

ROMANISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

J. Dwight Pentecost

Copyright © 1962

CHAPTER SIX

IS THERE A PURGATORY?

FEW QUESTIONS that face individuals are of such deep concern as this: “Where does the believer go after physical death?”

All religions that have ever existed seek to answer that question. We recognize that our only authority is the Word of God, for no one but Christ has come back from the dead to tell us of the mode or the state or the place of existence. We are shut up to the Word of God, an authoritative answer.

Various viewpoints and contradictory doctrines have arisen as to the place and the state of the departed. There are some who deny any sort of existence after life whether in a state of blessing or in a state of punishment. There are others who hold that the wicked are in Hell and the righteous are in Heaven. There are some who hold that those who were not too bad, who were too good to go to Hell but too bad to go to Heaven, are in some intermediate place where they are awaiting purgation so that eventually they may be taken into the presence of God.

It is to this perplexing problem we want to address our attention. “Is there a purgatory?”

The official Romanist conception of purgatory is defined for us in Edward J. Hanna’s article “Purgatory” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

“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.”

From that officially approved definition of the concept of purgatory in Romanism we make several observations.

First of all, purgatory, according to Catholic dogma, is a state or a condition of punishment. It is a punishment for those who have not made a full satisfaction for their sins; it is a place where, either through their own efforts or through the efforts of others that are attributed to them, individuals are purged from the remnants of transgressions and the punishment of sin due them.

Further, it is observed that purgatory is the place for those who have died in what is called "God's grace." By this they mean anyone who has been baptized into the Roman Church has been brought into God's grace. 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.

The Catholic doctrine of purgatory has no reference to those who are outside of the Roman Church. They are forever lost, and they are in Hell. Purgatory is the state, or the condition, or 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.

It is necessary to understand the basic concept behind this Roman doctrine of purgatory. Their teaching is based upon the belief that there are two separate effects of sin.

First of all, eternal judgment was passed by a Holy God upon sin, and when an individual receives baptism into the Roman Church, he is taken into God's grace and that baptism washes away the eternal aspect of his sin. Since that baptism removes the eternal judgment for his sin the baptized individual cannot be condemned eternally to Hell.

The second aspect of sin is called temporal judgment, which involves the consequences of sin. While baptism removes the eternal effects of sin, there is no remedy for temporal judgment other than the sacrament of penance. If the believer who sinned and therefore is under temporal judgment in his lifetime satisfied God for all of his misdeeds he conceivably could escape punishment in purgatory. But because no one would offer complete satisfaction to God for the temporal consequences of his sin, that individual must pay God the satisfaction due in purgatory.

The doctrine, then, is based on the concept that the removal of eternal judgment does not make complete satisfaction for all sin, but the temporal judgment must be removed in the future.

The Romanist conceives of purgatory as a place of physical suffering almost beyond human description, where repayment is made in kind.

One records a vision in which he was put in purgatory for a season and was permitted to walk through the length and breadth of it. He discovered that God was meting out punishment for every sin which the impenitent had committed. Those who had been guilty of sins of the tongue were forced to open their mouths and molten lead was poured into their mouths to repay in kind. Thus a vindictive God will repay, in kind, the sin of the impenitent sinner.

In a booklet entitled, *Purgatory, According to the Revelation of the Saints*, issued under the Imprimatur of the Archbishop of Montreal, the story is told of a Franciscan monk who fell grievously and painfully ill. An angel appeared to him and gave him the choice of lingering on earth for a full year or of dying at once and spending three days in purgatory before he was taken into the presence of God. The monk elected to die. After being in purgatory twenty-four hours, he was visited by the angel who had given him the option and the deceased monk began to accuse the angel of cruelty and deception.

He said, “You have left me for a whole century and you promised me I would be out of purgatory in three days.”

To this the angel replied that he had been there for only twenty-four hours but that the physical suffering and the extremity of his anguish was so great it had made him think the twenty-four hours was a century in duration. The monk was then released and brought back to this earth in his former body. He spent his time going through the length and breadth of Canada to exhort all those in the churches there to do religious penance for their smallest faults. Such was the picture used by the Archbishop of Montreal to impress upon his parishioners something of the anguish that could be expected by everyone who died without having done penance.

The doctrine of purgatory is not a Biblical doctrine but arose in pagan religions. Edward Hanna, in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* in the article on “Purgatory,” says,

“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.”

There it is admitted that purgatory had its origin among the pagan religions of the world, long before the advent of the Christian faith.

Plato, the well-known Greek philosopher, in his work, *Phaedrus*, gives us his concept of the state of souls after death.

