

DEATH AND AFTER

The False Teachings of Purgatory

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. One of the biggest threats to Biblical Christianity is Roman Catholicism and one of the most atrocious false teachings of the Roman Church is the doctrine of purgatory.
- B. As Bible believing Christians we must know what the teaching of purgatory is and be able to intelligently refute it.

II. PURGATORY

- A. Position: The doctrine of purgatory teaches that all those who die at peace with the church but who are not perfect must undergo penal and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory (purge-atory). Only those believers who have attained a state of Christian perfection go immediately to heaven (saints). The great mass of partially sanctified Christians dying in fellowship with the church, but who nevertheless are encumbered with some degree of sin, go to purgatory where, for a longer or shorter time they suffer until sin is purged away, after which they are translated to heaven. The sufferings in purgatory are said to vary greatly in intensity and duration, being proportional in general to the guilt and impurity or impenitence of the sufferer.

“Purgatory, in accordance with Catholic teaching, is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are not entirely free from venial faults or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.” (Edward J. Hanna, “Purgatory”, Catholic Encyclopedia)

NOTE: From the above definition, it is obvious that purgatory is a place of punishment, but it differs from hell in that there is a limit to purgatory but no limit to hell. “Nothing but the eternal duration makes the fire of hell more than that of purgatory” (Thomas Aquinas). NOTE: From the above definition, purgatory is a place for those who have died “in God’s grace” and by this it is meant anyone who has been baptized into the Roman Church. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory has no reference to those outside the Roman Catholic Church. Those outside the church are forever lost and condemned to hell. However, a person who has been baptized into the Roman Church will not go to hell but will go into purgatory and , eventually, at least by the time of the final judgment, will have been delivered from the pains of purgatory and brought into the presence of God. NOTE: From the above definition, purgatory is the place where those, who died in the Roman Church but who had not made full satisfaction for their sins, will be retained until full satisfaction has been made to God.

- B. Proponents: Purgatory is held by the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox church, the latter being less radical than the former.
- C. Pardon from Purgatory: According to Roman Catholic theology, there are four basic ways for people who die to have their time shortened in purgatory.

1. Prayers for the Dead: According to Romanists, a living Roman Catholic may pray for souls in purgatory by repeating the Lord's Prayer (Paternosters) and Hail Mary (Ave Marias). By doing this a person's time in purgatory may be shortened. NOTE: There is no Biblical basis for prayers for the dead; this is a pagan practice.
2. Indulgences: Good works which are worked with the intention of helping someone else may be applied to the dead. Before the Reformation and the counter-Reformation (Council of Trent) indulgences were actually sold for money.
3. Sacrifice of the Altar: An individual may employ the Priest to say mass with the intent to help someone in purgatory. The low mass is inexpensive; the high mass is more expensive and the solemn mass is very expensive. Prices vary somewhat in different dioceses and according to the ability of the person to pay. NOTE: It becomes obvious that the rich man has the advantage when it comes to the length of time one spends in purgatory.
4. Alms Giving: By giving money with the intent of aiding someone in purgatory a person's time may be shortened.

D. History of Purgatory

1. Purgatory had its origins in pagan religions. This concept can be traced clear back to the Babylonians and Egyptian religions.

“Among the Egyptians, the same doctrine was held. According to Egyptian mythology, after the death of an individual, the soul descended into the lower world, called Amenti, and was conducted into the hall of truth where the individual was judged in the presence of Osiris and forty-two judges who were assessors with him. Anubis brought in a scale and held that scale while all the man's bad deeds were put on one side and the scales and truth was placed on the other side of the scales and Thoth recorded the results. If the good outweighed the bad, the soul was put in the boat of the sun and was conducted into the presence of the fire of the sun so that the soul might be purged before it could spend 3,000 years with Osiris. After those 3,000 years that soul would be reborn in human form to go through that same cycle endlessly. If the individual's evil deeds outweighed the good, that soul was condemned to endless transmigration in the bodies of animals.” (Dwight Pentecost, Sermons on Romanism)

The ancient Greeks also had some kind of concept of purgatory in their religion.

“Now, in all these states, whosoever lives justly obtains a better lot, and whoever lives unjustly, a worse. For each soul returns to the place whence it came in ten thousand years, for it does not regain its wings before that time is elapsed, except the soul of him who has been a guileless philosopher or a philosophical lover. The rest, when they have finished their first life, receive judgment, and after the judgment, some go to the place of correction under the earth and pay their penalty, while the others, made light and raised up into a

heavenly place by justice, live in a manner worthy of the life they led in human form.” (Plato, Phaedrus)

Virgil, the poet, shows that some concept of purgatory was prominent even in Roman mythology and religion. Virgil said that “souls have to die and be purged, some of them by being hung up to be cleansed by the wind, others by being plunged into water, others by being burned by fire” (Pentecost). NOTE: In all these ancient pagan religions they believed that men had to be purged after death or there would be no entrance into any kind of a blessed state. This same concept is also taught in Buddhism, Confucianism and other Oriental religions. NOTE: Most importantly, many Roman Catholics admit purgatory has a pagan origin.

