

Q. If God makes sure we persevere, how can we be shipwrecked (1 Timothy 1:19) and become castaways (1 Corinthians 9:27)?

A. In 1 Timothy 1:18-19, Paul wrote to Timothy, "This instruction I commit to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies which led the way to you, that by them you may wage the good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience; which some having thrust away made a shipwreck concerning the faith." How can some have thrust away their faith and good conscience to become shipwrecks at the same time that God is making sure that they persevere? Is the perseverance of the saints an unbiblical doctrine that gives us false hope?

Remember that when trying to understand Scripture, we must study the context of the verse in question. In this case, simply looking at the very next verse instantly clears up the problem. "...of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I delivered to Satan, that they might be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20). Paul tells us that Hymenaeus and Alexander have done this very thing—thrust away faith and a good conscience and made shipwreck concerning the faith. Does he mean that they have lost their salvation? Not at all. He says that he delivered them to Satan "that they might be taught not to blaspheme."

Paul cannot possibly mean that Hymenaeus and Alexander lost their salvation. Losing one's salvation would certainly include God's withdrawing the Holy Spirit, the person becoming separated from God. The person would become carnally minded and spiritually dead. How could any of this teach a person not to blaspheme? Why would a spiritually dead and carnally minded person even care? If anything, a person losing his or her salvation would cause that person to become an even worse blasphemer.

If Paul's hope for Hymenaeus and Alexander was that they learn not to blaspheme, their thrusting away faith and a good conscience and making shipwreck concerning the faith cannot mean that they lost

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their salvation. Likewise, Paul's delivering them to Satan cannot mean they lost their salvation. It might have meant their being cut off from Christian fellowship for a time, or it might refer to a special curse of physical affliction that the apostles had the power to pronounce. Whatever it was, Paul did it to bring them back to their senses.

Let's face it, to say that Paul used "shipwreck" as a metaphor for losing one's salvation is a big and unfounded assumption. Being shipwrecked does not automatically kill people. It isolates them in a stressful situation, but they can be rescued from it. Paul himself was shipwrecked at least four times, three times up until he wrote 2 Corinthians 11:25 and at least one more time that is recorded in Acts 27 and 28. He was rescued from them all.

Daniel Defoe based his novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, on the very idea that we can be shipwrecked and survive. Crusoe turned from his father and from God and wound up being shipwrecked on a desert island. He didn't die, and he wasn't cut off from God. In fact, it is clear in the story that God used—even caused—the shipwreck to bring Crusoe to his senses, and through it all God providentially cared for him.

Hymenaeus and Alexander thrust away faith and a good conscience. That is, in their minds they turned from their trust in God and violated their consciences. By doing this, they shipwrecked themselves, isolating themselves from the faith. But they didn't lose their salvation. If they were saved in the first place, God would work with them—chasten them as a loving Father—to bring them back to their senses, to teach them "not to blaspheme." That is, He would make sure they persevered.

Of course, it is possible that they were never saved in the first place. If they were elect, the Holy Spirit will eventually bring them to salvation. Otherwise, if they were not elect, they will not be saved. Their profession of faith was false; they were among those who spring up for a time because something about Christianity makes them feel good or moral, or they like the fellowship or the music, or religion makes a good hobby for them. But as soon as there is something they don't like or another interest that is more entertaining comes along, they wither away or become choked (Matthew 13:3-7).

Castaway

In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul speaks of a concern that he has for himself. To understand what he means, we again must look at the

context. Earlier in the chapter, Paul is explaining how he will give up his rights and privileges as a free Christian and an apostle—he will not ask for financial support, he will become as one under the law, he will become as one outside the law, he will become as one who is weak (avoiding foods and drinks that offend others)—if that is necessary to further the Gospel. (Further information: "Are We *Under* the Law of Christ?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/under-law-of-christ/>) What is important for us to see here is that the context leading up to 1 Corinthians 9:27 is Paul's declaration that he will do what it takes to further the Gospel.

With that in mind, let's read beginning with verse 23. I'm going to use the King James Version because it contains the word "castaway." We'll examine that word afterward.

And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Paul does the whatever-is-necessary-to-further-the-Gospel things he mentioned earlier because he wants to be a partaker of the Gospel with those who hear him. The word is *sugkoinōnos*—"fellow-partaker" or "joint-partaker." It's not that Paul preaches so that he can qualify to be a partaker, which is an unfortunate impression that some translations give because they leave out the "fellow" or "joint" part of the word. It is that Paul preaches in order to bring in others with whom he can share the freely given benefits of the Gospel that he knows he already has (we see this assurance in verse 26).

