

## The Vile Doctrine of Purgatory

Recently, a Roman Catholic friend told me that he believes in purgatory. This friend is more knowledgeable in the Bible than any other Roman Catholic I met. So, I was surprised when he told me he believes in purgatory because I know that the Bible does not teach such things. I asked him what Bible passages form the basis for his understanding. Without hesitation, he was able to rattle off I Corinthians 3:11-13, Matthew 5:25-26 and Matthew 12:32. Then he mentioned a passage from II Maccabees of the Apocrypha. He also was able to explain from his perspective how each passage supports the doctrine. His response demonstrated to me that he had read and understood the interpretations fed to him by the Roman Catholic church. Because I consider this doctrine to be highly insulting to Jesus, I was very troubled and disappointed that my friend held to this teaching. Because I respect and care about my friend, I will now argue against this position hoping that someday, God will open his eyes so that he sees how this doctrine insults the finished work of Jesus and is not supported by Scripture.

In general, I find the passages on which this doctrine is based to be extremely weak, like grasping at straws. So, it confounds me greatly that in light of how this doctrine undermines the work of Jesus, so many people would be so quick to buy into it (since its basis is so weak in the first place). This doctrine takes away from the finished work of Jesus. When He died, the full price was paid as a ransom for the sins committed. I make the following rebuttal using only my knowledge of the Bible and the following texts. In other words, I did not consult any Protestant commentary to get ideas on how to argue against Purgatory. Now I will turn my attention to their proof texts.

### Roman Catholic Purgatory proof texts

The following contains RC commentary and text from II Maccabees 12:

*In II Maccabees 12:39-46, we discover Judas Maccabeus and members of his Jewish military forces collecting the bodies of some fallen comrades who had been killed in battle. When they discovered these men were carrying "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear" (vs. 40), Judas and his companions discerned they had died as a punishment for sin. Therefore, Judas and his men "turned to prayer beseeching that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out... He also took up a collection... and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably... Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin."*

I do not ascribe authority to II Maccabees because there is no biblical reason to warrant it. But this does not matter. The argument I make here applies even if II Maccabees was a part of the canon. I can still easily demonstrate that this passage cannot be used to support the doctrine of Purgatory.

This book, and in fact this passage, is narrative rather than didactic teaching on the subject. In it, we have a record of certain Jews praying and doing things for certain dead people in hope of atoning for their sins. This historical account does not qualify as authoritative because there is no way of proving that these Jews were even believers, or whether their actions were righteous. The Old Testament contains narrative of other people who did exploits for God and then did things that were incorrect, and in fact sinful. For example, Saul, who prophesied by God's Spirit<sup>1</sup>, later consulted a medium in order to conjure up the dead. (See I Samuel 28:7-19.) God strictly prohibited this type of thing but he did it anyway. So, just because someone does great

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<sup>1</sup> "So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day. <sup>10</sup> When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. <sup>11</sup> And it happened, when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What is this that has come upon the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" (I Samuel 10:9-11)

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exploits for God (as Saul did) does not make every subsequent action they do right. Since praying for the dead is nowhere taught in the Bible didactically, it is easy for me to conclude that these Jews did something that is not right. In other words, they sinned when they prayed for the dead, just like Saul sinned when he consulted the medium. If these Jews were believers, which cannot be proven, they were misguided. There is no reason to follow their example since it cannot be proven that they did right. There is more reason to call their actions into question and to wonder if they were even believers at all.

On the RC web site discussing the New Testament passages here, I saw no clear supporting evidence for the doctrine of purgatory. It would be one thing if they could point to clear didactic teaching instructing Christians to pray for the dead. But they can't do so because there are no such passages. Therefore, they have to lean on passages that do not clearly support their position. This type of argument reminds me of the preacher who writes in his sermon notes "pound pulpit here" at the point in the sermon in which he is trying to get a point across without having solid scriptural basis for it. If he pounds the pulpit and raises his voice, maybe he will convince his hearers to buy into what he is preaching.

***Here is one of the passages that the RC church uses to support its position:***

*Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny (Matthew 5:25-26).*

Since this passage obviously does not describe the place or give any details of the place that RC's call purgatory, I can easily say that Jesus is simply telling a parable or story to teach a basic idea that has nothing to do whatsoever with what RC's call purgatory. (It is impossible for them to prove me wrong in my assessment.) From the context, we know that this story is warning about judgment of God. But it is too ambiguous in nature to read too much into it beyond what it seems to be saying.

