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Timothy and Demas - The Verdict of the Long-Run

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8; 4:9,10.

The position in which both Timothy and Demas - amongst others - found themselves at the time when Paul wrote this letter was the acid test. Various other forms of testing might leave the metal still undetermined as to its through-and-through genuineness, but when at length subjected to the acid the verdict will be final.

Paul and his position was the acid test. It was not alone the fact that he was Rome's prisoner, and that the world was against, so that his life was to be forfeit for his faith. There were more factors than that. There was the fact that in every city and town the whole Jewish fraternity was against him. Then, not only was the world and the religious system which had - in a sense - produced Christ and Christianity - against him, but he was suspect amongst many Christians themselves. Even Peter found some things in his letters "hard to be understood."

Paul's position of being outside of the world, outside of the so widely established religious order, and so utterly spiritual and heavenly in object and method, meant well-nigh universal misunderstanding, suspicion, and ostracism. Association with him left no hope of popularity, wide acceptance, or even generous appreciation. On the contrary; the shadow resting upon Paul would rest upon all his associates, and their chances of influence would be prejudiced before ever they gave their message.

The alternatives were quite clear. If the world was at all in their hearts, the utterness of Paul's way left them no honest course but to leave all that for which he stood and go where that heart-dividing element drew them - back to the world. Demas did this. Paul was too much for anyone who had a secret love for the world.

Another course was open to such of whom it could not be said bluntly that they "loved this present evil age." As open association with Paul jeopardised their existing opportunities in the Lord's work, or introduced an element of risk into the prospects of wide ministry, they could secretly and inwardly be in sympathy with Paul, but keep quiet about it, and never let their sympathies be known. They might even go as far as to let Paul know that they had a very real agreement with him, but at the same time intimate that their very usefulness to the Lord (?) would become curtailed if they openly associated themselves with him and his position. Thus they would be involved in being one thing to Paul, and another to his enemies. The only remaining course would be to be quite sure about Paul's position, decide whether God was with him, and risk everything on a full unashamed fellowship with him, believing that in the long run God would vindicate, and in the meantime a man with a mandate from heaven cannot have his ministry stopped by all the forces of earth and hell; God will sovereignly see to that, and if every door which man can close is closed, God has others which no man can shut.

This last course Timothy took. What is the verdict of the long-run?

Tragic as is the answer concerning Demas, perhaps his was the more honest way than that of those who adopt the middle course.

These three courses are presented to many of the Lord's people today, and the question for many - especially those in the Lord's service - is, will they compromise in the matter of their position and relationships in order to preserve their own influence, or will they pay the price, lose everything, and have such a Divine support as will see at length something accomplished which is in spite of everything having conspired to make it impossible?