

Early Church Fathers and Jewish Teaching on Purgatory 1 of 3



November 8, 2019

Lord, this has been such a dark and controversial subject. And now, You have spoken words of advice and encouragement for those of us who were not taught what the first Apostles believed. Dear Lord, help us repent today, and not put off our conversion any longer. Amen.

And when I talk about repenting today, I'm not talking just about salvation. I'm talking about the things that we still do that we know we shouldn't be doing.

My dearest family, the Lord has asked me to share the traditions of the Jews and the Early Christians, and some of the current-day liturgical churches. The practice of praying for the dead. And here's another place where we've been ripped off by people starting their own churches, and re-doing doctrine and deciding to leave things out, because it didn't suit their agenda.

So, this is NOT about becoming Catholic. This is about becoming authentically First Century Christians. Christians according to the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers. Teachings according to those who canonized the Scriptures. These are the earliest teachers closest to the Lord. And for that reason, we're going back into Jewish tradition, as well.

When I was an Evangelical, I was always wondering: 'How does one get to Heaven when they have lived a life of sin, and convert only in the last moments?' I understand that Jesus paid the price to redeem us and opened the gates of Heaven by His death on the Cross. But how does a man or woman, with a long-life habit and pattern of sin, act when they get to Heaven? I mean, these things are ingrained. Your reactions are ingrained. And your personality.

And it takes time to turn those things around. How do you do it? It is just a Grace that you get in a twinkling of an eye? And you don't have to worry about it anymore; you're perfect now? Or is there more to it than that? Is Will involved? Applying yourself. Is that involved?

So, true. The Lord paid the price for our sins, they are under the Blood, the ones we've confessed. But we still have a tendency towards sin. And in order to get rid of that tendency, there must be something the Lord can do for us, before we get to Heaven and are embarrassed by our thoughts. Because everyone in Heaven can read your thoughts.

So, it made complete sense to me when I first heard about Purgatory, because the Lord said, *"Make every effort to reconcile with your adversary while you are on your way to the magistrate. (Thinking and looking at the magistrate as being the Lord Himself. And the courts of Heaven.) Otherwise, he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and the officer may throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the very last penny."* Luke 12:58-59 and the Lord speaking.

While this Scripture is not explicitly talking about the last Judgement, it certainly causes us to pause and consider that we will stand before a righteous God. And if we have not repented of certain sins, there will be consequences.

Another place in Scripture that talks about purifying fires is where Paul says:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

"Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." I Corinthians 3:10-15

Wow. That's a very, very, very strong statement. For the purifying fires that take place between Earth and Heaven. Or our final abode in Heaven.

These Scriptures point to a refining fire before the Judge of Heaven and Earth. Not the fires of Hell, which are reserved for Satan and his demons and those who consort with demons. But the fires of purification where our works and motives are weighed in the balance, to see if they are built on Truth.

In other words, you could be a wonderful preacher, but if you're doing it to make money, or to receive acclaim and be famous. If you're doing it for that motive. If any earthly thing is a motive for you preaching the Gospel--it's gonna be burned in the fire. The words will never be burnt, the Lord's words don't go forth without being fulfilled. So, the purity of the Word will go forth, but your motives will cause that to be burnt up, as far as what is coming to you for the service that you rendered the Lord on Earth.

I continue to go back to the Early Church and what the first Apostles believed, as well as the Jews upon whose faith the Lord continued to build. Wow is it interesting! It's really interesting, the way the Jews look at things. And I'm gonna read some quotes to you. Some of them came from Wikipedia and some of them came from the Douay-Rheims Bible. And from the Church Fathers, like Tertullian.

So, the Lord began this morning by saying, *"Praying for the dead was NEVER disputed in the Early Church."*

Wow. What a statement. "Praying for the dead was NEVER disputed in the Early Church." What happened?

After He said that, I looked up the Church Father's teaching during the first five centuries after Christ. The evidence is overwhelming that prayers were offered for the dead.

One of the Scriptural proofs was in the Book of Maccabees, which was removed from the canon.

2 Maccabees 12:46 from the Douay-Rheims The 1899 American Edition states: It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.

Now. We could argue that was before the Lord died on the Cross and rose from the dead. That was before the complete forgiveness of sin. But still, there are repercussions with our sins. And the repercussions themselves have to be worked out.

Here is what I found.

"Prayer for the dead is well documented within early Christianity, both among prominent Church Fathers and the Christian community in general. In Eastern Orthodoxy, Christians pray for 'such souls as have departed with faith, but without having had time to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance'".

What did John the Baptist say? "Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance."

"Among Church writers, Tertullian" (and he's a giant. And absolute giant as far as the Church Fathers goes. And was so faithful during so many times of heresies that were floating around. And he was persecuted for it, as well.)