In the verses before it, Jesus warns that people who have murderous hearts and attitudes (as reflected by the mistreatment of others) are in danger of hell, not purgatory. Jesus warned that "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt 5:20). Many of the Pharisees lived exemplary lives. For example, Paul said that before he was a Christian, he lived a life that was "blameless" as when examined against the righteousness which is in the Law. (See Philippians 3:6.) The common people listening to Jesus in this narrative would have been shocked to hear what Jesus said in verse 20. The common unbelieving Jew would conclude, "If the Pharisees are going to hell, then I am toast." So, Jesus is not talking at all about a place called Purgatory. He is warning them that unless they are completely changed, they will end up in hell (not Purgatory). So, right now, before you die, *"Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny (Matthew 5:25-26).*

Because Jesus used a basic earthly analogy, we can't read much more into it that the basic warning to get right with God or you will end up in hell. (That is what He was warning about, not Purgatory). Just because the earthly analogy includes the words, *"you will never get out till you have paid the last penny,"* we should not jump to the conclusion that Jesus is teaching that people can get out of hell. Remember, it is just an earthly analogy. If you insist on making this stand on its head, I can easily retort that Jesus is not teaching that people can get out of a dungeon after they paid their debt. It could just as easily be saying that the person will never get out, EVER...because their debt is infinite in nature and can never be paid!

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The proof text most relied upon by RC's is I Corinthians 3:11-15. But to more likely understand what Paul is saying, I will include some verses before and differentiate by making verses 11-15 bold.

*"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. **For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 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"** (I Corinthians 3:5-15).*

Without justification, the RC's insist that this describes Purgatory which in their teaching, is a place in which punishment is meted out to purge Christians. Each Christian will spend time in purgatory relative to the amount of purging required (relative to the amount of sinfulness that needs to be purged).

There is absolutely nothing stated in this passage that talks about duration. Instead, it gives the impression that whatever is happening, it happens instantaneously. If someone sees duration here, he is obviously reading his own ideas into the text.

I do not deny that this passage is describing something that will take place at the judgment. But clearly, Paul is talking about the work each Christian does for Jesus. This passage is about rewards for the labor each Christian does for Jesus this side of the grave. Depending on the quality of the service, each Christian (called here "God's fellow laborer") will receive a reward. If any man's work endures the instantaneous purging, **"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."** This passage talks about the work being burned, not the person. If the man's work survives the purging, he will receive a positive reward.

But if his work does not survive the purging, he won't receive a reward for the work. Yet he himself will be saved, "yet as through fire." (de. w`j dia. puro,j) Paul is careful to insert the word "as" ( w`j ) into this phrase. He could have said "he himself will be purged through fire" but he didn't.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the Christian's work will be shown on that day for what it is. Only those which pass as righteous works (done by faith through the power of God) will be rewarded. Everything else will not be rewarded. In the end, he will be left with rewards for the righteous works of faith he did for Jesus. There is no indication that this passage is talking about sins being punished. (The Christian's sins were punished on the cross in the body of Jesus.)

After reviewing the passages that are used by RC's to justify their position on Purgatory, I can say with confidence that the Bible does not speak of any such place of temporary punishment, the duration of which varies from Christian to Christian. The word "purgatory" is not found in the Bible. In addition, there is no place in the Bible or the Apocrypha that speaks of a place where saints go to be purged of their sins for a period of time that is relative to the amount of purging required. The duration aspect of the RC doctrine of Purgatory is definitely man-made thinking nowhere found in the Bible.

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<sup>2</sup> A passage from Luke shows how the word "as" is meant to be understood. "Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs?" (Luke 22:52). Obviously, Jesus was not a robber. But the mob came against Him "as if" He was a robber. So, in I Corinthians 3:15, Paul is NOT saying Christians will go through fire. Rather, whatever he goes through, it will be likened in some way to the idea of purging that fire produces. And this passage seems to be talking about something that happens in an instant.

## **The doctrine of Purgatory diminishes the bite of hell. (“Nothing to see here.”)**

All false religions and cults have something in common. They all have doctrines that tend to either eliminate or diminish the bite of hell. Jehovah’s Witnesses eliminate it while Mormons say it is merely a temporary purging. Most Muslims I meet believe in a temporary hell where all people must go for a period of time. These teachings are designed by Satan to take the bite out of hell. His subtle message is that people don’t have to be overly concerned about it because hell is just temporary or non-existent.

While the Roman Catholic church does teach that hell is real and is forever, they have overlaid the doctrine of hell with the doctrine of Purgatory which in turn causes the bite of hell to be diminished. Now, like Mormons, Muslims and JW’s, all RC’s who are living ungodly lives don’t have to worry about a place of everlasting punishment as long as they have been Baptized as Roman Catholic and participate in the Roman Catholic religion. It’s okay. Yes, you will have to spend some time in Purgatory but so will everyone else. Since you are living an ungodly life, you will have to spend more time than some but don’t worry, because eventually, you will be in heaven. And if the living continue to pray for you, the time can be cut even shorter.