“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 said that it was his belief that souls would go to a place under the earth, and there they would pay the penalty for the sins that they had committed in this life.

That concept was also the concept of Roman mythology. The Roman poet Virgil said:

Nor can the groveling mind,
In the dark dungeons of the limbs confined,
Assert the native skies, or own it heavenly kind.
Nor death itself can only wash their stains;
But long contracted filth, even in the soul, remains
The relics of inveterate vice they wear,
And spots of sin obscene in every face appear.
For this, are various penances enjoined;

And some are hung to bleach upon the wind,
Some plunged in water, others purged in fire,
Till all the dregs are drained and all the rust expires.
All have their manes, and those manes bear.
The few so cleansed to these abodes repair,
And breathe in ample fields the soft Elysian air;
Then they are happy, when by length of time, the
scurf is worn away of each committed crime;
No speck is left of their habitual stains,
But the pure ether of the soul remains.

Long before the time of Christ, Virgil taught that souls must 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 in fire. This made a place of purgation necessary.

The same doctrine was held among the Egyptians. According to Egyptian mythology, after death 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 truth was placed on the other side 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 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.

We could multiply these illustrations from the Babylonian religion and from Buddhism and Confucianism and the other Oriental religions, for they all held this idea, and believed that men had to be purged after death or there would be no entrance into any kind of blessed state. This reveals a groping after righteousness, and a conviction of a need of cleansing. Not knowing the way of access to God through the God-appointed way, their concept was that men must die in their sins and then after death they hoped to make a purgation through their own suffering so that they might come into a blessed state. This paganism of Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome was the source of the concept developed within the Roman system that the souls of those who have been baptized into the church must go to a purgatory to have their sins cleansed away.

Rome claims scriptural support for this teaching. Four Scriptures are cited which we will examine briefly. First of all, Matthew 12:36 is used, where we read the words of the Lord, **"I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."**

In that chapter the Pharisees had said that Christ was demon-possessed, insane, and had the Devil for His father. The Lord heard that discussion of the Pharisees concerning His person and warned that if they reject the evidence and testimony to His person they will be judged. He turned to those who were rejecting Him as Messiah and Saviour and told them that the day would come when their very words would meet them and they would have to answer to God.

Rome takes this verse and, instead of reading it in its context, interprets it as though it taught that for every idle word that men shall speak they will have to give back a payment in purgatory. But that is not what the Scripture says here. This verse teaches that these unbelievers will stand before God as a righteousness judge and they will be condemned on the basis of their words of rejection. But Rome chooses to take this passage and read something into it that is not there to say that it is a scriptural proof that men must make payment for their sins for which no penance has been done.

The second Scripture used by Romanist theologians to support the doctrine of purgatory is Luke 12:59. ***“I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.”***

The Romanist says the Lord told this individual that he could not get out of purgatory until he has paid to God everything that he owed. Again I ask you to look into the context. The Lord is not talking about purgatory; He is not talking to men about life after death; He is speaking to men about their relationship to Him. He is a judge. He was introduced as a judge by John the Baptist, for John said, ***“He that cometh after me is mightier than I, . . . whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”*** (Matthew 3:11-12).

In Luke 12:58 the Lord said to the nation Israel, ***“You have rejected Me and you have repudiated My person and I must sit in judgment upon you. But while I am still here you have an opportunity to receive Me and to escape the judgment of a righteous judge.”***

The Lord illustrates this by saying that if one is guilty of a crime and is put in a prison he will not get out of prison until that crime has been fully paid for. Then He asks that if men judge justly in that way, is He any less a just judge when He separates them from Himself forever? The Lord is giving a warning to the nation Israel concerning their rejection of Him as their heaven-sent Messiah. This is not a passage teaching that souls do not get out of purgatory until they have paid God the very last mite.

The third passage used is I Corinthians 3:15, where the apostles writes, ***“If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”***

The Romanist claims this is the clearest teaching on purgatory in the Word of God. It is their interpretation that the Apostle Paul is saying that when a man dies in grace, that is, in the Roman Church, he goes into purgatory, but that eventually he will be saved. He will eventually come into the presence of God but only by fire, that is, because his evil works have been burned up by the judgment of purgatory.

Once again I ask you to read the whole passage. The apostle is talking to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who are pictured as already in Heaven. This is not addressed to those who are separated from Christ, who are seeking to come to Christ by having their sins burned up and by giving satisfaction through their suffering. These are individuals who are standing face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ at the “Bema” of Christ to receive a reward.

Paul teaches that if one has been faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, he will receive a reward for his faithfulness; if he has been faithless, all of his evil works will be burned away but he shall be saved. Yet he will be as one who has been through fire and all his possessions have been destroyed. This is not talking about an individual coming into purgatory, but about one's works being judged to receive a reward.

