

# A Castaway

by William MacDonald

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*The Christian life requires self-discipline and the exercise of control over various areas of life in order to avoid being a castaway and to receive the reward of service.*

**Duration:** 29:26

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 10:27-29, Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

**Topics:** "Castaway"

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## Description

In this sermon on 1 Corinthians chapter 9, the preacher focuses on the concept of running the race of faith and obtaining the prize. He emphasizes the importance of discipline and self-control in striving for spiritual mastery. The preacher highlights the contrast between the corruptible crowns sought after in worldly races and the incorruptible crown promised to believers. He also shares a powerful story of a Scottish girl who remained steadfast in her faith even in the face of persecution and death. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the unbreakable love of God and the assurance of eternal life for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

1 Corinthians, chapter 9, please. The first book, first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9. I'd like to begin reading in verse 24. 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 24.

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. Some versions say I buffet my body, I pummel my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. If I were to give a subject to this message this afternoon, it would be that last word, castaway.

You might put your finger on that, your thumb on that, the last word. In some of your Bibles it might not be castaway. It might be another word, but it means the same thing.

Lest having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. I'd like to think with you this afternoon about the dreaded possibility that a Christian can be a castaway. When we come to a passage of scripture

like that, the first thing we have to do is emphasize that this passage does not contradict the wonderful truth of the eternal security of the believer.

We steadfastly maintain that the person who has been born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is eternally secure. We can turn, for instance, to John 10, verses 27-29, where the Lord Jesus says, Let my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life. And they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. Dear friends, no sheep of Christ can ever perish. If one genuinely born-again person ever perished at last, Christ would have to get off his throne.

He would no longer be dependable. He would no longer be God. It's that important, isn't it? We have the word of God the Son in this passage of scripture.

They shall never perish. It makes me think again of Dr. Ironside. One time he was in a meeting, and he was speaking along this subject.

And a woman came up to him after the meeting. She was furious. She said, Well, I certainly didn't agree with what you said tonight.

And he said, What didn't you agree with, madam? He was very gracious. She said, This business of want saved always saves. He said, I don't believe that.

And he said, Well, let me quote you a verse of scripture. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

And she said, I don't believe it the way you believe it. Well, he said, Let me repeat it to you again. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow.

She said, Don't repeat that again. I don't believe it the way you believe it. I don't believe it the way you believe it.

He said, Well, let me just quote it to you once more. And so he started to quote it to her the third time, and she was furious. She said, Don't repeat that to me.

She said, I don't believe that the way you believe it. He said, Madam, I haven't told you yet how I believe it. See, she wasn't fighting against Dr. Ironside.

She was fighting against the word of God. He hasn't told her yet how he believed it. John chapter 5, verse 24.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life. Hath everlasting life. Dear friends, if you have it and you lose it, it wasn't everlasting life.

It was a pretty short-lived life, wasn't it? Short term. If you have it and then can lose it again. John 3, verse 36.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. And then I'm very fond of two passages in Romans chapter 8. The first is verse 30.

Romans chapter 8 and verse 30. But I'll go back to verse 29. It says, For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Now, I know that's involved and has a lot of big words in it, but just take those last words. Whom he justified, them he also glorified. Dear friends, if you're justified, it's just as good as if you were already glorified in the purposes of God.

It's so sure in the purposes of God that he can speak of your glorification in the past tense. You're not glorified yet. Pardon me for saying such a thing, but you know, you aren't.

That's all there is to it. I'm not either. We're not in our glorified state, yet it's glorified in the past tense, isn't it? Whom he justified, them he also glorified.

If he justified 10,000, 10,000 will be glorified. I pray to God there will be more than 10,000. And then in that same passage, same chapter of Scripture, it says in verse 37, We are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Isn't that wonderful? I like that passage because Paul ransacks the universe in these verses of Scripture to see if he can find anything that could ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And he can't find a single thing.

No wonder the martyrs, some of the martyrs of the Christian church have gone down to the grave with these words on their lips. Saying in effect to their guilty murderers, you can murder me, but nothing can separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. I think of that young Scottish girl who lived at the time of the Scottish Covenanters.

These Covenanters were being put to death for their loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. And they took this Margaret McLaughlin, and they said, well, you recant. You recant your faith in Christ, or we'll drown you at the stake.

She said, I can't recant my loyalty to Christ. They took her out to a beach where the tide was out, and they drove a post into the sand, and they tied her to the post so that when the water came in, when the tide came in, it would come up over her and finally engulf her. And they thought, well, we know how to break her will.

Incidentally, her own parents went out on unbended knee, asked her to do what her persecutors were telling her to do, and she said she wouldn't do it. So they said, we know how to get her to break. So further out on the sand, they put another stake, and they tied an old Christian woman to the stake.

They said when she sees that woman drown, she'll change her mind. So the tide came in, and pretty soon it engulfed that dear old Christian woman, and she drowned, and Margaret said if God can give grace to an old woman to die for him, he can give grace to me. And the tide came in and went up over her body and up over her mouth and up over her nose, and as she was dying, she was heard to say, I am persuaded that neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The believer in the Lord Jesus is eternally secure. When we come to a passage of Scripture like this, we must distinguish between salvation and service, and 1 Corinthians 9 has to do with service, not with salvation. That's what Paul is talking about.

