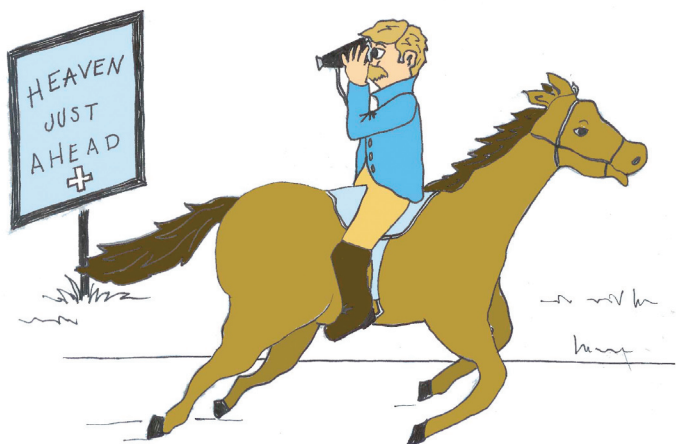


We Got It All Backwards



10 Mistakes That Can Lead Us to Hell

By Dale Rudiger

There is a way which seems right...

On a foggy night in 1938, Douglas Corrigan ascended in his monoplane for a trip from New York to California. 28 hours and 13 minutes later he landed in Dublin, Ireland. He blamed his compass.

The California Bears were battling the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets in the 1929 Rose Bowl. Roy Riegels of the Cal defense recovered a fumble, and after being bumped and spun around, started racing 64 yards for an apparent touchdown. As he ran down the field, one of his teammates was yelling and chasing after him. "Roy, you're running the wrong way!" Thinking that his speedier teammate wanted him to lateral the ball, he yelled back "Gidoutta here, Benny. This is my ball!" Finally realizing his mistake, he turned around at his own one-yard line, only to be gang-tackled. Georgia Tech eventually scored a safety, and won the game 8-7.

Going the wrong way can have significant consequences. Several drivers in my hometown have died due to wrong-way drivers. And it could have ended quite badly for "Wrong Way Corrigan."

No one likes to consider that they are wrong. But being wrong is part of our humanity. Pope Alexander coined the phrase "to err is human, to forgive divine." Oops, it wasn't Pope Alexander who said that, it was Alexander Pope. I got it backwards! Speaking of divine forgiveness, how do our choices impact whether we will arrive at heaven versus hell? Is it possible that we are relying on a "moral compass" that is improperly calibrated? Could we be flying to hell, thinking that heaven is just ahead? The book of Proverbs warns us about self-deception:

*There is a way which seems right to a man,
but its end is the way of death. Prov. 14:12*

In this booklet we will investigate ten popular misconceptions concerning what it takes to get to heaven. There is a proverb which states: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." What is the road to heaven paved with?

#1-

The Way of the Religious

Truth: Heaven is Received, Not Achieved

In macroeconomics, Milton Friedman popularized the saying: “There is no such thing as a free lunch.” Everything that has benefit comes with a cost. There is no free lunch since “lunch” is a closed system at the macro level. Someone’s gain is another’s loss – a zero sum.

So how does this apply to heaven? The Bible states the following: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Eph. 2:8. A gift, by its nature, is free to the recipient. On the macro level, however, heaven is not free. It cost the Father the life of His Son. Jesus paid the debt that we owed. What we earned, our wages, was death: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 6:23.

Our problem is this: we want to be in control of our destiny. We do not want to humbly receive the gift of heaven. We would rather do it ourselves. “Do” is the operative word. We are insufferably religious. We take pilgrimages; we abstain from foods; we obey man-made traditions; we pray to Saints; we give up television for Lent; we wear religious articles; we obtain indulgences; we put hooks in our backs, and do the swinging poojah.

Jesus tells us that we must deny ourselves. “Doing” to get to heaven is the polar opposite. To deny self means to stop making self the object of life and actions. This is only possible when the focus is on another (Jesus) and what He has accomplished. Can we ever know if we have done enough? There is always more that we can do.

“It is finished,” Jesus said on the cross. But we want to turn Jesus into a “semi-savior.” Jesus did his 95%, now I must do my 5%. We need to be done with doing, as it relates to heaven. Jesus done did it. He came in as our substitute, and finished the job. The resurrection of Jesus is proof that we are reconciled to God. ***We need to give it a rest!***

#2-

The Way of the Cautious

Truth: Heaven is for Believers, not Doubters

Playing golf recently, I found my ball behind some trees in the rough. I decided that the wisest course of action was to pitch back out to the middle of the fairway. I hit a nice, low shot. Unfortunately, my ball hit a very small, hidden stump that was at the edge of the fairway. The ball ricocheted directly into the woods. A one-in-a-million shot! I was severely penalized for playing it “safe.”

