies in the United States chose to remain in the United States. It appeared that God would call young men from Canada to prepare for Christian service, but when they saw the bigger churches and the larger salaries in the south, God suddenly called them to stay there. The administration was concerned to ensure that we equipped men for service in Canada without promoting a foreign cultural norm on those men. We wanted to design studies that would equip Canadians to serve in Canada without transforming them into Americans. In the midst of these efforts, God called my wife and me to leave our home and move to Canada. Completing all requirements for immigration, we moved to Canada. I have sent a few young men to train in the States; but I insist that they must not lose their love for this nation—they must come back to Canada.

When the going got tough, Demas returned to what was familiar. He quit his appointment to serve because things were getting tough. Down deep, he was in love with this present age. I must caution the people of God that love of money, love of ease, love of the praise of men, love of anything other than the love of Christ Jesus the Master will lead you to quit. What is worse, you will find it distressingly easy to justify the decision to quit.

³ Cf. Kenneth S. Wuest, **Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1997), 2 Ti 4:10

⁴ E.g. John Chrysostom, **The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church** (John Henry Parker; J. G. F. and J. Rivington, Oxford, London 1843) 259

DEMAS: HIS FUTURE — A friend whom I knew well was removed from ministry. His church was compelled to take this action out of necessity. Some time after he had been removed from ministry, while ministering to him and his wife, he said to me, “Mike, the thing I miss most is hearing trumpets in the morning.” I knew exactly what he meant. The servant of God awakens with anticipation, knowing that God is at work and that his service will be energised by the Spirit of God. Every day for the faithful minister begins with excitement and anticipation.

We don’t know what happened to Demas. He is lost to the history of the churches after this final, sad notation from the Apostle. The great difference is that Demas wasn’t removed from service—he quit. Though Paul’s language leaves open the possibility that Demas could possibly return to the work, if he ever again took up the labours for Christ, we have no way of knowing. I am confident, however, that if Demas was indeed appointed by God, he never again experienced trumpets in the morning. If he was a pretender, as was Judas, then quitting when the going got tough made no particular impact in his life. The one who has no vital relationship with the Living God will likely feel relief at quitting his service. The pressure to perform for one who is not serving because of divine appointment is tremendous; and quitting relieves that pressure. We really don’t know the situation for Demas.

There are some truths we can know, however. We can know the sense of loss felt by every true minister of Christ who is not in service. We can know that Christ does not remove the joy of submissive service for that one who serves by divine appointment. We can know that Christ stands ready to restore each one whom He appoints when they repent.

True servants feel keenly the loss when they are not serving. It is almost axiomatic to say that Peter denied the Lord. John wrote of Peter after this denial. He noted that Peter didn’t quit talking to the disciples. In fact, he still enjoyed a measure of respect. Thus, when Peter said, “I am going fishing,” at least six others said, “We will go with you” [JOHN 21:3]. Though they employed every trick they knew, they toiled all night and caught precisely nothing.

A solitary figure appeared on the beach as they neared. Inquiring whether they had caught any fish, they replied, perhaps somewhat grumpily, “No.” The figure said, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some” [JOHN 21:4, 5]. Of course, they pulled in an unprecedented catch. Peter knew immediately that the figure on the beach was the Master. He leapt into the sea and swam to shore, though he said nothing in all this. He turned and helped the others haul in the fish. When they at last made land, the figure had built a fire and was inviting these men to breakfast. The text informs us that “None of the disciples dared to ask Him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord” [JOHN 21:12]. Jesus’ interaction with Peter on the beach, presented in JOHN 21:15-19, reveals Peter’s brokenness, a brokenness experienced by every God-appointed servant who is not in service. Every one who is appointed longs to declare the things of God and is miserable if he is not proclaiming Christ.

The joy that comes from service is real for all who serve by divine appointment. I have said, and I say again, I will proclaim Christ until the day I die or until the Master returns. Every servant of God would make just such an avowal. To see the transformation of life, to witness the strength that message gives to the weak, to note the encouragement the proclamation of the Word gives to the discouraged, to see the grace of God at work in the lives of those who feel broken and cast aside imparts a joy that can never be explained. Paul rejoiced because the obedience of the Romans was known to all [ROMANS 16:19]. He rejoiced in the knowledge of the zeal of the Corinthian Christians and because they repented and because he could be confident of their love [2 CORINTHIANS 7:7, 9, 16]. He rejoiced to know that Christ was proclaimed [PHILIPPIANS 1:18].