The end of verse 24 can sound as if Paul means that his hearers must do a work—run the race—in order to obtain the prize of salvation; if they don't run, they won't obtain salvation. But we must not ignore the first part of the verse. Paul says that in a race, all run, but only one receives the prize. Will only one person in all of history be saved? Certainly not. Paul no more means that we must run a sort of spiritual race in order to obtain salvation than he means that only one person will win.

Paul is saying that 1) He does whatever it takes to further the Gospel, 2) He does this to bring in believers with whom he can become a fellow-partaker of the benefits of the Gospel, 3) You also become motivated in the furtherance of the Gospel with me having the same degree of zeal that runners have when they run a race knowing that only one of them will win. Paul's emphasis is not on the prize, and it is certainly not on only one person winning. His emphasis is on the running with zeal of someone in a race who wants to win a prize. The fact that Paul uses "we" and the Greek word for plural "you" demonstrates clearly that he knows that all will win—that all have already won in Jesus Christ. And now they are to zealously run with him to bring in others, "So run, that ye ["you all," that is, all of the elect] may obtain" by our running or working together for the Gospel.

Paul has not really dropped the topic he began earlier in the chapter of how the brethren should have been supporting him in his preaching. Now, instead of twisting their arms and possibly offending them, he's trying to motivate them by helping them to see that we are all in this race to get out the Gospel; we are all running together. To do this, we should not become intemperate with our goods and time and lives, but focus on the goal (verse 25). He is talking about the *manner* in which we live our Christian lives: we should be focused and zealous, not aimless and lethargic.

Paul's saying in verse 25 that we do this that we might obtain an incorruptible crown doesn't mean that our running this race wins us salvation personally. Our running this race is a figure for our bringing the Gospel to all the elect (whom Paul includes in "we").

In verse 26, he says that he, therefore, doesn't run without knowing his goal and he doesn't merely fight with the air. Instead of being aimless or beating the air, he keeps his body under subjection (verse 27). Actually, the Greek here literally says that he socks his body under the eye and enslaves it. He does this lest, while he has preached to others, he finds that due to lack of diligence, he himself has been disqualified. The King James Version says, "I myself should be a castaway," but the Greek word is not really "castaway," and certainly it is not used in the sense of someone being a castaway from a ship. The word is *adokimos*, and it means "unapproved." Paul means that he is concerned that, through lack of diligence in focusing his energies toward the goal of preaching the Gospel to the lost, he might find himself disqualified to continue his work as a herald of the Gospel.

Perseverance

Neither of these verses, then, is saying that the saints can be castaways or shipwrecked in the sense of losing their salvation. This is completely in agreement with the Bible's teaching that we are saved by grace through the gift of faith and that we are God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:8-10). How can God fail in His work? He cannot. Romans 8:29-30 leaves no room for failure: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified." Reading to the end of Romans 8, we see that no one—including ourselves—and nothing can "separate us from God's love, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Sadly, many have lived their lives in fear that they could lose or had lost their salvation. For example, of the English poet and hymn writer, William Cowper, Robert Manson Myers wrote, "Cowper was seized in 1773 with a conviction that God's displeasure rested heavily upon his soul. He never lost this persuasion that he was irretrievably damned, and his religious despair thereafter appeared in the gentle melancholy and morbid religiosity of much of his verse ("Fifty Sermons on Handel's Messiah," *Harvard Theological Review*, October 1946, 232). Cowper suffered from depression and mental illness, but whether this caused his doubts or was caused by his doubts, I don't know. His last published poem, "The Castaway" (1799), tells of a man washed overboard from a vessel during a tempest who, despite the attempts of those on board to throw him a rope and casks to grab, is left behind by the ship and sinks beneath the waves. In the last stanza, Cowper sees himself as also a castaway, perishing with the man in the sea and without God's intervention:

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

Sadly, Cowper died only some months later in 1800, apparently believing that he was a castaway from salvation. Don't ever be led astray by the lie that your salvation is in your hands or anyone's hands but God's. Paul wrote to the Philippians that he was "confident of this

very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that doesn't fade away, reserved in Heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:3-5

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