In Luke 16:16, Jesus says “...the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is pressing into it. Not that I would ever do this, but when you gamble at golf and find yourself behind you can “press.” It is “double or nothing.” You risk it all.

God rewards those who take risks. The greatest king of Israel, David, was a “man after God’s own heart.” Knowing that God was on his side, he boldly confronted the mighty Goliath with just a sling and a few stones. The Bible says that without faith you cannot please God. He rewards those who trust Him. Gideon trusted God, and with three-hundred men routed the vast army of the Midianites.

Those who belong to God are eternally safe. David writes in Psalm 3: “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about.” Why is David unafraid? God is his protector.

When it comes to heaven, God rewards those who trust Him. Entrance into heaven is by faith. But it is not faith in our abilities. It is not trusting in a Church or religion. Rather, it is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is **trusting** that He is the Savior. It is **believing** that He paid the penalty for sin. It is **knowing** that He will bring us safely home to the promised land of heaven.

To doubt God’s promises concerning heaven is a common, but fatal, mistake. Is Jesus your Savior?

Faith is the key to heaven.

#3-

The Way of the Procrastinator

Truth: We Enter Heaven Now, not Later

As the old saying goes, "Timing is everything." A woman shows up to work late. Her boss tells her "You should have been here at 9:00!" Her response: "Why, what happened at 9:00?"

It is a **HUGE** mistake to have wrong timing when it comes to our eternal destiny. The apostle Paul tells us: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Believe it or else, entrance into heaven occurs **NOW!** It is very dangerous to put off entering heaven for later. No one knows the hour of their death. No one knows if the opportunity to enter will be available again.

There are two types of people who put off heaven. First, there is the worker bee. This is the person who is going to climb the stairway to heaven, step by step, until they arrive at the pearly gates on the date of their death (or after time in purgatory). Second, there is the party animal. This is the person who is having too much fun **NOW** to worry about what may or may not happen later.

The Jewish New Year is celebrated in the Fall. But God told the Jews to celebrate the New Year at Passover, six months earlier (Ex. 12:2). The Jews changed to the Babylonian calendar during their deportation, and now have it backwards! The Passover foreshadowed initiation into heaven. Jesus, the Lamb, has been slain. We are forgiven. The veil of separation between God and us has been removed.

We enter God's rest - heaven - today, not later. "For we who have believed do enter that rest." Heb. 4:3a. "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." Heb. 4:10. The reason that we can enter today is that Jesus completely finished the work that is necessary. As proof of this, the Father raised Jesus from the dead. "Job well done, My Beloved Son!" says the Father. So, don't be left behind, inconsolably wailing "I should have been here at 9:00!" Enter your heavenly rest **today!**

#4-

The Way of the Self-Righteous

Truth: The Forgiven get in, not the Deserving

Here is a widely held belief: you gotta be good to go to heaven. The children's rhyme testifies to this: "One-two-three-four-five-six-seven, all good children go to heaven." So, how good do we need to be to enter heaven? Do we need to do more good than bad? Can a person ever know for sure that they have met God's qualifying standard?

God's qualifying standard is perfect love. I must love God with **all** my heart. I must love my neighbor as myself. No bad thoughts. No improper motives. No little white lies. Even one transgression would cause imperfection and disqualify me. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." James 2:10. I met a woman at a conference who claimed that she had never sinned. But she committed at least one sin. She called God a liar. The Bible says: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The wonderful news of the gospel is this: Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. He was the perfect lamb, without blemish, that was offered up by God as a sacrifice on our behalf. He is our substitute. We get all his goodness credited to us, and He gets all our sin credited to Him. He paid the penalty for our sin, which is death. We get the reward for His righteousness, which is eternal life in heaven.

Paul tells us: "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Quite deceived by the enemy (Satan), we actually think that we can be righteous like God. The requirements of the law and our weak human nature testify otherwise. We must "hit bottom" and admit that we are powerless (over sin), and submit to God.

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Rom. 10:3-4.

#5-

The Way of the Wet

Truth: Enter by Spirit, not Water Baptism

“Uh, Houston, we have a problem. We’ve lost all power to the engines. We are dead in space. We are floating in a tin can, and there’s nothing we can do.” These would be horrifying words to hear from an astronaut. There would be no way for the ship to return to its home, earth. The Bible says that we have a similar problem. We are born “dead in trespasses and sins.” How on earth will we be able to return to our spiritual home, heaven? We need our spiritual engines to be ignited.

