

# Purgatory



Hebrews 12:28

Let us offer to God acceptable worship with  
reverence and awe for Our God is a consuming fire.

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

*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. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. [CCC 1030-1031]*



The only way that a blacksmith can know when the purifying process is complete is. . . .when he can see his own image reflected in the silver.

Only when God can see His image in our soul will we be fully sanctified and be worthy to be in His presence. This process Catholics call purgatory.

Throughout scripture God is portrayed as a consuming fire purifying us like gold and silver:

Zechariah 13:8-9 "I will bring the one third **through fire**, and I will **refine them as silver** is refined, and I will **test them as gold is tested**. They shall call upon my name, and I will hear them. I will say, "They are my people," and they shall say, "The LORD is my God."

He will sit as a **refiner and purifier** of silver. Malachi 3:3

Many shall be **refined, purified, and tested**, but the wicked shall prove wicked... Daniel 12:10



Saint Paul gives us this beautiful image of this purification in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

“For no other foundation can anyone lay that that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.”

Paul is referring to the end of our life, our time of judgment and “the Day” will disclose all of the works that we have done, whether good or bad. He uses the images of wood, hay and straw to portray our bad works, in other words our venial sins. Our good works he portrays with images of gold, silver and precious stones for which we will receive a reward.

For our bad works (venial sins) that are burned up we will “suffer” loss. This cannot mean heaven since there is no suffering in heaven and this cannot mean hell because no one is saved from hell. Paul is speaking about purgatory.



“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

“It is appointed for men to die once and after that comes judgment.”  
Hebrews 9:27

Will any of us be perfect at our moment of death, at our moment of judgment? We must be perfect to see God.

Jesus said, “You must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14

This state of being that we call purgatory is where we are made perfect.

In the New Testament the Book of Hebrews gives us a vision of heaven where God, Jesus, angels and “spirits of the righteous **made** perfect” are present.

“You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men **made** perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel”.(Hebrews 12:22-24)

How are the righteous made perfect? Why do the righteous need to be made perfect?

Nothing unclean shall enter it.



“And I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light. ...and nothing unclean shall enter it.”  
Revelation 21:22-27

Purgatory exists because of the mercy of God. If there were no purgatory we would have to be completely sanctified in this life before we could enter heaven since nothing unclean can enter heaven.

Sanctification involves suffering: Romans 8:16-17 “We are children of God and if children, then heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Purgatory is the final stage of sanctification that we will need to undergo before we enter heaven. Purgatory is the final phase of Christ’s applying to us the purifying redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross

**Catechism 1521** “Union with the passion of Christ.....suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:29-30 Paul mentions Christians baptizing on behalf of the dead. Paul does not criticize them or tell them to stop. Clearly they were doing this because they had been taught that there was something they could do to help those who had died. Those in hell cannot be helped. Those in heaven do not need our intercession. Obviously they had been taught that there was a place between heaven and hell which we call purgatory.

**Note:** It is because of this verse that Mormons baptize the dead. Even though Paul does not condemn this practice it is clear that the Corinthians misunderstood how we can help those who have died. We can pray for the dead, offer up our suffering and offer a Mass for the repose of their soul but baptizing the dead was never adopted by the early Church.

Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church 211

“Because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especial the Eucharistic sacrifice. They also help them by almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance.”

## The Book of Maccabees

Sadly at the Protestant “Reformation” in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as fallen away Catholics began to start the first denomination the decision was made to remove seven books from the Christian Bible including the Book of Maccabees that speaks about the Jewish practice of praying for the dead.

2 Maccabees 12:45 “Therefore it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they might be loosed from their sin” *Douay Rheims translation*.

Orthodox Jews still pray for the dead just as they did during the time of Christ. Why pray for them if there is only heaven and hell? Paul, the apostles and Jesus were all orthodox Jews and they would have prayed for the dead. Jewish website click [HERE](#)

From the Jewish Website:

“According to Jewish tradition, the soul must spend some time purifying itself before it can enter the World to come. The maximum time required for purification is twelve months”

**Protestant objections:** When Jesus died on the cross He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) Jesus completed the work of redemption at the cross. No purgatory is needed for those who trust in Christ. That was finished on the cross

**Catholic Answer:** Catholics agree that Jesus’ redemptive work was finished and He would no longer need to suffer and die for sin. However, how is His redemptive work applied to us? We must still cooperate with God’s grace and believe, confess, repent and be baptized. We must also “suffer with him to be glorified with him.” Romans 8:16-17

Purgatory is only possible because of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Only the saved go to purgatory where there are purified by the love of God.

