



# Joyful And Ardent Labor In The Scriptures

Studying the Bible with humility and reverence.  
Studying to get to know God in truth, then live accordingly.

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## Why the Catholic Road to Heaven Leaves Its Travelers Cursed

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee (Wisconsin) has uploaded C4: Ignite Your Catholic Faith, a video series in which Auxiliary Bishop Don Hying "discusses the Catechism of the Catholic Church and his views on God's importance and relevance in our lives."<sup>1</sup>

Much can be written in reply to this series but episode 43 is particularly unsettling. Its title is the question "How Do I Get to Heaven?"<sup>2</sup> and the answer from Hying is that

we need the law, we need to observe the ten commandments, [observe] the seven beatitudes in the gospels, [observe] the precepts of the church. For us as Catholics we need to be participating in the eucharist, to celebrate the sacrament of confession, to live the moral life that the church so beautifully lays out for us.

It cannot be denied that Hying comes across in the series as a gentleman who is not only sincere about what he believes but also able to communicate his beliefs in simple terms. But when the basis for one's answer to a theological question is a catechism and his own views, beware.

Hying's commentary is not at odds with the Bible—it is a diametric contradiction of the Bible which states:

- By doing what the law commands, no one will be acquitted and thus recognized as righteous in the eyes of God (Rom. 3:20; cf. Gal. 3:11–12).
- If moral rightness that meets God's standard could come through the law, then Christ died purposelessly (Gal. 2:21; cf. Rom. 9:30–10:13; Heb. 7:11–12).
- God saves and calls not according to works, but according to His own purpose and grace (2 Tim. 1:9; cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:4–7).
- You have all been severed from Christ, all who by the law are attempting to be acquitted so as to be saved; you have all fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

Living by the ten commandments—or by any code—will not get anyone right with God. For if doing good deeds or living a moral life or obeying the rules as best as we can could put us in a right relationship with Him, then the suffering and bloody execution of His beloved Son Jesus was for nothing.

Those who are trying to get to heaven by an overall "good" performance while here on earth or by "doing their part while Jesus does His," these have fallen from grace, Christ is of no benefit to them, and they are under obligation to do the *whole* law (cf. Gal. 5:2–4) which is impossible (Eccles. 7:20; cf. James 2:10). As such, they are under a curse, for it is written that everyone who does not abide by and do *all* the things that are written in the

book of the law is cursed (Gal. 3:10).

If you are trying to merit your way to heaven, hoping that what you do and do not do while here on earth will result in a favorable verdict from God on the day of judgment, you are cursed. That is your present state.

The good news proclaimed by the apostle Paul was not that one could get to heaven by observing commandments, beatitudes, and precepts, participating in the eucharist, celebrating the sacrament of confession, and living the moral life laid out by the church. The good news Paul proclaimed is that one can get to heaven by God's grace alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, period (Rom. 1:14-17, 4:4-8, 10:4-13; 1 Cor. 1:17-24; Gal. 3:6-25; Eph. 2:4-10; cf. Gal. 3:2 with Eph. 1:13-14).

Anyone who proclaims any "gospel" other than that, Paul says to let that one be given up to the wrath of God (Gal. 1:8-9).<sup>3</sup>

Note the content of the gospel according to John was written that its readers and hearers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by *believing*—not by *doing*—they may have life in His name (John 20:31; cf. 6:26-29). And the content of the first epistle of John was written that those who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they *have* eternal life (1 John 5:13).

So one does not walk in the light (1 John 1:7), confess his sins (1 John 1:9), keep God's commandments (1 John 2:3), and love others (1 John 4:11-12) in order to attain or retain or recover eternal life. The one who does these things *already has* eternal life, and he does these things *because* he has been fathered by God (1 John 2:29, 4:7; cf. 5:1-5). Sacred Scripture does not teach that we bear fruit for God to the end that we become or remain united to Christ. Rather, one belongs to Christ in order to bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:4-6; cf. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:24).

### **But Philippians 2:12 Says to Work Out Your Own Salvation**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cites Phil. 2:12-13 to support the paragraph that is the basis for Hying's commentary, paragraph 1949. Adapted from the Vatican web site, paragraph 1949 of the *Catechism* reads as follows:

#### **GOD'S SALVATION: LAW AND GRACE**

Called to beatitude but wounded by sin, man stands in need of salvation from God. Divine help comes to him in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).<sup>4</sup>

My immediate purpose is not to put paragraph 1949 to the touchstone of Scripture to determine whether it is sound but to expose that the *Catechism* is disregarding the context of Phil. 2:12-13 when using it as a proof text for paragraph 1949.<sup>5</sup>

Situated as it is in paragraph 1949, Phil. 2:12-13 appears to support Hying's view that doing a number of things is necessary for salvation. The *Catechism* itself within paragraph 2027 asserts, "Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life"<sup>6</sup> (cf. paragraphs 1477, 1813, 2008, 2010, 2016, 2025).