The fourth passage which the Roman theologians use is found in I Timothy 2:1, where the apostle says, **"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."**

The Romanist says that the phrase refers to the dead who are now in purgatory, so that Paul is commanding men to pray those who are in purgatory out of that condition into the presence of God. You simply have to read the passage to see that the apostle is not talking about purgatory, nor about prayers for those in purgatory, but about prayer for our governors, our kings, our presidents, so that we might lead a godly and peaceable life here on earth.

Since the doctrine is not taught in Scripture, how did it become an official dogma of the Roman Church?

The Council of Florence in 1439-42, said,

"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."

At the Council of Trent in 1545 it was pronounced:

"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 this ecumenical synod, that there is a purgatory and that the souls there detained are relieved by the suffrages of the 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."

Thus the Council of Trent in 1545 made purgatory a part of the doctrine of the Roman Church.

According to the teaching of Rome how do souls escape from purgatory? There are four principal ways.

The first is by prayers for the dead. According to the Romanists, the individual who says "Paternosters" and "Ave Marias," that is, the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary, with intent to help the departed souls may shorten the temporal punishment of those who are in that state.

The second way that souls are delivered from purgatory is by the practice of indulgences. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*,

“An indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. It is provided for by a change in the form of penance, the temporal penalty for sin.”

It is held that the Pope has the power to forgive sins. While the sin of the one in purgatory may be forgiven because he offers satisfaction by suffering for his sins himself, forgiveness may also be granted by the Pope if someone else does something of merit and transfers that merit to the individual in purgatory. It is taught that the Pope may change the penalty or may put the penalty on someone else so that the penalty may be paid by another.

The Council of Trent forbade the sale of indulgences for money, but good works, which are worked with the intention of helping somebody else, may be applied to the dead. The Pope has the right to give either “plenary” indulgence, that is to forgive every sin, or the Pope may grant “partial” indulgence, forgive part of the sin of the individual who is in purgatory.

The third method of getting souls out of purgatory is by what is referred to as “the sacrifice of the altar.”

One may pay a priest to say a mass with intent to help a certain individual in purgatory. If the priest says the mass with the intention of helping that individual, merit will be given by that mass to the one in purgatory. A small card that accompanied the saying of mass with intent has this prayer on it: “Oh, gentlest heart of Jesus ever present in the blessed sacrament, ever consumed with burning love for the poor captive souls of purgatory, have mercy on the soul of thy departed servant; be not severe in thy judgment, but let some drops of thy precious blood fall upon the devouring flame and do thou, O merciful Saviour, send thy angels to conduct thy departed servant to a place of refreshment, light, and peace. Amen.” An individual, by paying a priest to say a mass with intent, thought that he would be shortening the stay of a loved one in purgatory.

The fourth way that an individual may escape from purgatory is by alms-giving.

If one gives alms with the specific intent to aid someone in purgatory, that, the theologian says, is to pour water on the flames which devour the one in purgatory. Hanna in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* made the statement concerning the prayers for the dead and the sacrifices of the altar:

“Whether one’s works of satisfaction performed on behalf of the dead avail purely out of God’s benevolence and mercy or whether God obliges Himself in justice to accept our vicarious atonement, is not a settled question.”

What he is saying is that the one who says prayers for the dead, or who gets the Pope to grant indulgences, or who pays the priest to give the sacrifice of the altar, is offering a vicarious, substitutionary atonement for sins. Scripture says Jesus Christ, once and for all, offered Himself for the sin of the world.

Not only is the doctrine pagan in origin and devoid of scriptural support, but, most important of all, it denies the value of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ to save sinners.

The reason that an individual goes to purgatory is because he has not been cleansed to a sufficient degree to be able to be received and accepted in the presence of a Holy God. He has received all that the church could give him and yet it is insufficient to bring him into the presence of God Himself. To hold to this doctrine is to deny the very clear teaching of the Word of God that Jesus Christ has once and for all made a complete satisfaction to God for the sins of all who would accept Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour.

Consider several Scriptures. Our Lord's words on the Cross in John 19:30, **"It is finished,"** show us that nothing need be or can be added to His work at Calvary.

Hear the words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews as he says in Chapter 9, verses 11-12:

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Or again, Hebrews 10:14,

"For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

Or the same chapter, verses 19-22:

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

In these passages, which are but few from the many to which we could direct your attention, the Word of God says that Jesus Christ, by the offering up of Himself, has provided a full, complete, and a satisfactory salvation to any individual who will accept Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour.

When you accept Jesus Christ as your substitute and receive the gift of eternal life, God washes away every sin and stain and all the guilt that could be a basis of accusation.