Heaven is entered through baptism. And since we are spiritually dead, we need a spiritual baptism. John the Baptist tells us: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Water baptism is a sacrament, a sign that proclaims that something has happened. In many navies around the world there is a ceremony that is performed when a ship crosses the equator. Those who have never “crossed the line” before (pollywogs) are ceremonially initiated into the group that has crossed (shellbacks). The ceremony does not **cause** the group to cross the equator. It happens after the ship has crossed. In the same way, when someone crosses the line from death to life, a “crossing the line” ceremony is performed – water baptism.

Peter tells us that salvation results from our making an appeal: “Corresponding to that [the ark that saved Noah and his family], baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an **appeal to God** for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The cause of our being saved is an appeal, a word spoken. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” God provides repentance and the faith to believe, resulting in heaven.

Made alive via spiritual baptism → Appeal to God → Salvation → Water Baptism

#6-

The Way of False Humility

Truth: Heaven is Certain, not I Hope So

Do you think you got an “A” on your final exam? “I don’t know. I hope so.” I am somewhat confident, but I’m not really sure. Maybe I didn’t study quite hard enough. Or maybe my teacher will be a tough grader. Do you think that when you die you will go to heaven? “I hope so. I’ve been pretty good. I’m a nice person. I go to church most Sundays. Who knows? Maybe I can slip in the side door of purgatory.”

This kind of “hoping” is not what the Bible means when it discusses hope. For access to heaven, hope is not “maybe.” Hope is faith in the future. It is the certainty of a positive outcome. When someone becomes a Christian, they become possessed. The Holy Spirit enters in. They are protected. Hope is the “helmet of salvation.” Hope prevents going astray: “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast...” We are anchored to the Rock (Jesus).

How different this is from the frail, uncertain hope of “I hope so,” which carries the tinge of unbelief. “I hope so” is the characteristic of a person who is trusting in their own efforts and goodness. Since we are such changeable beings, this human-centered hope waxes and wanes based upon our circumstances and our frail, sinful character.

Biblical hope, on the other hand, is based on the unchangeable character and promises of God. “For I am the LORD, I do not change” Mal. 3:6. God has promised heaven to those who trust in Jesus. Those who believe God have a “sure bet.” In the movie “Back to the Future II,” Biff obtained a sports almanac and went back in time sixty years. He was able to generate great wealth through wagering, since he knew the results before they took place. The Christian has this kind of certain hope. He has the final results in hand. He has trusted in the God and Savior whose promises are more sure than even a bet on a past event.

How blessed are those who trust in Him!

#7-

The Way of the Lukewarm

*Truth: God is your Daddy, not a
Higher Power*

In the Bible, Paul writes to his good friend the following words of encouragement: “Luke, the Force be with you!” 1 Paul 3:7. Okay, I made that up. There is no such verse or book in the Bible. Paul would never write these words, because he knows that God is **personal**, not a force.

You may mistakenly view God as having characteristics of your earthly father. My dad was a salesman, and was often absent when I was young. He was also an alcoholic. This led me to see God as distant, and One to be appeased. Also, it is easy to fall into the “higher power” view of God, because He is invisible.

Intimacy with God is **necessary** to enter heaven. Jesus says: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Later, Jesus warns that many will go to hell because He “never knew them.” “To know” is a term of extreme intimacy in the Bible. It is even used as a euphemism for intimate marital relations. If Jesus knows you, you are his sheep. If not, you are a goat; you are heading toward destruction.

Intimacy with God is also **wonderful** here on earth. Look at the glorious benefits of a relationship with God! The first thing I realized when I understood the intimate nature of God’s love is the security it brings. The Holy Spirit superintends our well-being: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.” The angels also watch over us: “Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” And our Father provides forgiveness and eternal life in His Son. In His kindness, He even disciplines us when we go astray. “Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline?”

No, He is not a force. He is Abba, our Daddy.

#8 -

The Way of the Victim

Truth: The Grateful go in, not the Obligated

There are two erroneous responses to the free gift of eternal life. The “worker” response: “You mean I don’t have to be good to go to heaven? As long as I believe in Jesus I get in? No way! You have to do good to go to heaven!” The “player” response: “Heaven is a free gift. Party on! I have a ‘Get out of Hell Free’ card. You don’t have to do good to go to heaven!” One person says: I am obligated. The other says: I am not obligated. Both are coming from a reactive, victim mentality. Freedom comes via the realization that we can proactively choose to do good – because of the cross of Christ. There will also be times when we choose not to do good - because of our human frailty.

In order to go to heaven, a line of transformation must be crossed. A palm reader will examine a person’s “love line” to foretell their amorous future. God’s “love line” is the line which separates obligation from gratitude. It is the line that determines motive in all actions. Unless this line is crossed, heaven is impossible. God despises outward religious activity prompted by impure motives. God says: “Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to me...I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them.” He wants all your actions to be prompted by love, not obligation.

