

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

Purgatory and the Bible

By Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

The Roman Catholic teaching about purgatory is closely connected to its teaching concerning the prayers of the saints. The doctrine of purgatory was first established by Pope Gregory I in 593 AD. He declared that souls of believers enter purgatory for purification before passing into heaven and that prayers were needed to help those who were in purgatory enter into heaven. The Catholic Church officially adopted this teaching at the Council of Florence in the year 1459.

What is Purgatory?

The word purgatory comes from the Latin word “*purgare*” which means to purge or purify. This is how the Catholic Church defines what happens in purgatory: “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1030). It is taught that purgatory is a place of cleansing where those believers go after death “who have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions” (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Support for Purgatory

The Bible passage that is most often quoted in support of the doctrine of purgatory is 1 Corinthians 3:13-15: **“each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”** (Other passages used in support of the doctrine of purgatory include: Daniel 12:10; Micah 7:9; Zechariah 9:11; Matthew 5:26; Matthew 12:32 & 36; Luke 12:47-48; Philippians 2:10; James 3:1; 1 Peter 3:19; 1 Peter 4:18; and Jude 23.)

According to the Roman Catholic Church, the Day referred to in that verse is not Judgment Day but a process that takes place in purgatory. The context of this verse is speaking about how we - as Christians - build on the foundation of Christ. Some of our works are a result of Spirit-produced faith, and others are not. The fire being described here (as throughout the rest of Scripture) is referring to what we face in this life. Consider the following Scripture references:

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a

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little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love” (1 Peter 1:6-8a; cf. 1 Peter 4:12-13).

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory is not based on the teachings of Scripture. Nowhere does Scripture speak of a place of punishment for sins after death (nor will one find any teaching of purgatory in the apocrypha or in the writings of the church fathers). Purgatory is not based on the teaching of the Bible but on what is assumed to be a logical conclusion. “If sin still clings to Christians (Heb. 12:1), but there is no sin in heaven (Rev. 21:27), there must be a purification that takes place after one’s death and before one enters heaven” (Roman Catholic magazine *This Rock*; October 2000).

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Understanding Punishment

Instead of pointing people to Christ and the punishment He has borne for us, Roman Catholic teaching points people to their own work: “the sacrament of Penance, worthily received, always takes away all eternal punishment; but it does not always take away all temporal punishment” (p.199, Question #422). They also make a distinction between temporal and eternal punishment in connection with this doctrine. As an example they point to David who was forgiven by God for his sin of murder and adultery with Bathsheba, but who still suffered the loss of his child. In the same way, they say that the suffering of purgatory is a suffering for temporal punishment only which is necessary in order

for a person to be purified in preparation for heaven.

While it is true that there are consequences of our sins for which we will suffer, Scripture speaks of such temporal punishment taking place in this life, not after it. The Bible clearly says: ***“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:27-28)***. Scripture clearly speaks of two places people will go after death – heaven or hell (cf. Matthew 25). Paul writes: ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10)***. It is important to notice that when the Holy Spirit speaks of the day of judgment in the Bible, the contrast is always between believers and unbelievers, not good believers and bad believers.

Understanding Sanctification

One other problem with this teaching is the idea that the process of sanctification is extended after this life. Sanctification is the process through which a person becomes holy. Roman Catholic teaching sees the process of sanctification as necessary even after death until one is completely holy. This is the purpose of purgatory. While Scripture does speak of sanctification in a broad sense as an ongoing process in this life, it also speaks of sanctification in a narrow sense as a completed act in Christ through faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:10-11).

“Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which

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are offered according to the law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:8-14).

We have been washed and made clean through the blood of Christ, which is a full and complete payment for all our sins. We can be confident that through faith in Him, when we are called home we will not need to suffer again for sins we have committed and not atoned for, but will see Him face to face, and live with Him for all eternity!

Note: This study was prepared for the Bible Class at Zion Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, GA by Pastor Nathanael Mayhew.

Missionary Responsibility

By Dave Koenig

MARTIN LUTHER ON MISSIONARY RESPONSIBILITY – “A Christian does not only have the right and the power to teach the Word of God, but he has an obligation to do so, unless he is willing to forfeit his soul and bring upon himself God’s wrath...And when he is in a place where there are no Christians, he needs no other calling but that he is a Christian and inwardly called and anointed by God Himself. He is obligated to preach and teach the Gospel to the erring heathen or non-Christians out of his duty of brotherly love, even though no man has called him”

The Bible Is a Missionary Book: Just think! Every book in the New Testament was written by a missionary. Every epistle in the New Testament that was written to a church was written to a foreign-mission church. Every letter in the New Testament that was written to an individual was written to the convert of a foreign missionary. The one book of prophecy in the New Testament was written to seven foreign-mission churches in Asia. The disciples were called Christians first in a foreign-mission community. The language of the books of

the New Testament is the missionary’s language. The map of the early Christian world is the tracings of the missionary journeys of the apostles.

HOW IS IT? A daughter of Islam once asked a woman evangelist who went from house to house reading the Gospel to women (who men could not reach due to Islam’s strict rules): “Why do you go from house to house reading the Gospel?” The woman evangelist answered: “It is the master’s command.” The daughter of Islam asked: “Why do not all of your caste obey it? Out of so many Christians, only you come here once a week to read to us. Oh, they will receive a very great punishment! How is it?” How is it indeed? Each son and daughter of God “How is it? “How sweet ’twill be at evening, If you and I can say; ‘Lord Jesus, we’ve been seeking, the lambs that went astray; Heartsore and faint with hunger, we heard them making moan, And lo! we come at nightfall and bear them safely home!”