He's not talking about being cast away as far as our salvation is concerned, but he is talking about being cast away as far as service is concerned. When we come to a passage of Scripture like that, we have to distinguish between gift and reward. Salvation is a gift, isn't it, received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but service is linked with reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

So, I repeat, this passage of Scripture does not deny the eternal security of the believer, but sometimes I think we spend so much time emphasizing that that we fail to emphasize what the passage is really saying. You know, we're creatures of extremes, aren't we? And we spend all the time saying, look, this does not deny eternal security, but we forget to tell people that it does have a serious side to it, just the same. And so we don't want to rob the passage of its deep, deep meaning for our hearts today.

And the deep, deep meaning is it is possible to be a castaway in Christian life and service. It's possible to be disqualified. It's possible to be disapproved of service.

It's possible to be put on the shelf as far as service for the Lord is concerned. It's possible to be rejected from present testimony and future reward. I don't like to think about that, but we have to think about it, and we have to face the fact bravely.

This passage of Scripture points up the need for self-discipline in the Christian life. I like the way that Phillips, in his paraphrase, says it. Let me read it to you.

He says, I run the race then with determination. I am no shadow boxer. I really fight.

I am my body's sternest master. Isn't that good? I am my body's sternest master, for fear that when I have preached to others, I myself be disqualified. You know, that's the worth of price of the whole book, just that simple paraphrase.

And then the Today's English Version says, that is why I run straight for the finish line. That is why I am like a boxer who does not waste his punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control to keep from being rejected myself after having called others to the contest.

Paul pictures himself as having called others to the Christian race, and here they all get there, and they're clustered around the starting line, and Paul himself is nowhere to be seen. What a tragedy. Let me read that to you again.

That is why I run straight for the finish line. That's why I am like a boxer who does not waste his punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control to keep from being rejected myself after

having called others to the contest.

In that expression, in the King James Version, it says, everyone that striveth, the word in the original language of the New Testament is everyone that agonizes, agonizes. And that word agonizes tells us something of the strict self-control that a Christian must exercise if he's going to win in the race. There's an awful lot of teaching today about Christian holiness, but I want to tell you something.

God wants you and me to be holy, but he won't do it without our cooperation. There's a divine side to holiness, but there's a human side to it as well. And I know there is a teaching abroad, I think it's called the faith rest light.

And it sounds to me as if all you have to do is get in your lazy boy and bring up the footstool part of it and lean back in the rest of it and expect it to happen automatically. And I tell you, it won't happen automatically. It won't happen automatically.

And I want to tell you that if somebody's going to live a holy life, he's got to learn to say no 10,000 times a week, if not more. He's got to learn to discipline himself and bring his body into subjection, lest having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. In this passage of Scripture, Paul sees three different athletes in action.

He likens the Christian life to three different forms of athletics. One is the runner. All that run in a race, know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize.

That doesn't mean that only one person can receive the prize in the Christian life, does it? But it means run to win the prize. That's what it means. And then he uses the illustration of a wrestler, every man that strideth, that agonizes in the games is temperate in all things.

Runner, wrestler. And then he uses the illustration of a boxer who don't waste his punches, makes every punch count for God. I'm sure that when the Olympics were going on in Los Angeles, this passage of Scripture had to come before many of our minds.

So think of those young people competing, and you think of the agony, and I mean agony, that they went through qualifying themselves, huh? I want to tell you something. They didn't get it sitting around sipping Cokes all day. They really exercised self-control.

They disciplined themselves. They trained according to the rules. A young man said to his coach, can't I smoke and still play in the game? He said, of course you can, but you can't win.

That's it. Sure you can do it, but you can't win. Paul says, I pummel my body and bring it into subjection, lest having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Sam Shoemaker some years ago wrote this. He said, most of us fight a dreary battle for character, or else give it up entirely and just give in to the desires that assail us. Desires to coddle and indulge the body, to please and amuse the mind, to fritter away the life with trivial pursuits.

He wrote that in 1965 before the game ever came out. Wasn't that interesting? Maybe they got the title from Sam Shoemaker. To fritter away the life with trivial pursuits, to win out over somebody else to get ours.

The way to deal with sin is not to hate sin more, but to love Christ more. He makes the battle seem worthwhile. He gives us help directly and through the church in winning it.

Stuttgart Kennedy used to say, and I like this, Stuttgart Kennedy used to say, it takes a passion to conquer a passion. Think of that. It takes a passion to conquer a passion.

What does that mean? It means I have some besetting sin in my life, and I want victory over that sin. I have a Goliath in my life that needs to be conquered. It'll take a passion to do it.

It takes a passion to conquer a passion. Now, Christ is the only passion great enough to make me want to overcome my sin. How true.

There's not a sin in the catalog which he has not helped somebody to overcome. Somebody may be here today, and you're thinking, it's okay for him up on the platform. He doesn't face the problems I face.