Just because we failed once does not mean that God rejects us. We are provided examples of individuals who quit and were yet powerfully used by God. One example is a young man named John Mark. On the first deliberate missionary journey sponsored by and supported by a Christian congregation, among those accompanying the missionaries was a young man named John Mark. He was a Christian. His mother appears to have been a generous woman who opened her home to the Christians for prayer and other ministries [see ACTS 12:12]. Mark was also the cousin of Barnabas [see COLOSSIANS 4:10], one of the principles on the first missionary tour. Mark was also the author of the Gospel account that bears his name; that Gospel appears to be primarily the account provided by Peter and written by John Mark.

Though John had many advantages that would suggest success in Christian service, he quit on the first missionary journey. The incident is mentioned almost in passing when Luke writes, “Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem” [ACTS 13:13]. Whether homesick or whether fearful of the potential dangers of the journey, John Mark quit! He went home rather than continuing. Though Paul appears to have avoided saying much about the defection, he did have a long memory as is evident when he and Barnabas began to think of a second missionary tour.

The account provided in the Acts demonstrates Paul’s strong feelings about including Mark in the missionary work. “After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.’ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord” [ACTS 15:36-40].

In Paul’s estimate, John Mark had deserted at a critical time; thus, John Mark had no future as a servant of Christ in Paul’s estimate. However, fast forward to the time of Paul’s first imprisonment, and we see a wonderful commendation concerning Mark. From prison, Paul writes the Colossians, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him) [COLOSSIANS 4:10]. He also mentioned Mark in the personal letter he sent to Philemon. “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers” [PHILEMON 23, 24]. Mark is not only sharing Paul’s imprisonment, providing him comfort and encouragement, but he is commended as one trusted in providing oversight to the churches. He would prove to be an encouragement even in the Apostle’s final imprisonment, for Paul urges Timothy, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:11]. Failure at one point need not disqualify from fruitful service for the servant of God.

John Mark did fail in his first attempt at ministry. His restoration through service with Peter becomes all the more significant in light of this fact. We have already noted that Peter himself understood something about failure in Christian service. Peter, had boasted of his determination to stand firm when opposition arose, but the Master caution him when He said, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” At this, Peter again boasted, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death,” which elicited this response from the Master, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” [LUKE 22:31-34].

Peter did fail miserably; he didn't stand firm—he fled when the going got tough. Nevertheless, God was not finished with Peter despite his timidity and bluster. After His resurrection, Jesus restored Peter to His service. The account provided by John demonstrates Jesus' work with the crest-fallen Apostle. "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me'" [JOHN 21:15-19].

Peter's greatest work lay before him, though he really couldn't know it at that moment. Peter would be God's instrument, working in concert with the other Apostles, each of whom had fled at the critical moment. Together they would be empowered to proclaim Christ in the very city where the Master had been crucified. Jesus had called the disciples to a hilltop from which He would ascend into the heavens. Doctor Luke relates what happened as Jesus was about to ascend into Heaven. "When [the disciples] had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'" [ACTS 1:6-11].

For ten days, the disciples—one hundred twenty men and women—united in prayer. Their hearts beat as one and they sought Christ's glory about all else. How powerful is the statement of their unity; it is a unity so rare today as to be enviable. "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer" [ACTS 1:14a]. On the tenth day after Jesus ascended into Heaven, on the Day of Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit on all those gathered in that upper room. Not one, not a select few, but *all* "were together in one place" [ACTS 2:1]; moreover, "they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit" [ACTS 2:4]. And the message of the Living Christ was proclaimed in power in Jerusalem. God restored the one who failed when that one humbled himself under the mighty hand of God.

I speak to people who have known failure at one time or another. There is not one among us who has not felt the stinging lash of self-recrimination because of failure. Someone listening actually quit serving because he felt himself to be such a failure. Someone who listens wonders if she can ever be used of God because she was ready to quit serving. We must never forget that we serve the God of the second chance, and the third chance, and the... Do we not remember the promise of God delivered through the Apostle of Love? "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" [1 JOHN 1:9]. This is the God we serve—the God who forgives and who restores.

COLOSSIANS 4:14; PHILEMON 23, 24
CAN WE QUIT WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH?

Perhaps you have thought about quitting because your situation seems impossible. The threats to self-preservation are real and they are terrifying. Don't quit your service before the Lord. Rather, seek Him and His power, asking that He give you strength to accomplish the task He assigns. Perhaps you have been wounded at some time in the past and you question whether you are able to continue to serve. Look to God and receive the power that He offers through His Spirit. Perhaps it is time for His people to commit themselves to renewed service in the power of His Spirit. Do it now. Do it today.