But the whole of Phil. 2:12-13 according to the electronic transcription of the New

American Bible on the Vatican web site reads:

So then, my beloved, obedient as you have always been, not only when I am present but all the more now when I am absent, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work.<sup>7</sup>

At once it is seen that the *Catechism* not only cites merely a segment of Phil. 2:12–13 but, worse, uses that segment to convey something quite contrary to Paul's conscious intent.

What the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* employs as an unconditionally and universally binding imperative is actually a reasoned or consequential exhortation to certain people "beloved" by Paul who "have always been" obedient. Hence, "work out your own salvation" is an obligation that lays claim on the *saved*, not the lost.<sup>8</sup> It is the *saints* who are in Philippi (Phil. 1:1) whom Paul exhorts to work out their own salvation:

Work it *out*, my beloved saints, not *for* it; for the gospel as God's power wrought salvation for every one of you *when* you heard the word of truth and believed in Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13–14). You-all possess eternal life right now; you have since the day you put your faith in the Lord Jesus alone (Acts 16:11–40; cf. John 3:36, 5:24, 6:47) to save you from your sins (cf. Matt. 1:21; see also Rom. 6:5–7, 8:1–2). And having been justified by God by reason of your faith in Christ (Phil. 1:29, 2:17; cf. Rom. 3:21–28, 5:1–2), your future glorification is certain (Phil. 3:20–21; cf. Rom. 8:29–30).

But just as Christ's course from incarnation to exaltation was not mechanical (cf. Heb. 2:9, 5:7–8; Luke 24:26; see also John 4:34, 5:36), neither is our course from justification to glorification mechanical. That is, even though the exultation of Jesus Christ was certain, He did not enter into His destined glory by sitting on His hands in lifeless passivity—and neither by such do we enter ours (cf. Acts 14:21–22; 1 Thess. 3:1–4; see also 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 3:8–14; 2 Tim. 4:7–8).

So in view of Christ Jesus' own humble obedience to and subsequent exaltation by God (Phil. 2:8–9), work with fear and trembling to bring your own salvation to the end (cf. Rom. 6:22). Work right on down to the finish line where the salvation you-all share together in Christ Jesus will be consummated (cf. 2 Pet. 1:1–11), where the right-now and not-yet aspects of eternal life will meet (cf. John 5:24 with Mark 10:28–31; cf. also 2 Tim. 1:9 with Rom. 13:11).

Not only ought you carry through your common salvation but you can—but not because you, even as saints, have any intrinsic ability to do so. The One producing in you-all both the desire and the effort (for the sake of His good pleasure) is God Himself (Phil. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 12:6; Eph. 3:20–21; Col. 1:29; Heb. 13:20–21). So work with fear and trembling (cf. Heb. 12:28–29), shunning any notions of self-reliance or self-dependence.<sup>9</sup>

The saints in Philippi were not in need of meriting graces to attain eternal life. Any instruction, doctrine, or dogma in that vein is repugnant to the preaching and letters of Paul. The case was, the Christians in Philippi were at a time of need for apostolic exhortation to corporate like-mindedness (Phil. 2:2, 4:2; cf. 1:27). And this was, in a manner of speaking, one episode in the running series of these saints working out their own salvation, salvation they already possessed according to God's own grace, grace that was given to them in Christ Jesus before time began (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9).

As a people to whom it was granted not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for Him (Phil. 1:29), their continual (and thankful) "work" in response to this gracious treatment

by God was, in general, to rid themselves of their sins (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14–16, 2:11–12, 4:1–5) and supplement their faith with godly traits (cf. 1 Pet. 3:8–12; 2 Pet. 1:1–7; 1 John 3:16–18), cultivating their common salvation so that it would grow to be fully developed (cf. James 1:2–4; Col. 1:28–2:3, 4:12; see also Eph. 4:1–6:20, esp. 4:11–16).

Specifically, to the end that Paul would hear that his beloved Philippians were standing firm in one spirit, striving together with one soul for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27–28; cf. 4:1), they (as a people already saved by grace) were to empty themselves of any selfish ambition, vanity, and self-interest, modeling the self-emptying and humility of Christ Jesus Himself (Phil. 2:3–8). To have the same love, to be fellow-souled and unanimous in purpose, to consider one another as better than themselves and be looking out for each others' interests (Phil. 2:1–4; cf. 4:2–3), their faith was to work through self-sacrificial love (cf. Gal. 5:6, 13–14; 1 Cor. 7:19; see also James 2:18). They were to do all things without grumbling and disputing not to become children of God (for they were God's children already by adoption [cf. Rom. 8:15–16]) but to become *faultless* children of God (Phil. 2:14–16; cf. Eph. 5:1–4; 1 Pet. 1:14–16; 1 John 3:2–3).

