

“Many are they who say of me, ‘there is no help for him in God.’” (Ps 3:2)

## ✠ Lecture VII: The Purgatory ✠

According to the Roman Catholic Church, purgatory (Lat., *‘purgare’*, to make clean, to purify) is a place or a condition of temporal punishment for those who died in a state of grace yet are not entirely free from lesser faults or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. The punishments in this alleged place is referred to as ‘purifying fire’ (Lat., *‘purgatorius ignis’*) and from which the term ‘purgatory’ derives. The Roman Church teaches that the vast majority of believers is neither good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell and thus is tormented in the purgatory to be purified and cleansed. The All Souls’ Day, in the Roman Church, is a day for commemoration of all the faithful departed, those baptized Christians who are believed to be suffering in purgatory because they have died with the guilt of lesser sins on their souls. It is celebrated on November 2, or on November 3 if November 2 is a Sunday. The Roman doctrine holds that the prayers of the faithful on earth will help ease the sufferings and help cleanse these souls in order to fit them for entering heaven. In what follows, we shall, by the grace of God, present the reasons why we reject the heresy of purgatory:

### **1. The purgatory contradicts the doctrine of Atonement and Redemption:**

The basic foundation of the doctrine of Atonement and Redemption is that human beings are totally incapable of satisfying the Divine Justice of God and thus God who is alone unlimited was Incarnate and provided us with unlimited atonement and forgiveness. The existence of a place of purifying sufferings for the believers implies that the blood of our Saviour was not enough to purify us in the first place.

- “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses us from all sin...** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleanses us from all unrighteousness.**” (1 Jn 1:7-9)
- “He is able to save **to the uttermost** those who come to God through Him...” (Heb 7:25)

If human sufferings were capable of satisfying the Divine Justice, then what was the need for Lord Jesus Christ’s Incarnation and death on the cross? Why didn’t God just increase the amount of suffering in purgatory or the period we spend there and then take us to heaven? Therefore, we totally reject any notion of satisfying the Divine justice through good works, asceticism, or punishments.

- “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...” (Rom 3:24)

### **2. The purgatory contradicts the good news of the Holy Gospel:**

The angel said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid, for I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk 2:10,11) – How are we supposed to rejoice if the Savior cannot save us from the torments and fire of the purgatory? How are we supposed to have a desire to depart and be with the Lord like St. Paul (Phil 1:23) while the flames of the purgatory are awaiting us? This explains the paranoiac question ‘Are you saved?’ of the Protestants who went out of the Roman Church.

### **3. The purgatory contradicts God’s Justice:**

St. Paul said that we “were bought at a price” (1 Cor 6:20). – This price is the precious blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who said on the cross “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). – The sufferings and torments in this alleged purgatory imply that the price of sins will be paid twice, which is in clear contradiction with the Divine Justice. Moreover, according to this doctrine, the purgatory is a place of torment of the spirits while the bodies are lying in the graves not feeling a thing. This also contradicts the Divine Justice because it implies punishing the spirit only and not the body that participated with it in committing the sin and may even have been the cause of it as “the flesh lusts against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17). – Also, how will the allegedly purged spirit be united with an un-purged body on the Last day?

#### **4. The purgatory contradicts God's Mercy:**

David the Prophet said, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Ps 51:7) He did not say 'purge me with fire, burn me in purgatory and I shall be clean.' Human nature is not purged with fire but rather with the grace of our merciful God and the work of His Holy spirit. Our Lord said, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Is 1:18) – This will not occur through the tormenting flames of purgatory after departing from this world but rather through the work of the Holy Spirit in repentance during this present life.

- "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from **all** your filthiness and from **all** your idols." (Ezek 36:25)

Purging is an act of mercy and grace not of punishment, it takes place here on earth not after death, and it is through clean water not tormenting flames of fire!