"Among the church writers, Tertullian is the first to mention prayers for the dead: 'The widow who does not pray for her dead husband has as good as divorced him'. This passage occurs in one of his later writings, dating from the beginning of the 3rd century.

"Subsequent writers similarly make mention of the practice as prevalent, not as unlawful or even disputed until Arias challenged it towards the end of the 4th century."

You've probably heard the name Arias, from the 4th century as being a schismatic and a heretic. When he was. He did not believe in the Triune God. He did not believe in the Trinity. He did not believe that Jesus was God. He said that Jesus had a beginning to His life, and therefore He was not God.

So "This caused a serious division in Constantine's reign. The most famous instance is Saint Augustine's prayer for his diseased mother, Monica, at the end of the 9th book of his Confessions, written around 398 AD."

And of course, Augustine is also one of the Church Fathers, and had quite an amazing conversion from what he was living in in Rome.

This article goes on to say, "An important element in the Christian liturgies, both East and West, consisted of diptychs, or lists of names of living and dead, commemorated at the Lord's Supper. To be inserted in these lists was a confirmation of one's orthodoxy, and out of the practice grew the official canonization of Saints; on the other hand, removal of a name from a diptych was a condemnation."

So, there were lists of people that were prayed for at Mass, or at the Lord's Supper. And some of them had gone on to be with the Lord.

"Although it is not possible, as a rule, to name dates for the exact words used in the ancient liturgies, yet the universal occurrence of these diptychs and of definite prayers for the dead in all parts of the Christian Church, East and West, in the 4th and 5th centuries shows how primitive such prayers were. The language used in the prayers for the departed is asking for rest and freedom from pain and sorrow."

So, obviously they are not in Heaven, or there would be no pain and sorrow.

"A passage from the Liturgy of St James, composed in the fourth century, reads: "Remember, O Lord, the God of Spirits and of all Flesh, those whom we have remembered and those whom we have not remembered, men of the true faith, from righteous Abel unto to-day; do thou thyself give them rest there in the land of the living, in thy kingdom, in the delight of Paradise, in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, our holy fathers, from whence pain and sorrow and sighing have fled away, where the light of thy countenance visiteth them and always shineth upon them."

Wow. So, it's obvious that it wasn't just taken as just automatic that you would go straight to Heaven when you died. Unless you were martyred. That is the teaching.

"Public prayers were only offered for those who were believed to have died as faithful members of the Church. But Saint Perpetua, who was martyred in 202AD, believed herself to have been encouraged in a vision to pray for her brother, who had died in his eighth year, almost certainly unbaptized; and a later vision assured her that her prayer was answered and he had been translated from punishment.

"Eastern and Oriental Orthodox believe in the possibility of situation change for the souls of the dead through the prayers of the living and reject the term 'purgatory'. Prayer for the dead is encouraged in the belief that it is helpful for them, although how the prayers of the faithful help the departed is not elucidated. Eastern Orthodox simply believe that tradition teaches that prayers should be made for the dead.

"Saint Basil the Great (379), writes in his Third Kneeling Prayer at Pentecost: 'O Christ our God...on this all-perfect and saving Feast, art graciously pleased to accept propitiatory prayers for those who lay imprisoned in hades, promising unto us who are held in bondage great hope of release from the vileness that doth hinder us and did hinder them ... Send down Thy consolation... and establish their souls in the mansions of the Just; and graciously vouchsafe unto them peace and pardon; for not the dead shall praise thee, O Lord, neither shall they who are in Hell make bold to offer unto thee confession. But we who are living will bless thee, and will pray, and offer unto thee propitiatory prayers and sacrifices for their souls.'

"Saint Gregory in his famous Dialogues (written in 593) teaches that, "The Holy Sacrifice (the Eucharist) of Christ, (or the Lord's Supper) our saving Victim, brings great benefits to souls even after death, provided their sins are such as can be pardoned in the life to come.' However, St. Gregory goes on to say, the Church's practice of prayer for the dead must not be an excuse for not living a godly life on Earth.

"In the West, there is ample evidence of the custom of praying for the dead in the inscriptions of the catacombs."

And this is... The Catacombs are a tremendously reliable source of the early practice of the Christians. They have the Lord's Supper, women celebrating the Lord's Supper in the catacombs. And they have the diptychs, the lists of people to be prayed for at Mass, or the Lord's Supper.

Anyway.

"The custom of praying for the dead in the inscriptions of the catacombs, with their constant prayers for the peace and refreshment of the souls of the departed and in the early liturgies, which commonly contain

commemorations of the dead; and Tertullian, Cyprian and other early Western Fathers witness to the regular practice of praying for the dead among the early Christians."

End of Part 1 of 3

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