

## Five Common Myths About Purgatory

<https://www.churchpop.com/5-myths-about-purgatory-too-many-people-possibly-even-you-still-believe/>

It's probably safe to say that for most Protestant Christians, there are few doctrines more "Catholic" than Purgatory. Unfortunately, most people's understanding of Purgatory is fraught with myths and misconceptions.

First, here's how the Catechism describes Purgatory: "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.

"This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, mentioned in Sacred Scripture... From the beginning, the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead..." (CCC 1030-1032)

Now here are five of the most common myths about Purgatory:

### **Myth 1: Purgatory is a second chance at salvation**

**Truth:** At death, a person's eternal destiny is sealed: he will either spend eternity in heaven or hell. Purgatory is a temporary place that people who are already assured of heaven may go to in order to prepare for heaven. So, once in Purgatory, a person can't alter their eternal destiny – there are no second chances after death.

### **Myth 2: Purgatory isn't in the Bible**

**Truth:** In 1 Cor. 3, Saint Paul describes a period after death, but before heaven, in which a Christian is purified with fire. That's Purgatory.

There is other biblical evidence, to name two: In Matt. 12, Jesus mentions the possibility of sins being forgiven after death, and in 2 Macc. 12, the practice of praying for the dead (a practice Purgatory makes sense of) is commended. (For more, see [this great article by Catholic Answers.](#))

### **Myth 3: Purgatory is a way of being saved apart from Christ**

**Truth:** As already mentioned, Purgatory is only for people who have died in friendship with Christ and are assured of heaven. Further, the purifying process of Purgatory is only through the grace of Jesus Christ. So rather than being something in competition with Christ, Purgatory is an occasion for the grace of Christ.

### **Myth 4: Indulgences are a way of buying salvation**

**Truth:** An indulgence is something granted by the Church that limits or removes a person's need for Purgatory after death. Indulgences do not, however, determine whether a person goes to heaven or hell.

Further, while historically there have been abuses regarding indulgences, the Catholic Church considers the selling of spiritual things ([simony](#)) a sin.

### **Myth 5: Praying for the dead is a late medieval corruption of the faith**

**Truth:** Actually, the Jews practiced praying for the dead prior to Jesus, as recorded in 2 Macc. 12. The Early Church [also practiced it.](#)

## The Catechism of the Catholic Church on "Purgatory:"

1031. "The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. [Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1304; Council of Trent (1563): DS 1820; (1547): 1580; see also Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (1336): DS 1000.] The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire. [Cf. 1 Cor 3:15; 1 Pet 1:7.] As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come. [St. Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 4, 39: PL 77, 396; cf. Mt 12:32-36.]"

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. [Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712-1713; (1563): 1820.]"

### Canon 30 from the Council of Trent's Decree on Justification (Sixth Session, 1547)

<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/trent/sixth-session.htm>

30. If anyone says that after the grace of justification has been received the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out for any repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be paid, either in this world or in the other, in purgatory, before access can be opened to the kingdom of heaven, anathema sit ["let him be anathema" or excommunicated].

### New Advent – Purgatorial Fire <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12575a.htm>

At the [Council of Florence](#), [Bessarion](#) argued against the [existence](#) of real purgatorial fire, and the Greeks were assured that the [Roman Church](#) had never issued any [dogmatic decree](#) on this subject. In the [West](#) the [belief in the existence](#) of real fire is common. [Augustine](#) (*Enarration on Psalm 37, no. 3*) speaks of [the pain which purgatorial fire causes as more severe than anything a man can suffer in this life](#), "gravior erit ignis quam quidquid potest homo pati in hac vita" (P.L., col. 397). [Gregory the Great](#) speaks of those who after this life "will expiate their faults by purgatorial flames," and he adds "that the pain be more intolerable than any one can suffer in this life" (Ps. 3 poenit., n. 1). Following in the footsteps of [Gregory](#), [St. Thomas](#) teaches (IV, dist. xxi, q. i, a.1) that besides the separation of the [soul from the sight of God](#), there is the other punishment from fire. "Una poena damni, in quantum scilicet retardantur a divina visione; alia sensus secundum quod ab igne punientur", and [St. Bonaventure](#) not only agrees with [St. Thomas](#) but adds (IV, dist. xx, p.1, a.1, q. ii) that [this punishment by fire is more severe than any punishment which comes to men in this life](#); "Gravior est omni temporali poena. quam modo sustinet anima carni conjuncta". [How this fire affects the souls of the departed the Doctors do not know](#), and in such matters it is well to heed the warning of the [Council of Trent](#) when it commands the [bishops](#) "to exclude from their preaching difficult and subtle questions which tend not to edification", and from the discussion of which there is no increase either in [piety](#) or [devotion](#)" (Sess. XXV, "De Purgatorio").

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### **Summary of what St. Thomas Aquinas says about purgatory:**

**St. Thomas Aquinas** believed that purgatory is a place of cleansing for believers who die with sin in their souls. He described purgatory as having two types of pain:

- **Pain of loss:** The delay of the Beatific Vision
- **Pain of sense:** Punishment by fire
- **Pain of purgatory is greater than pain of life:** Aquinas believed that the least pain of purgatory is greater than the greatest pain of life. He explained that the more a person desires something, the more painful it is to be absent from it.
- **Purgatory's fire is the same as hell's fire:** Aquinas believed that the fire of purgatory is the same as the fire of hell, but the damned are consigned to a lower place because they are of lower merit.
- **Souls in purgatory are not tormented by demons:** Aquinas believed that souls in purgatory are not tormented by demons because they have resisted demonic temptation in life.
- **Prayers for the dead are acceptable to God:** Aquinas believed that prayers for the dead are acceptable to God because the dead need them and cannot help themselves.
- **The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the most effective way to help souls in purgatory:** Aquinas believed that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the most effective way to help souls in purgatory.