Oh, no? Every one of us has besetting sins. Every David has a Bathsheba. Don't tell me anything differently.

There's not a sin in the catalog which he has not enabled somebody to overcome. There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you're able, but with the temptation also provide a way to escape that you may be able to bear it.

This involves many different areas of the Christian life. It involves the hands. It involves the feet.

It involves the eyes. Turn to Mark chapter 9, please. Mark chapter 9, verses 43 through 48.

Mark chapter 9, verse 43. Jesus says in verse 43 of Mark chapter 9, And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter into life named than having two hands to go into hell to the fire that never shall be quenched.

Where there worm dieth not, the fire is not quenched. If thy foot offend thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter, halt into life than having two feet to be cast into hell into the fire that never shall be quenched.

Where there worm dieth not, the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out. It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire where there worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

There he speaks about the hand, the foot, and the eye. The hand, what we do. The foot, where we go.

The eye, the things we crave after. And what the Lord is saying there is that in the development of Christian character and in the Christian life we have to exercise discipline. Now, praise God, we don't have to maim ourselves, do we? We don't have to.

Jesus wasn't saying literally that you have to pluck out your eye or cut off your hand or cut off your foot. He says it would be better to do it. It would be better to do it.

But praise God, by the power of the Holy Spirit who's given us it's not necessary to do it. We can conquer these things. We can control what we do, where we go, the things we crave after.

It means that we have to exercise discipline over our sleep. So many can cater to the body in this way, forgetting that the times of greatest temptation are the times when we're most slept and most fed. Times of greatest temptation.

We have to exercise discipline over the sex life. Probably when the history of the Christian church is told, this is the area in which the devil has been most successful. David, at a time when kings went to war, David stayed at home.

Up on the roof of the palace, he sees this attractive woman. Fantasies in David's mind. Pretty soon he converted fantasies into action.

And he fell. And he caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. And they've been blaspheming ever since.

David should have disciplined himself to keep busy. Idle hands are the devil's workshop. If he had kept busy, it never would have happened.

He stayed at home at the time when kings go to war. We have to exercise discipline in food, don't we? I think of poor Esau. Poor Esau comes home and he's hungry, and he thinks he's going to die.

He sees this bowl of red soup or red mush. Maybe it was refried beans. I'm not sure what it was.

It was red pottage anyway. And he says, you know, I'd like some of that. Okay, give me your birthright.

You can have some birthright. What good's a birthright? He said, I'm about to die. He wasn't about to die.

He would have lived. He would have been healthier. But that's what he said.

He said, I'm going to die. What good is a birthright? Do you know what it was? He despised something with a spiritual value. He was more concerned with catering to a momentary lust of the flesh.

That's what he was. You see, the birthright gave him the first place in the family. He would become the spiritual head of the family.

He didn't care about that. Spiritual values had no meaning to him at all. Actually, it would have put him in the line of the Messiah in a way, you know? He didn't care anything about that.

And isn't it sad to think that to satisfy a momentary appetite, a man is willing to sell his birthright. And you know what's still happening in 1985? It really is. To satisfy a momentary passion, men and women, young men and young women, are willing to sell their birthright.

It's happening all the time. Some are doing it for pleasure. Some are doing it for money.

For passing whims of life. We have to exercise discipline in the area of money, in the area of time, in the mind. Exercise discipline over what we think.

So many today live in a dream world. Somebody said this, there are only two ways to defeat forbidden thoughts. The first is by Christian action.

The best way to defeat such thoughts is to do something. To fill life so full with Christian labor and with Christian service that there's no time for these thoughts to enter in. To think so much of others that in the

end we entirely forget ourselves.

Oh, that's good. To rid ourselves of a diseased and morbid introspection by concentrating not on ourselves but on other people, the real cure for evil thoughts is good action. The second way is to fill the mind with good thoughts.

We have to exercise discipline in the whole matter of our lifestyle. I was reading a book and the man said something about the soft and effeminate luxuries that destroy the soul. That's quite a statement, isn't it? The soft and effeminate luxuries that kill the soul.

In every man there's a weak spot which if he's not on the watch can ruin him. Somewhere in every man there is the flaw, some fault of temperament, which can ruin life. Some instinct or passion so strong that it may at any time snap the leash.

Some quirk in our makeup that makes what is a pleasure to someone else a menace to us. We should realize it and be on the watch. I think it's a very healthy thing for us all to realize that we have that old nature.

Funny, we've been hearing a lot lately about the Holocaust in Germany when six million Jews were destroyed. And I was thinking the other day, I wonder if my old nature is any better than Hitler's. Well, that wasn't a very comforting thought, was it? But, you know, I decided my old nature is no better than his.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I've never done the things that Hitler did. But, you know, the capacity is there.

And I think the world is missing the boat by sitting back in selfish pride and pointing the finger at Hitler as if he was the only one that could do it. Listen, the seeds of that are in every human heart. That's why we need to be saved, isn't it? I believe in the total depravity of man.

That doesn't mean that I've committed all the sins in the book, but it means I'm capable of them. And you know very well a person like that can't go to heaven unless he... I'm sorry to say that that is all there is.

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