

Penance and Purgatory

- Now we return to the third part of Penance – Satisfaction.
- 1459 Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.⁶² Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

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- From Catholic Answers at catholic.com:
- We normally focus on the eternal penalties of sin, because they are the most important, but Scripture indicates temporal penalties are real and go back to the first sin humans committed: "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children (Gen. 3:16).
- Protestants misunderstand Catholic teachings as though they were created out of whole cloth without some appeal to Scripture - that's rarely the case, rather it's a misunderstanding of Scripture.

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- “When someone repents, God removes his guilt (Is. 1:18) and any eternal punishment (Rom. 5:9), but temporal penalties may remain. One passage demonstrating this is 2 Samuel 12, in which Nathan the prophet confronts David over his adultery:”
- "Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan answered David: ‘The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin; you shall not die. But since you have utterly spurned the Lord by this deed, the child born to you must surely die’" (2 Sam. 12:13-14). God forgave David but David still had to suffer the loss of his son as well as other temporal punishments (2 Sam. 12:7-12). (For other examples, see: Numbers 14:13-23; 20:12; 27:12-14.)”

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- Remember that most of the Reformers, including Luther, were priests familiar with these arguments. Here is what our Confessions say in response:
- They oppose the example of Adam, and also of David, who was punished for his adultery. From these examples they derive the universal rule that peculiar temporal punishments in the remission of sins correspond to individual sins. 59] It has been said before that saints suffer punishments, which are works of God; they suffer contrition or terrors, they also suffer other common afflictions. Thus, for example, some suffer punishments of their own that have been imposed by God. And these punishments pertain in no way to the keys, because the keys neither can impose nor remit them, but God, without the ministry of the keys, imposes and remits them [as He will].

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- Confessions continued: “Neither does the universal rule follow: Upon David a peculiar punishment was imposed, therefore, in addition to common afflictions, there is another punishment of purgatory, in which each degree corresponds to each sin. 60] Where does Scripture teach that we cannot be freed from eternal death except by the compensation of certain punishments in addition to common afflictions? But, on the other hand, it most frequently teaches that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ's sake, that Christ is the Victor of sin and death. Therefore the merit of satisfaction is not to be patched upon this. And although afflictions still remain, yet Scripture interprets these as the mortifications of present sin [to kill and humble the old Adam], and not as the compensations of eternal death or as prices for eternal death.”

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- Catholic Answers: “In the early Church, penances were sometimes severe. For serious sins, such as apostasy, murder, and abortion, the penances could stretch over years, but the Church recognized that repentant sinners could shorten their penances by pleasing God through pious or charitable acts that expressed sorrow and a desire to make up for one’s sin.”
- Catechism of the RCC: 1460 The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him."63

Penance and Purgatory – Reformers' Response

- Apology continued: They bring forward such passages as these: Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance, Matt. 3:8; Mark 1:15. Again: Yield your members servants to righteousness, Rom. 6:19. Again, Christ preaches repentance, Matt. 4:17: Repent. Again, Christ Luke 24:47, commands the apostles to preach repentance, and Peter preaches repentance, Acts 2:38.
- The Scriptures cited by the adversaries speak in no way of canonical satisfactions...We say that good fruits, good works in every kind of life, ought to follow repentance, i.e., conversion or regeneration [the renewal of the Holy Ghost in the heart].

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- Apology continued: Neither can there be true conversion or true contrition where mortifications of the flesh and good fruits do not follow [if we do not externally render good works and Christian patience]...In a word, there is no inner repentance unless it also produces outwardly mortifications of the flesh.
- We say also that this is the meaning of John when he says, Matt. 3:8: Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. Likewise of Paul when he says, Rom. 6:19: Yield your members servants to righteousness; just as he likewise says elsewhere, Rom. 12:1: Present your bodies a living sacrifice, etc. And when Christ says, Matt. 4:17: Repent, He certainly speaks of the entire repentance, of the entire newness of life and its fruits; He does not speak of those hypocritical satisfactions which, the scholastics imagine, avail for compensating the punishment of purgatory or other punishments

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- Apology continued: Besides, the death of Christ is a satisfaction not only for guilt, but also for eternal death, according to Hos. 13:14: O death, I will be thy death. How monstrous, therefore, it is to say that the satisfaction of Christ redeemed from the guilt, and our punishments redeem from eternal death; as the expression, I will be thy death, ought then to be understood, not concerning Christ, but concerning our works, and, indeed, not concerning the works commanded by God, but concerning some frigid observances devised by men!

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- Purgatory pertains to this third section alone (satisfaction or penances) and Indulgences are an outgrowth of it.
- From New Advent, the Catholic Encyclopedia:
- Purgatory (Lat., "purgare", to make clean, to purify) in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.

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- 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.⁸³

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- The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Indulgences:
- 1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.
- "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."⁸¹
- "An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin."⁸² Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead.

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- The Church recognized the duration of temporal punishments could be lessened through the involvement of other persons who had pleased God.
- From the beginning the Church recognized the validity of praying for the dead so that their transition into heaven (via purgatory) might be swift and smooth. This meant praying for the lessening or removal of temporal penalties holding them back from the full glory of heaven. For this reason the Church teaches that "indulgences can always be applied to the dead by way of prayer.
- In the Old Testament, Judah Maccabee finds the bodies of soldiers who died wearing superstitious amulets during one of the Lord's battles. Judah and his men "turned to prayer, beseeching that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out" (2 Macc. 12:42).