#### **5. The purgatory contradicts God's Promises:**

Through the precious blood of Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in repentance, God forgives our sins and no longer remembers them:

- "If a wicked man turns from all his sins ... none of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him ..." (Ezek 18:21,22)
- "... Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Col 2:14)

The purgatory implies that the spirits of the believers will have to suffer prior to going to heaven even though God has promised to forgive and forget their sins. Notice that in the parable of the creditor and the two debtors, which Lord Jesus Christ said to Simon the Pharisee, the creditor "freely forgave" both debtor; the one who owed five hundred denarii and the one who owed fifty because "they had nothing with which to repay" (Lk 7:42)

#### **6. The purgatory contradicts Holy Scriptures:**

The doctrine of purgatory does not possess any Scriptural basis but rather contradicts Holy Scriptures creating several theological problems:

- Our Lord said to the right thief, "Assuredly, I say to you, **today** you will be with Me in Paradise." (Lk 23:43) – Now, if this alleged purgatory indeed exists, why then didn't the thief go there?
- "And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus **we shall always be with the Lord.**" (1 Thess 4:16,17) – Here St. Paul describes the Last Day saying that those faithful who are still alive will meet the Lord with those who rise from the dead and then remain with Him always. Are these faithful exempt from purgatory? Is God showing partiality towards them?
- In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) we read about two places; one for comfort and the other for torment. Moreover, there is a great gulf fixed between the two that prevents people from moving from one place to the other. Now where is it mentioned that there is such a purgatory?
- The Roman Church falsely teaches that there is a 'particular' judgment that takes place after one's death during which the eternal fate is determined. The ungodly will be sent to hell, the saints will be sent to heaven and the majority of the faithful will be sent to purgatory to be tormented until they become worthy of entering heaven. Now this contradicts Holy Scripture that testifies that there is only one general judgment on the Last Day for all (Mt 16:27; 25:46; Jn 5:28,29; Rev 20:11-15)

‡ **FAQ:**

**Q1: St. Paul said, “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” (1 Cor 3:15) – Does this fire refer to the purgatory?**

**A1: No it does not for the following reasons:**

→ This fire is for works and not individuals “the fire will test each one’s work” (1 Cor 3:13).

→ This fire is for testing not tormenting.

→ This fire will be on the Last Day “for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire” (1 Cor 3:13) while the alleged fire of purgatory is supposedly prior to the Last Day.

→ This fire will cause loss “if anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss” (1 Cor 3:15) while the fire of purgatory allegedly purifies the faithful and prepares them to go to heaven.

→ The words “he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” signify that this person will be scarcely saved – “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?” (1 Pet 4:18) –

This symbolic fire brings to mind what was said about Joshua the high priest during his life on earth, “Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” (Zech 3:2)

**Q2: Our Lord said, “whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Mt 12:32) – What is the forgiveness in the age to come?**

**A2:** The forgiveness in the age to come applies to those who were wrongly excommunicated by the Church in this age also anyone who repents but for whatever reason could not confess and dies without hearing the forgiveness from the priest in this age. Their forgiveness will be declared or announced in the age to come.

**Q3: Our Lord said, “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” (Mt 5:25,26) – Is this prison the purgatory?**

**A3: No it is not.**

→ If our Lord’s words were taken literally, then they are referring to social dealings between people. Now, if they were interpreted symbolically they will not refer to purgatory either. Because all the Church fathers who interpreted this portion of the Sermon on the Mount symbolically did not refer to purgatory at all. The words “till you have paid the last penny” are interpreted as meaning “never” – Thus the Judge is God, the officer is an angel, and the prison is eternal hell. This is obvious from the parable of the unforgiving servant who owed his master ten thousand talents (Mt 18:24) and was not able to pay (Mt 18:25) yet in spite of being forgiven this huge debt, he did not have compassion on his fellow servant who owed him only a hundred denarii.

Thus his master “delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.” (Mt 18:34)

This parable was referring to the eternal punishment of those who do not forgive others and even though our Lord said, “until he should pay” we know that this is an impossibility because our Lord initially said, “he was not able to pay” (Mat 18:25) – Moreover, if this prison were purgatory, how will the spirit alone be able to pay the last penny without the body, which was the accomplice in committing sin?

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\* This lecture is adapted from ‘*Why Do We Reject Purgatory?*’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.