Only as each saint in Philippi personally matured in these areas would the Philippian congregation lock arms and complete Paul's joy (Phil. 2:2).

So, to achieve the like-mindedness Paul called them to, the saints in Philippi had work to do. That work was, in essence, to do Eph. 4:22 (cf. Col. 3:8) on account of Rom. 6:6; to do Eph. 4:24 (cf. Col. 3:12–14) on account of Col. 3:9b–10; to do Rom. 13:14 on account of Gal. 3:27. Such exhortations remain applicable to countless situations in the lives of all actual Christians today as they, too, work with fear and trembling to bring to the end the salvation that they already possess according to God's own grace.<sup>10</sup>

### **But Jesus Said to Keep the Commandments to Enter into Life**

On Matt. 19:16–22, the narrative of the rich young man, Hying says, "In that scriptural narrative we see a beautiful example of what it means for us on our journey to heaven, that we need the law, we need to observe the ten commandments, [observe] the seven beatitudes in the gospels, [observe] the precepts of the church."

But Scripture says, "If a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law" (Gal. 3:21).

If the law that was written by the finger of God the Father Himself (Exod. 24:12, 31:18, 32:15–16) cannot save anyone, then no law can. No law, no commandment, no beatitude, no precept of any church anywhere has any power whatsoever to save you from your sins, no matter how well you obey or conform.

A function of the law of God (i.e., the divine moral standard) is that, through it, one comes to the knowledge of his sins (Rom. 3:19–20, 7:7). Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15; cf. Luke 5:32), so Jesus brings the letter of the law to bear on the rich young man with the objective that he recognizes his sins (Matt. 19:17–19).

Yet despite the likes of Ps. 143:1–2 and Eccles. 7:20, and perhaps because he thinks obedience to the literal terms of the law is sufficient, the rich young man is unable to see and loathe himself as a violator of the law, a sinner. What he lacks is not some final thing that will make him perfect or complete (Matt. 19:20); his principal need, though he does not perceive it, is the forgiveness of his sins and the gracious gift of God—both of which are found in the very Person with whom he is conversing (Rom. 6:23, 8:1; Col. 1:14).

Unlike the hypocritical expert in the Mosaic law at Luke 10:25–37, the rich young man is likely sincere. But he is sincerely blind and in damning error, for his response to the commandments is essentially, "I'm okay; I've obeyed" (Matt. 19:20). This is called self-righteousness (cf. Rom. 10:3). It is a perilous form of self-deception. If no one living is innocent in the sight of the LORD (Ps. 143:2; cf. Rom. 3:23; James 3:2; 1 John 1:10), then that includes the rich young man.

But Hying remarks that "at that moment Jesus invites the young man to move from the world of law into the world of grace." In the context of this episode of the C4 series and paragraphs 1961–1986 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that remark apparently means that when the rich young man says, "All these [commandments] I have kept," Jesus takes his word for it and merely calls him to poverty because his many possessions hinder the *perfection* of his love for both God and neighbor!

But the rich young man has not kept the divine moral standard, not its real meaning. For the demands of the law run deeper than the literal terms (cf. Matt. 5:21–30). When the young man does not recognize any personal violation of the literal terms of the six commandments which confronted him, Jesus reveals the man's sinfulness by directing him to an act of obedience to the *spirit* of the second great commandment (Lev. 19:18; cf. Matt. 22:34–40). It is as if Jesus says, "You say to Me that you have always loved your neighbor as yourself. Well then, go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, for they are in need. Then come, follow Me, and all that *you* need will be provided" (cf. Matt. 6:19–34).

At that, the young man's mouth was stopped (cf. Rom. 3:19). Defiled all along without knowing it (cf. Prov. 30:12; see also 1 Cor. 4:4), the rich young man not only loves himself and his wealth more than those in need, namely, his neighbor, the poor, but he also values his standard of living more than he values Jesus.

Sin in the heart. That is what Jesus revealed by His imperatives to "go . . . sell . . . give . . . come, follow." Even so, revealing the man's sin for him to recognize (and the manner in which it was brought to light) was an act out of Jesus' love for the man (Mark 10:21).