Is this not obvious in the human realm? How insulting would it be to receive a gift, only to whip out your wallet to pay for it? God has given us the gift of eternal bliss. He wants our gratitude, not our efforts to pay our way in.

Twice Jesus warned the Pharisees: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” The true sacrifice that God desires from His children is the “sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” Heb. 13:15.

***The essence of Christianity is gratitude.
“We love, because He first loved us.” 1 Jn. 4:19.***

#9 -

The Way of the Worldly Wise

Truth: Qualifying is Simple, not Complex

We live in the information age. The internet provides instantaneous access to the accumulated knowledge of the world with a few clicks. But with technology comes complexity. We need to rely on the experts. Our car engines have microchips, so only a highly trained mechanic can perform a tune-up.

Throughout history, there have been those who deemed the Bible too difficult for ordinary laypeople to understand. The Bible was only available to “the religious,” and in Latin to boot. Those who dared to translate the Bible into the vernacular were murdered. The Bible was even placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. Do we really need an infallible teaching authority to interpret the Bible for us?

The reality is that little children can understand the central truths of the Bible. They know that God created all things. They know that there is life after death. And they understand that sin has consequences. We tend to make things much more complicated than they are. God has ordained that the simple, those with child-like faith, will be with Him in heaven forever. Those who are wise in their own eyes will not go to heaven. The “worldly wise” will not see the beauty and majesty of God’s simple plan of redemption. John wrote that the early church had been infected with the false teaching of the “Nicolaitans.” This term, meaning “conquerors of the people,” is an apt description of those who abuse God’s people by adding complexity to the simple truth of the gospel.

“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.” 1 Cor. 1:27-29.

“I’m going to heaven, Lieutenant Dan” - Forrest Gump

#10-

The Via of the Via

Truth: Heaven is Direct, not through Mediators

In the business and political realms, it is helpful to have a network of powerful connections. A new hire in the mailroom of a large corporation does not report directly to the President or CEO. It is necessary to go through proper channels. It seems logical that in order to approach the awesome and holy God, we too would need to go through intermediaries. After all, we are but lowly sinners. Our hope of heaven could depend upon the intercession of those more powerful than ourselves.

This is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible says that there is only one mediator. Through Jesus we are granted direct access to the very throne of God. Mediators are not necessary to bring us home to heaven. Worse, the effect of many go-betweens is to diminish the perfect work of Jesus. Each mediator acts like a pair of “reverse binoculars.” When you look into the wrong end of binoculars, everything looks smaller and further away. Or, think of each mediator as a nested Russian doll. Jesus becomes the miniature doll.

Because of sin, the people of Israel brought their sacrifices to the priest, who would offer them at the temple on their behalf. And the High Priest entered the holy of holies once a year to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the nation. This reminded Israel that God’s justice required that sin be punished. But because of the final (once for all time) sacrifice of Jesus, we now have direct access to heaven. “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” Heb. 10:18-22.

Jesus has unlocked the door to heaven. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to heaven except VIA Jesus! Are you relying on any other?

Changing Direction

Heaven: The Way of the Cross

Here is good news: God loves sinners! Even though we have been heading down the wrong path, God is an expert at finding the wayward.

God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. This calls for an honest assessment: Have you been heading the wrong way? Then turn around! There are only two requirements for heaven: repentance and belief. Humble yourself, and tell God that you are in need of His salvation. Ask Him to forgive your sins, and He will answer your prayer. Believe that Jesus is indeed a Savior. Let go, sinner. God saves.

Our Father is marvelous! You will experience the wonderful joy of His presence for eternity. But know that you will also be persecuted. Jesus warned us that the counter-intuitive gospel message would even separate family members. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household." You will be like a salmon swimming upstream, and may encounter ridicule and scorn from your fellow religious fish swimming in the other direction. Share the good news with them, and pray that God would put a hook into their mouths so that they would turn to Him and be saved.

Even though you entered heaven now, you will continually grow and mature in the faith. You will have a desire to know Him better through prayer and worship. The Bible will become His cherished love letter to you. You will enjoy spending time with your new family of believers. God will put a new song in your heart, and you will desire to serve Him with the gifts He has given to you. You will be conformed to Jesus, through suffering, for your good.

***Jesus assures you: "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."
Enjoy!***

A Hitchhiker's Guide to Heaven

*Good news for those on the highway to
heaven! Only two more steps, and
the trip will be over.*

Step # 1 – “I’m going the wrong way!”
(Repent)

Step # 2 – “Thanks for the ride,
Jesus!” (Believe)

***Could it really
be that simple?***

For more information and resources,
please visit: www.lovingcatholics.com