I say on the authority of the Word of God, there is no reason in Heaven, nor in earth, nor in Hell, why God should not accept you into His presence, because you have been washed, you have been sanctified, you have been justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. Were it not for the authority of the Word of God it would seem blasphemous to say it; but if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you have as much right in God's presence as Jesus Christ Himself has, for God has made you as acceptable in His sight as His own beloved Son.

To say that an individual must go into purgatory to pay for his sins is to deny the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Not only does this teaching deny the work of Christ, but it denies the clear promise of Scripture that teaches that the individual who receives Christ as a personal Saviour steps out of this life into the presence of God without a moment's delay. We have the God-given answer in the Word as to what happens to the soul of the believer who is taken from this life. In Luke 23:43 the Lord said to the thief, **"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise."** Not aeons hence, not after a purgatory experience, but **"today thou shalt be with me in paradise."**

In II Corinthians 5:8, the apostle gives his testimony,

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

The translation from life on this earth to life in the presence of the Father is an instantaneous one.

In Philippians 1, the Apostle Paul, by inspiration, again gives us a word of assurance as he tells us in verse 21,

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

If the apostle had believed that to depart from this life was to go into the pains of purgatory, he would certainly have said it is far better to stay on this earth than to step out into that experience. But he says for him to go to be with Christ is a far better thing.

In Colossians 3:3-4 we read,

"Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory [or, ye shall appear with him, glorious ones]."

According to the Romanist doctrine, at the end of time Jesus Christ is going to come back to this earth to judge. At that time He is going to free all the souls that are still in purgatory. But on the basis of Colossians 3:4, how is that possible? For when Jesus Christ comes, He is not coming to get the souls that are in purgatory; He is going to bring all His own with Him. They had to be with Him before they could come with Him.

In II Timothy 4:6-8, the apostle, coming to the close of his life, said,

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me"—the experience of purgatory. Is that the way your Bible reads? No! — "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing."

The beloved Apostle John, writing in Revelation 14:13, gives us a word of assurance as he said,

“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: ye, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; not consigned to purgatory are the dead which die in the Lord. Scriptures are sufficient to establish the fact that when the Lord Jesus Christ summons to Himself one of His own children, that one is not to be detoured by way of purgatory where the effect of sins must be purged away because Christ was not able to purge them by His own offering. That one is to be taken into His presence to be with Him, to behold Him, to receive the blessing of the dead who die in the Lord.

We often refer to the gentle Jesus, the loving Saviour.

May I say to you that the Lord Jesus Christ had more to say about Hell, about the lake of fire and about eternal punishment, than anyone else in the entire Word of God. I cannot refer you to the whole chain of warnings concerning the unrighteous. One or two will suffice.

In Matthew 25:41, from our Lord's own lips come the words,

“Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

In the Gospels again and again our Lord emphasizes this same teaching. The one who dies without Christ goes into Hell to await the final judgment and the lake of fire. He does not step into a purgatory where, after some suffering, he may receive forgiveness for his sins either by his own suffering or by the vicarious, substitutionary works of another. The individual who dies without Christ goes into perdition called **“the lake of fire.”** He will hear the sentence of eternal death pronounced upon him, to be separated from God forever.

But some will say, “Doesn't Revelation 20:12-13 tell us that death and hell will be emptied?” We do read there:

“I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Some who have read that passage have said that the passage teaches that Hell is only temporary, limited in its duration, and all those who are now in Hell will eventually get out. I would have to say, “Yes, that is right, as far as it goes.” The individual who dies outside of Christ goes into Hades or what the English translation calls Hell a place of torment.

The Lord described the torment of the rich man in Hades or in Hell in Luke 16, who cried for a drop of water to ease his anguish. Every unsaved man, when he dies, goes into that prison where he is retained until the time Hell will be emptied. But every individual who is delivered out of Hell is put into the lake of fire according to Revelation 20:14: **“Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”**

As a prisoner might be confined to the city jail until the time of the passing of sentence and then be transferred to the state penitentiary to serve out the judgment against him, so sinners who die are in Hades or Hell, where they are detained until the judgment of the wicked when the sentence of eternal separation from God is pronounced upon them. At that time they will be put into the lake of fire to remain forever.

There are only two destinies: Heaven or Hell. There is no purgatory.

There is no chance after death to purge oneself or to be purged by others. The issue must be settled now.

The individual who refuses Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour will hear the pronouncement of eternal death and be sentenced to eternal death in the lake of fire. The individual who receives Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour receives the gift of eternal life and, at his physical death, says, “Good night, earth. Good morning, Glory!”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