Nonetheless, instead of crying out to God in self-contempt over his sinfulness and throwing himself at the mercy of the divine court (cf. Luke 18:13), the rich young man goes away sorrowful, unwilling to give up his life as he knows it and follow Jesus (cf. Mark 8:34–38; see also Luke 12:13–21).

May that not be the case with you, dear reader. God commands you to repent (Acts 17:30). That is, turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God (cf. Acts 26:16–20). Your Maker commands you to repent because He has set a day on which He, by means of the Son, Jesus from Nazareth, is going to judge both the living and the dead with impartial justice (Acts 17:30–31; cf. 10:39–42; John 5:22–23; see also Rom. 14:9). And the divine standard of judgment is so high, so holy (Ps. 19:7–10, 119:137, 142; Rom. 7:12), that all our so-called good deeds are like a garment soiled by menstruation (cf. Isa. 64:6; see also Rom. 3:10).

On that day, when your turn comes to give an account of yourself to God (Eccles. 12:14; Rom. 14:11–12), that eternal standard will not budge for you, not one whit, no matter how mistakenly good you think you were, no matter what group of moral principles or set of values you lived by (Matt. 12:36–37; Rom. 2:12–16; cf. Ps. 143:2; Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16).

So I plead with you on behalf of Christ, get reconciled to God! Forsake your self-righteous efforts to get to heaven and put your faith in the Lord Jesus alone, clinging to Him as your only hope of salvation from your sins (Acts 10:43, 26:18) and from the wrath of God (cf. Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:9–10). For that is the very purpose God sent His Son into the world, that the world may be saved through Him (John 3:16–17; 1 John 4:9–10; cf. Acts 4:12; 1 John 4:14). Through *Him*, I stress, not through your moral activity.

Stop trying to attain your own salvation by prayers, penance, and good works, for you are rejecting the very One to whom you will answer on the day of judgment, the very One who completed all the work necessary for sinners to be saved (cf. John 4:34, 5:36, 17:4; see also John 10:17–18, 19:30; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:17, 3–8).

I am warning you. Repent and believe (Acts 20:18–21; cf. Mark 1:14–15) or else remain accursed (Gal. 3:10; cf. 1 Cor. 16:22), in darkness (John 12:44–50), as one judged already (John 3:18–21), under the wrath of God (John 3:36). There is no middle ground.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "C4 - Ignite Your Catholic Faith video series," <http://www.archmil.org/c4video/C4-series.htm> (accessed December 16, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "C4 - How Do I Get to Heaven?," <http://www.archmil.org/c4video/C4-43.htm> (accessed November 8, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994) teaches the following as "necessary for" salvation: "Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation" (par. 161; cf. 183, 846, 2068). "Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the [Catholic] Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation" (par. 846; cf. 1277). "Th[e] sacrament of Penance is necessary for salvation for those who have fallen after Baptism" (par. 980). "Baptism is necessary for salvation for those who have not yet been reborn" (par. 980; cf. 846, 1256–57, 1260, 1277, 2068). "The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*" (par. 1129). "Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation" (par. 1816). Observance of "the specific precepts of the *natural law* . . . is necessary for salvation" (par. 2036; cf. 2068). For the "necessity" of "Purgatory," see paragraphs 1030, 1054, 1682. The *Catechism* also teaches the following conditions for entering the Kingdom: "To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom" (par. 526). "Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom" (par. 544). "Detachment from riches is necessary for entering the Kingdom of heaven" (par. 2556; cf. 2544). See also paragraphs 543, 545–46, 556, 2826.

<sup>4</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana, "Catechism of the Catholic Church," [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P6S.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P6S.HTM) (accessed December 16, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> See E. W. Bullinger, *How to Enjoy the Bible* (1916; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990), 275–76.

<sup>6</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana, "Catechism of the Catholic Church," [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P72.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P72.HTM) (accessed November 14, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana, "The New American Bible," [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/\\_\\_\\_P10G.HTM#NTLET.PHI.2.12](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/___P10G.HTM#NTLET.PHI.2.12) (accessed November 8).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Second Corinthians, Galatians, and Philipians*

*Chapters I to End. Colossians, Thessalonians, and First Timothy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 177, [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/maclaren/iicor\\_tim.pdf](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/maclaren/iicor_tim.pdf) (accessed October 15, 2013); Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 14: 1868* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 399–400, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons14.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> An expanded paraphrase by the present writer.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on three Protestant views on Phil. 2:12 see Paul Hartog, "'Work Out Your Salvation': Conduct 'Worthy of the Gospel' in a Communal Context," *Themelios* 33, no. 2 (September 2008): 19–33, [http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/33.2/Themelios\\_33.2.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/33.2/Themelios_33.2.pdf) (accessed October 15, 2013).

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