Jesus warned that *“unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, we will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven”* (Matt 5:20). Religious people who are living ungodly lives need to be warned that they are headed for hell, not Purgatory! So, it is easy to recognize that the doctrine of Purgatory is nothing but a trick of the devil to keep people unconcerned about the pending danger of hell and the wrath of God that will soon be poured out on them.

## **The doctrine of Purgatory insults Jesus and His Work on the cross!**

Above all, the doctrine of Purgatory undermines the work that Jesus did by coming here in the first place. It suggests that His Work was not sufficient to pay for our sins. This is highly insulting. Several passages are provided below that speak to the all-sufficient sacrifice for sins accomplished at the cross by Jesus’ death.

*“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:5-6). Seven hundred years before Jesus died, God told us the plan of salvation. We could not pay for our own sins. Instead, God would send His Son who would bear the punishment that we deserved.

Concerning Jesus: *“When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”* (Hebrews 1:3). This says that Jesus, by HIMSELF, purged our sins. This took place on the cross and it is FINISHED!

*“And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance...For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another -- He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Hebrews 9:15, 24-26). The sins were put away by the sacrifice of Himself! It is finished!

*“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”* (Hebrews 10:10-12). It is finished!



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*“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Jesus is the One who takes away the sin and He did it on the cross!*

*“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins.... For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:13-14, 19-23). This passage applies only to true believers (the ones who continue not moved away from the hope of the gospel). But all who are “in Christ” have already received the remission of sins and are reconciled in the body of His flesh through His death. As a result, they are already holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight. Jesus’ death made them this way, not themselves! It was accomplished at the cross. It is finished!*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:3-7). All these blessings have already been bestowed upon us as sons. We are accepted in Christ. No mention here of additional punishment. Sounds like these “sons” are already fully acceptable to God because of what Jesus did for them by taking all their punishment already on the cross.*

This covenant of grace was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah: *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- <sup>32</sup> “not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34) In this covenant which was only possible through the sacrifice of Jesus, God tells us that He will remember their sin no more. He is not keeping track of it for later punishment. It was already paid for by the only One who was worthy to pay for it!*

Paul teaches that God was satisfied by the death of His Son. The sins were paid for. God’s wrath was appeased. *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:23-26). This payment was RIGHTEOUS. It and only it could make it possible for a person to come into God’s presence. A person is not righteous enough in himself to make payment that would satisfy God’s absolute righteousness. It had to be the blood of Jesus alone!*

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*“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:19 & 21). Because Jesus was “made sin” for us, we have become “the righteousness of God” in Him. (This assumes that we are truly “in Christ.”)*

*“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7). This truth only applies to those who are truly His disciples. These are the ones who walk in the light as He is in the light. But all of these have been cleansed already from all sin. It is finished! “Jesus was manifested to take away our sins (I John 3:5).*

*“From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5-6). We have already been washed from our sins in His blood. No need for further purging because Jesus’s blood and His blood alone is capable of cleansing us!*

According to Paul, there is nothing good that dwells within us, that is, within our flesh. (See Romans 7:18.) We bring nothing good that makes us acceptable to God. But because of what Jesus did, THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION toward those who are IN CHRIST (who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (See Romans 8:1.) Zero condemnation! Jesus paid it all!

It is because of all these things that Jesus could say to the thief on the cross, *“**Today you will be with me in paradise.**”* He would not have to undergo additional purging because Jesus was paying for his sins while He hung on the cross! The idea of Purgatory is completely contradictory to Jesus’ promise to the thief. In addition, Paul seemed to think that the moment he died, he would immediately begin enjoying eternity in the presence of Jesus. This thought caused him to prefer dying over continued living!<sup>3</sup> He thought that if he died, ***that day he would be with Jesus in Paradise.***

In summary, the Bible does not speak of any place of temporary punishment, the duration of which varies from Christian to Christian. The doctrine of Purgatory should be seen for what it is...another deception of Satan to get people’s attention off the thing that they should fear which is HELL, not Purgatory. But most important, the doctrine of Purgatory is also completely contradictory to the abundance of passages that talk about the all-sufficient payment that Jesus made by shedding His own blood for us. To suggest that we have to pay further is to deny the all-sufficient payment that Jesus made and it diminishes the value of His blood before the Father who accepted His payment as PAYMENT IN FULL! Any teaching that diminishes the efficacy of Jesus’ blood in this way is best described as ANTICHRIST!

### **Head’s up. Here is how it will actually go down:**

*"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.... "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:32-34, 41). Notice that there is no delay for either group. One group immediately inherits the Kingdom and the other group cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

Thomas Bear, June 23, 2019

Οὐαὶ μοί ἐστιν ἂν μὴ εὐαγγελίζωμαι (Προς Κορινθίους Α 9:16)

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<sup>3</sup> “To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:21-23).