

A STUDY OF THE

Protestant Reformation

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The 500th Anniversary





Introduction: Part 6

To consider the Indulgence Controversy during the time of Luther is to simultaneously open the door to examine the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on purgatory. What happens to believers during what is known as the *Intermediate State*, the “interval of time in which the dead await the final judgment and the resurrection of the body”? (Frame). Do believers go **immediately into God’s presence** at death? Or, do they go to **purgatory**? Or, do believers enter into what is known as **soul sleep**, an unconscious state until the final judgment? What does the Bible teach about these three views? Today, we will examine the doctrine of purgatory and the Protestant rebuttal to the claims of the Roman Catholic Church.



Definition of Purgatory

“Roman Catholic theology maintains that while eternal punishment and the guilt of moral sin is absolved by the sacrament of penance, the requirement of satisfaction and temporal, as opposed to eternal, punishment is not. If appropriate satisfaction has not been made for sins committed and absolved in life, then satisfaction must be made after death. Purgatory is not hell, since all the souls in purgatory are on their way to the heavenly Jerusalem, though it is a place of temporal punishment.”

- *International Dictionary of the Christian Church*



Pope Benedict XVI and Purgatory

Pope Benedict XVI's (2005-2013) encyclical, *Spe Salvi* (*Saved in Hope*, 2007) contains telling comments on judgment in the afterlife:

- God's judgment is a combination of justice and grace.
- Few people (if any) receive only his justice (i.e., punishment), and few people receive His full grace (i.e., immediate salvation).
- Most people receive both justice and grace, purgatory being the intermediate state of the soul that discloses both.
- In the afterlife, the soul goes through a time of purification, deserving neither justice nor grace.
- Prayers on behalf of the dead speed their time of purification.



Spe Salvi

“For the great majority of people – we may suppose – there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, however, it is covered over by ever new compromises with evil – much filth covers purity, but the thirst for purity remains, and it still constantly re-emerges from all that is base and remains present in the soul. What happens to such individuals when they appear before the Judge?” After quoting I Cor. 3:12-15, Pope Benedict continues: “In this text, it is in any case evident that our salvation can take different forms, that some of what is built may be burned down, that in order to be saved we personally have to pass through “fire” so as to become fully open to receiving God and



Spe Salvi

able to take our place at the table of the eternal marriage-feast....This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves. All that we build during our lives can prove to be mere straw, pure bluster, and it collapses. Yet in the pain of this encounter, when the impurity and sickness of our lives become evident to us, there lies salvation. His gaze, the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation ‘as through fire.’ But it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God....It is clear we cannot calculate the ‘duration’ of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world.”

Purgatory

“Purgatory basically refers to the purification of the saved ones in order to achieve the holiness necessary to enter heaven. The premise of purgatory is that salvation is not by grace and faith alone, but is by grace and what is achieved by means of merit and works. Purgatory is the last ‘work’ required to get to heaven, i.e., a time of purification that lasts in proportion to what still needs to be purified.”



Leonardo De Chirico

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Justification According to Catholics

“For Catholics, justification is conferred at baptism, continues with faith personally proclaimed at confirmation, develops as the Christian grows in knowledge and faithfulness in the context of the church and through being nourished by the sacraments, and continues even after death, when God cleans away remaining sin during purgatory.”

- Mark A. Noll, PhD



Mark A. Noll

1946 –

Research Professor of History

Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Time's 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America, 2005



Mark Noll on *Purgatory*

- “Catholics hold that believers who die will be cleansed by the spiritual fire of purgatory, basing their belief in part on I Corinthians 3:14-15.”
- “If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (I Cor. 3:14-15).
- “Evangelicals agree that ‘our lives will be reviewed before the judgment seat of Christ, and that all that is unworthy will be burned away,’ but they see no biblical warrant for purgatory.”
- “The doctrine of purgatory is not taught here, since the apostle has in view works rather than persons, works built by teachers on the good foundation” (Grosheide).



The Charges Against Indulgences: Calvin

- Indulgences bestow the remission of sins through Peter, Paul, and the martyrs.
- Indulgences make the blood of the martyrs an ablution (cleansing) of sins.
- Indulgences make the satisfaction of sin to depend on the blood of the martyrs.
- Indulgences insist that sanctification, which would otherwise be insufficient, is perfected by martyrs.
- Indulgences tell us to wash our robes in the blood of saints.