- 38 After the battle Judas led his men to the town of Adullam. It was the day before the Sabbath, so they purified themselves according to Jewish custom and then observed the holy day. 39 By the following day it was urgent that they gather up the bodies of the men who had been killed in battle and bury them in their family tombs. 40 But on each of the dead, hidden under their clothes, they found small images of the gods worshiped in Jamnia, which the Law forbids Jews to wear. Everyone then knew why these men had been killed. 41 So they praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge, who reveals what is hidden, 42 and they begged him that this sin might be completely blotted out. Then, Judas, that great man, urged the people to keep away from sin, because they had seen for themselves what had happened to those men who had sinned. 43 He also took up a collection from all his men, totaling about four pounds of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. Judas did this noble thing because he believed in the resurrection of the dead. 44 If he had not believed that the dead would be raised, it would have been foolish and useless to pray for them. 45 In his firm and devout conviction that all of God's faithful people would receive a wonderful reward, Judas made provision for a sin offering to set free from their sin those who had died.

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- The reference to the sin being "wholly blotted out" refers to its temporal penalties. The author of 2 Maccabees tells us that for these men Judah "was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness" (verse 45); he believed that these men fell asleep in godliness, which would not have been the case if they were in mortal sin. If they were not in mortal sin, then they would not have eternal penalties to suffer, and thus the complete blotting out of their sin must refer to temporal penalties for their superstitious actions. Judah "took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this . . . he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin" (verses 43, 46).

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- The Communion of Saints: 1474 The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."⁸⁵
- 1475 In the communion of saints, "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things."⁸⁶ In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

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- 1476 We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the Church's treasury, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."87
- 1477 "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.

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- Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church
- 1478 An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.⁸⁹
- 1479 Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.

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- Earlier I said that Protestants often mistakenly assume that Rome created its doctrine out of whole cloth without reference to Scripture.
- However, in the case of the Treasury of Merit and the Invocation of the Saints I can't find any connection with Scripture. The best I was able to find was the belief that when our Lord said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal," (Mat 6:19-20) these treasures are the treasures of the saints that the church distributes through indulgences.

Penance and Purgatory Reformers' Response

- Our Confession approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised, who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful business-men, 5] Matt. 25:21, 23. The second service is the strengthening of our faith; when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace 6] truly superabounds over sin, Rom. 5:20. The third honor is the imitation, first, of faith, then of the other virtues, which every one should imitate according to his calling. 7] These true honors the adversaries do not require. They dispute only concerning invocation, which, even though it would have no danger, nevertheless is not necessary.

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- Moreover, even supposing that the saints pray for the Church ever so much, 10] yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked; although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid. But since neither a command, nor a promise, nor an example can be produced from the Scriptures concerning the invocation of saints, it follows that conscience can have nothing concerning this invocation that is certain. And since prayer ought to be made from faith, how do we know that God approves this invocation? Whence do we know without the testimony of Scripture that the saints perceive the prayers of each one?

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- Again, the adversaries not only require invocation in the worship of the saints, but also apply the merits of the saints to others, and make of the saints not only intercessors, but also propitiators. This is in no way to be endured. For here the honor belonging only to Christ is altogether transferred to the saints. For they make them mediators and propitiators, and although they make a distinction between mediators of intercession and mediators [the Mediator] of redemption, yet they plainly make of the saints mediators of redemption. 15] But even that they are mediators of intercession they declare without the testimony of Scripture, which, be it said ever so reverently, nevertheless obscures Christ's office, and transfers the confidence of mercy due Christ to the saints.

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- Here the adversaries first bid us invoke the saints, although they have neither God's promise, nor a command, nor an example from Scripture. And yet they cause greater confidence in the mercy of the saints to be conceived than in that of Christ, although Christ bade us come to Him [22] and not to the saints. Secondly, they apply the merits of the saints, just as the merits of Christ, to others; they bid us trust in the merits of the saints as though we were accounted righteous on account of the merits of the saints, in like manner as we are accounted righteous by the merits of Christ...But where has this arrangement, to which he refers when he says that we ought to resort to the aid of the saints, been instituted by God? Let him produce an example or command from the Scriptures.

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- For we obtain remission of sins only by the merits of Christ, when we believe in Him. Of the other saints it has been said, 1 Cor. 3:8: Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor, i.e., they cannot mutually bestow their own merits, the one upon the other, as the monks sell the merits of their orders. 30] Even Hilary says of the foolish virgins: And as the foolish virgins could not go forth with their lamps extinguished, they besought those who were prudent to lend them oil; to whom they replied that they could not give it because peradventure there might not be enough for all; i.e., no one can be aided by the works and merits of another, because it is necessary for every one to buy oil for his own lamp. [Here he points out that none of us can aid another by other people's works or merits.]

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- So there are several problems with Purgatory and Indulgences for the Reformers in the Middle Ages and Biblical Christians today:
- First, the biblical evidence for Purgatory is thin at best (1 Cor 3 does not appear to be talking about our works that will be consumed by fire [purged] but false teaching).
- Secondly, even if there was a purgatory we see no biblical evidence for the merits of some being applicable to others (the foolish and wise virgins).
- Finally, even if the saints do pray for the church we have no command or promise from Scripture that we should invoke them or expect any good from them, unlike the promises attached to prayer in Jesus Name.