"It is finished" cannot mean nothing else was needed for scripture also says, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" 1 Corinthians 15:14.



Isaiah had a vision of entering heaven and because he was not sanctified to be in the presence of God an angel took a burning coal and touched Isaiah's mouth and the angel said, "Behold this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven." Isaiah 6:5-7

Not only was his sin forgiven but the guilt of his sin as well. To be in God's presence all attachments, all effects of our sins must be purified by fire.

**Protestant objection:** The bible says, "The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7

**Catholic Answer:** We agree that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin but not the punishment for all sins. For example King David was forgiven of his sins yet according to scripture he still had to be punished for his sins of adultery and murder.



### King David and Nathan

2 Samuel 12:13-14 "David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord. " And Nathan said to David, "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die."



**Protestant Objection:** Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross at Calvary, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise.(Luke 23:43) This habitual sinner did not need a fire to purge his sins. He went straight to heaven that very day.

**Catholic Answer:** The thief did not go straight to heaven. That did not take place until the Ascension some 40 days later and when Jesus took all the saved who had died to heaven.

Ephesians 4:8-10 “Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives.”

Jesus told Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” John 20:17

The good thief went to the spirit prison known to Jews as Sheol. This is the spirit prison that Jesus went to while His body was in the tomb.

1 Peter 3:19 “He went and preached to the spirits in prison.”

Please consider that even though Jesus forgave the thief nonetheless the thief suffered by having his legs broken and that suffering could have completed his purification.(John 19:32)

All people suffer, not because of personal sins, but because we are imperfect creatures stained by the sin of Adam. From them we have inherited a sinful nature. To be with God we must obtain a new nature, a divine nature of sanctifying grace.



**Protestant Objection:** Philippians 1:23 clearly teach that all believers in Christ go straight to heaven. That rules out purgatory. Philippians 1:23 says, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ.”

**Catholic Answer:** In the context of Philippians 1:23 Paul says, “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

Paul is simply stating that his desire is to leave this life and be with Christ but he knows it is necessary to stay and evangelize. Paul isn't addressing Purgatory in this verse. Nonetheless only the saved go to purgatory and all the saved are with Christ.

**Protestant Objection:** 2 Corinthians 5:8 clearly teaches that when believers are absent from the body (dead), their souls are immediately present with the Lord in heaven.

**Catholic Answer:** Please watch this short video from Catholic Apologist Jimmy Akin on this verse: Click [HERE](#)

**Protestant Objection:** Christians are made perfect forever at the moment of justification by the one offering of Jesus 2000 years ago (Heb. 10:14).

**Catholic Answer:** The context of Hebrews 10:14 is comparing the sacrifice of Christ to the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Those had to be offered over and over again and did not take away sins. The sacrifice of Christ, however, was once for all time. This one sacrifice was sufficient to sanctify and perfect all men for all of time, but this verse is not saying that a man cannot lose his sanctification if he later turns away from the Lord and sins.

If we are already perfect forever how could Paul say: “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his suffering, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have obtained this or am already perfect but I press on to make in my own....” Philippians 3:10-12

**Protestant Objection:** Jesus never talked about purgatory

**Catholic Answer:** In the context of judgment Jesus told His disciples:

“Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.” Matthew 5:25-26

Consider a man who commits adultery. He asks God for forgiveness and his sin is forgiven. However the man is still “attached” to that sin. He still has flashbacks, memories of his sexual sin. We know from Revelation 21:27 that nothing impure can enter heaven. Even though the man's sin has been removed from his soul, his attachment to that sin has not been removed. His soul is still impure and this impurity must be burned up like “wood, hay and stubble” before he can enter the presence of God. This place of purification is purgatory where as Paul says the man, “will suffer loss but will be saved as through fire.” (1 Corinthians 3:15)

**Catechism 1472:** To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a *double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.

### [Addition resources for this topic](#)

Onesiphorus and Paul's Prayer for the Dead: Catholic convert Steve Ray gives an interesting commentary on 2 Tim 1:16-18

Click [HERE](#)

#### **Books-**

*The Biblical Basis for Purgatory* by John Salza

*End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life* by Father Charles Arminjon

*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* by Ludwig Ott

[Next topic](#): What happened to Church leadership with the death of the apostles? Who were the men who continued to pass down the apostolic faith to the next generation of Christians? Next week we will meet some of these men known as the Early Church Fathers.