John Calvin: Words to Describe Indulgences

- A “pretense”
- “Frivolous errors”
- “Pious frauds”
- “Polluted”
- “A profanation of the blood of Christ”
- “A delusion of Satan”
- “A patchwork of sacrilege and blasphemy”
- “A deadly device of Satan”
- “Insult to the divine mercy”
- “Horrid blasphemy against Christ”
- “Fountain of impiety”
- “Superstitions”
- “Monstrous”
- “Shameful trafficking”
- “Salvation taxed at a few pieces of money”
- “Impious dogma”

Calvin's Question



John Calvin
1509-1564

“Who taught the Pope to enclose the grace of Jesus Christ in lead and parchment, grace which the Lord is pleased to dispense by the word of the gospel?”



Leo: A Roman Bishop

“Although the death of many saints was precious in the sight of the Lord (Ps. 116:15), yet no innocent man’s slaughter was the propitiation of the world. The just received crowns, did not give them; and the fortitude of believers produced examples of patience, not gifts of righteousness; for their deaths were for themselves; and none by his final end paid the debt of another, except Christ our Lord, in whom alone all are crucified – all dead, buried, and raised up.”

- Cited by John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*



The Perversion of the Gospel of Christ

The Romish tenet claims that “the work of satisfaction accomplished by Christ does not relieve the faithful of the necessity of making satisfaction for sins which they have committed. According to Romish theology, all past sins both as respects their eternal and temporal punishment are blotted out in baptism and also the eternal punishment of the future sins of the faithful. But for the temporal punishment of post-baptismal sins, the faithful must make satisfaction either in this life or in purgatory. In opposition to every such notion of human satisfaction, Protestants rightly contend that the satisfaction of Christ is the only satisfaction for sin and is so perfect and final that it leaves no penal liability for any sin of the believer” (John Murray).



John Murray: The Atonement of Christ

- “The atonement is a completed work, never repeated and unrepeatable.”
- “The atonement of which Scripture speaks is the vicarious obedience, expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption performed by the Lord of glory when, once for all, he purged our sins and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.”
- “Christ discharged the debt of sin. He bore our sins and purged them. He did not make a token payment which God accepts in place of the whole. Our debts are not cancelled; they are liquidated. Christ procured redemption and therefore he secured it.”

The Westminster Confession of Faith

“The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.

- Chapter VIII, *Of Christ the Mediator*, Sect. V.



The Westminster Assembly

1643-1653

Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster Abbey



Systematic Theologian, John M. Frame

“Roman Catholics believe that although some especially great saints go directly to heaven when they die, most of us won’t be good enough for heaven. So we need to undergo some purging (hence the name *purgatory*) before we enter heaven. That purging includes suffering. The Bible, however, says nothing about a place called *purgatory*, or a time of suffering for believers between death and heaven. A text in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (12:42-45) suggests some such thing, but Protestants have agreed that this book is not part of the Word of God. More important, the doctrine of purgatory conflicts with the biblical teaching that Jesus has dealt with the sins of believers once for all, that our suffering and good works can add nothing to the atoning work of Christ.”



R.C. Sproul: Merit and Grace

- Protestants believe in *sola gratia*, salvation is by the grace of God alone.
- “Merit is defined as that which is earned or deserved. Justice demands that merit be given where it is deserved. Merit is something due a person for a performance. If it is not received, an injustice is committed.”
- Roman Catholic theology: (1) *condign* (worthy) merit (obligation for reward); (2) *congruous* merit (it is fitting or congruous for God to reward it); and (3) *supererogatory* merit (excess merit achieved by saints; going beyond what God commands or requires; deposited into the treasury of merit). Protestants deny all three forms of merit.

R.C. Sproul: Merit and Grace



“The merit of Christ comes to us by grace through faith. Grace is the *unmerited* favor of God. It is an action or disposition of God toward us. Grace is not a substance that can inhabit our souls. We grow in grace, not by a quantitative measure of some substance in us, but by the merciful assistance of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, acting graciously toward us and upon us. The means of grace God gives to assist us in the Christian life include Scripture, the sacraments, prayer, fellowship, and the nurture of the church.”

The Clear Teaching of God's Word

- “He (the Father) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21).
- “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment; so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation” (Heb. 9:27-28).
- “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).
- “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).