

## PURGATORY

**Protestant Perspective** In afterlife, one either directly goes to heaven or hell.

**Catholic Perspective** Purgatory is a *temporary* state of purification for the *imperfect saints* before they enter heaven. In purgatory, all remaining *venial sins* are purged and all *reparation* for forgiven sins is made.

### Reparation

Does God forgive the *guilt* of sin and still require *punishment*? Ask King David. In 2 Sam 12:13-14 we read: *"The Lord on His part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die. But since you have utterly spurned the Lord by this deed, the child born to you must surely die."* God forgave the guilt of David's sin, but He still required reparation in the form of suffering. A man might forgive a teenager for breaking his window, but still insist that he repair the damages. Christ reiterates this principle in the New Testament, *"you will never get out (of prison) till you have paid the last penny"* (Matt 5:26).

### Venial Sin

I Jn 5:16-17 distinguishes between mortal sin and sin that is not deadly. James 1:14-15 reads: *"each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death."* James distinguishes desire from sin, and beginning sin (venial sin) from mature sin which brings death (mortal sin).

### Temporary Purification

Souls of those who die with unrepented mortal sin go directly to hell. What if someone dies with only venial sins? They do not merit hell, for their sins are not deadly, yet they are not pure enough for heaven, where *"nothing unclean will enter"* (Rev 21:27). Where do they go?

- In 1 Cor 3:13 -15, Paul says *"each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."* This cannot refer to hell, for there no one is saved. Nor can it refer to heaven, for there no one suffers. It refers, then, to a middle state where the soul temporarily suffers loss so that it may gain heaven.
- Peter seems to agree. In 1 Pet 3:18-20 and 4:6, he mentioned that the gospel was preached by Jesus to the disobedient spirits in prison, and to the dead, and yet they were saved and *"might live in the spirit in the estimation of God"*. This is not hell, because no one is saved from hell. This is not limbo either because this is a place for disobedient spirits. It sounds more like purgatory.
- In Matt 12:32, Jesus says, *"whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."* Jesus implies that some sins can be forgiven in the next world. Sin cannot be forgiven in hell. There is no sin to be forgiven in heaven. Any remission of sin in the next work can only occur in purgatory.

### Prayers for the Dead

Protestants generally refuse to pray for the dead because there is no reason doing so for the dead are already in heaven (they have no need) or in hell (they have no hope). It only makes sense if purgatory exists. Praying for the dead presumes souls in a middle state where atonement for sin can be made.

The practice of praying for the dead predates Christianity. In the Old Testament, Judah Maccabee and his companions pray for the souls of departed soldiers: *"It was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin"* (2 Macc 12:45).

This passage from Maccabees explicitly affirms an intermediate purification state. However, Martin Luther chose to remove it from the Old Testament. But, even if Maccabees is rejected as scripture, there can be no doubt that, as history, the book accurately reflects the religious character of the Jews in 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. A little more than 100 years before Christ, Jews prayed for their dead, and they still do today.

This practice is also recorded throughout ancient Christian documents. In 2 Tim 1:16-18, Paul prays for his departed friend Onesiphorus. Some of the earliest Christian liturgies include prayers for the dead. Ancient Christian tomb inscriptions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries frequently contain an appeal for prayers for the dead (e.g. the epitaph of Abercius [180 A.D.]). Praying for the dead can also be found in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and in the writings of Perpetua, Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, all written between A.D. 160 and 421.

### Short Final Note

C.S. Lewis, the famous Protestant writer, have also held to the truth of the doctrine of purgatory. In his *Letters to Malcom*, he wrote,

*"I believe in purgatory....Our souls demand purgatory, don't they? Would it not break the heart if God said to us, 'It is true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy'? Should we not reply, 'With submission, sir, and if there is no objection, I'd rather be cleansed first.' 'It may hurt, you know' - 'Even so, sir.' "*

### READING

Purgatory? Where is that in the Bible? (*This Rock*, March 2001)

### Further Research

- What are the three conditions for committing a mortal sin? Is venial sin anything to worry about? (Catechism 1857-1861, 1863)
- Does purgatory imply that Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient, that he didn't finish the work of redemption on Calvary?
- What are indulgences? How are they related to purgatory? What is the Church's current teaching on this subject?