

Doctrine of Purgatory

1. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, only the souls of those who are perfectly pure at death are immediately admitted to heaven.

1.1 But the great majority of those who die in justifying grace are still burdened with the guilt of venial sins having also not endured the temporal punishment for their mortal sins by fulfilling the works of penance during life on earth.

2. These must endure a time of expiatory suffering as a process of cleansing before they may experience the beatific joys of heaven.

2.1 The place where this intermediate suffering and cleansing takes place is called purgatory.

3. Roman Catholics generally agree that purgatory is a place of punishment and cleansing by fire, and that the time spent there might vary from hours to thousands of years, though no one in this life knows how long he himself or one who has already died might have to spend.

4. Actually, the only ones who are certainly known not to be in purgatory are the canonized saints.

4.1 The duration and intensity of suffering depend on the degree of purification and the amount of temporal punishment still lacking at the time one dies.

5. These can be shortened and alleviated by the prayers and good works of those on earth, especially by masses and the granting of papal indulgences.

6. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory has absolutely no basis in Scripture, and so Protestants have not accepted it.

6.1 Roman Catholics appeal to 2Ma 12:39-45, a book which Protestants do not accept as canonical.

7. Some passages of Scripture are cited as justification (Isa 4:4; Mic 7:8; Zec 9:11; Mal 3:2-3; Mat 12:32; 1Co 3:13-15; 15:29), but only the most forced analysis can read purgatory into these verses.

Isa 4:4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.

Mic 7:8 Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.

Zec 9:11 As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

Mal 3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

Mal 3:3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

Mat 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.>

1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

1Co 15:29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

9. Even the contemporary Roman theologians Rahner and Vorgrimler (Theological Dictionary, page 391) admit the paucity of scriptural evidence for the doctrine.

10. The doctrine of purgatory is an integral part of the Roman view of salvation and satisfaction for sin with the place it gives to man's works and supposed merits.

11. To Protestants, this seems directly contrary to the Pauline teaching of grace (cf. Eph 2:8-10) and Christ's words in Joh 3:36 and 5:24.

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Eph 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Joh 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

12. If the source of this doctrine of purgatory is not to be found in Scripture, where did it come from?

13. In Session XXV, the Council of Trent decreed that the existence of purgatory and the detention of souls there is "taught by the Holy Spirit from the sacred writings and the ancient traditions of the Fathers."

14. As a result, the church taught it in earlier holy councils and in this ecumenical synod (meaning the Council of Trent). Teaching of the purgative cleansing by fire existed as early as Origen, Cyprian, and Augustine.

14.1 St Augustine in his arguments with Pelagius was unimpressed with the entire concept of "salvation by means of works be they ones own or anothers for you in some state of limbo".

15. It is found in the writings of Gregory the Great and it developed in medieval theology.

15.1 The teaching of purgatory was formally affirmed at the Council of Lyons (1274), Council of Florence (1439), and finally at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) (Sessions VI and XXV).

15.2 The magisterium has never given a detailed definition on the exact nature or duration of purgatory.

15.3 The late dates of 1274 and 1563 indicate Purgatory is a product of decisions made by Cardinals and Popes distant from the early church.