“For unrepented, venial faults; for the payment of the temporal punishment due to sin at the time of death, the church always has taught the doctrine of purgatory. So deeply was this belief ingrained in our common humanity that it was accepted by the Jews and, in at least a shadowy way, by the pagans, long before the coming of Christianity.” (Catholic Encyclopedia)

2. The Jews also held to some form of purgatory. At least the Rabbis came to teach that by means of sin offerings children could alleviate the sufferings of their deceased parents. NOTE: This was not part of Biblical Judaism but a later development because of pagan influence.
3. There were a few germ thoughts about purgatory in the first three centuries of the church but these teachings were basically found in the heretical sects such as the Marcionites.
4. Up until 312 A.D. Christianity was fairly pure but in 312 A.D. Christianity became the accepted state of religion of Rome. At this time Christianity became the popular religion and its doors were swung open to paganism. Many unconverted pagans entered into the church and they brought the practice of prayers for the dead in purgatory with them.
5. Purgatory was resisted by many for years and it was given strong support by Augustine, although he had some doubts about it (died 430 A.D.). It was Pope Gregory the Great who brought purgatory officially into the Roman church (died 604 A.D.). Purgatory was still resisted by some but was stated as pure Roman doctrine at the Council of Florence in 1439-42:

“Such souls as have departed in God’s grace, but without having done penance enough for their sins are detained in purgatory and , while there, are assisted by the sacrifices, prayers, and good works of Christians on earth.” (Council of Florence)

The Council of Trent (1545 A.D.) was when purgatory was made an official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church although it had been practiced for over eight hundred years:

“Whereas, the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has, from the sacred writings in the ancient traditions of the fathers, taught

in sacred councils and, very recently in the ecumenical synod, that there is a purgatory and that the souls there detained are relieved by the suffrages of faithful, but chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar, the Holy Synod enjoins the bishops that they diligently strive that the sound doctrine touching purgatory be believed, held and taught.” (Council of Trent)

E. Support for Purgatory

1. II Maccabees 12:39-45: The primary support for purgatory is found in II Maccabees 12:39-45, a Jewish book written after the close of the Old Testament canon and before the birth of Christ. This book is part of the Apocrypha and not accepted as canonical by the Protestant Church. Furthermore, in context, it is difficult to see how this verse really teaches a purgatory.
2. Matthew 12:36, 37: “And to say to you, that every careless (idle, useless) word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.” Roman Catholics say this applies to believers who will have to be purged after death. OBJECTION: These words are spoken by Christ to unbelieving Pharisees who accused Christ of being demon possessed. They were speaking evil of Christ and would be judged for it at the final judgment day, but if they would believe and speak out for Christ their words would give evidence of true justification.
3. Luke 12:59: “I say to you, you shall not get out of here until you pay your last cent.” The Roman Catholics say that this applies to purgatory and a man cannot get out of there until he has paid in full for his sins. OBJECTION: This in context is not about purgatory but about final judgment. The parable speaks of the fact that a person guilty of a crime does not get out of prison until the crime has been fully paid for (Lk. 12:58). God, who is a just God, will certainly condemn rejecters of Christ more severely than mere men with their human law standards.
4. I Cor. 3:15: “If any man’s word is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.” Roman Catholics teach that when a true believer dies he goes into purgatory but eventually he will be saved. He will eventually come into the presence of God by fire after he has paid the penalty for his evil works. OBJECTION: These believers are pictured as already in heaven and standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive a reward (II Cor. 5:10). All evil works will be burned away and only the good works will remain and for those good works one will be rewarded.
5. Matthew 3:11: “He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Roman Catholics teach that true believers must experience the fire of Christ’s judgment. OBJECTION: This fire may refer to judgment but if so it refers to the eternal judgment of hell, not a temporary purgatory because it is called an unquenchable fire (eternal fire) (Matt. 3:12). This also may refer to the speaking of tongues on the Day of Pentecost, for on that day the baptism of the Spirit occurred as well as “tongues of fire” resting on them (Acts 2:1-3).
6. Jude 22, 23: “. . . save others, snatching them out of the fire.” Roman Catholics teach believers can be snatched from the fire of purgatory.

OBJECTION: This refers to unsaved false teachers and unbelievers who are headed for eternal punishment if God does not save them (Jude 17, 18)

7. I Tim. 2:1: “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men.” Roman Catholics teach that prayers should be made for all men, even the dead. OBJECTION: The context clearly teaches that the “all men” are “kings and all who are in authority” (I Tim. 2:2).

F. Logical and Theological Objections to Purgatory

1. The doctrine of purgatory makes a mockery of the death of Christ because it says that the death of Christ is not sufficient to cleanse from all sins and make one fit to stand in the presence of Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ made a once and for all complete satisfaction for all sins (Jn. 19:10; Heb. 9:11, 12; 10:14, 19-22).
2. The doctrine of purgatory denies the clear promise of Scripture that teaches that an individual who receives Christ as personal Saviour steps out of this life into the presence of God without a moments delay (Lk. 23:43; II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21; II Tim. 4:6-8).
3. The doctrine of purgatory is based on paganism and there is no Scriptural basis for it.
4. The doctrine of purgatory destroys any joy at the moment of death, for one faces the fires of purgatory. The departed soul is ushered into unspeakable torture. It is no wonder that Roman Catholic funerals are so sad and morbid.
5. The fear of purgatory for members of the Roman Catholic Church has been a powerful instrument of terror to enslave people by fear and to raise great sums of money.
6. Conclusion: Purgatory is not Scriptural and it is an enslaving false doctrine, but a person still may be a Christian and believe in purgatory, especially if that person has had years of false teaching and ignorance.

“We do not say that no person who believes in purgatory can be a Christian. Experience shows that Christians as well as unbelievers sometimes can be very inconsistent, that they may accept, without thinking it through, a doctrine of theory that is contrary to what the Bible teaches and to what their hearts know to be true.” (L. Beottner, Immortality)