

Wednesday Night Apologetics: Topic #2 – Confession and Purgatory

Confession

Definition of Confession:

The sacrament instituted by Christ by which those who fall into sin after Baptism may be restored to God's Grace.

Biblical Support:

John 20:19-23 – On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

- Why would Jesus give this authority to forgive or retain a person's sins, if He didn't expect them to use it?

Some other Scriptures:

1 Cor 5:3 – St. Paul uses his authority to forgive sins.

2 Cor 2:10 – Same as above

Why not go straight to God?

- You should go straight to God as soon as you are aware of any sin, but you MUST go to confession to be absolved of mortal sin.

What is mortal sin? (1 John 5:16-17)

- Sin that causes you to lose sanctifying grace
- Three conditions must be met for a sin to be a mortal sin: CCC 1857
 - 1) Grave matter – As defined in Mark 10:19 (breaks a commandment)
 - 2) Full knowledge – You know that the act is sinful
 - 3) Deliberate consent – You made a personal choice to do the sinful act.
- Ignorance/Passion/Mental States can diminish culpability

The Value of Confession

- 1) Allows us to meet Christ and receive his word that we are forgiven
- 2) There is value in the act of admitting guilt to another human being
- 3) There is value in hearing that we are forgiven – if you “only tell your sins to God” how positive are you that you are forgiven? When you go to Confession, you hear the words from Christ through the Priest, “I absolve you of your sins.”
- 4) Gives us strength to avoid sin in the future – we receive God's Grace which helps battle the temptations to sin again.

Purgatory

Definition:

A temporary state of purification after death.

Biblical Support:

2 Maccabees 12:38-46 – Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the

resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.

- If there was only Heaven and hell why would we pray for the dead? Those in Heaven are without sin, and they need no prayers. Those in hell are damned forever, so praying for them would not be meritorious whatsoever. Since there is no need to pray for souls in Heaven or hell, there must be another state where souls can use prayers from those on earth to be loosed from their sins.

(It is worth noting here that 2 Maccabees is one of seven books of the bible, known as the deuterocanonical books, that are excluded in Protestant bibles. A little history about this can be found at the end of this document.)

Rev. 21:27 – Nothing unclean will enter Heaven.

- One sin on your soul at death means that you are unclean. If it is a mortal sin, you go to hell. If it is a venial sin, you go to Purgatory until you are purified.

Some other Scriptures:

1 Cor 3:12-15 – “the person will be saved, but only as through fire.”

1 Peter 1:7 – “tested by fire.”

Luke 12:59 ; Matt 5:26 – “you will not be released until you pay the last penny.”

Matt 31:32 – “Blasphemy...will not be forgiven in this age or the age to come.”

1 John 5:16-17 – Clearly states that there are sins that are mortal (deadly) and sins that are not mortal.

Why is there a Purgatory if my sins were forgiven when I went to Confession?

Sin has a double consequence:

- 1) Eternal Punishment – Grave sin deprives us of communion with God. Eternal punishment means going to hell. If we die in a state of unrepentant mortal sin, we would go to hell.
 - 2) Temporal Punishment – All sin, even venial sins, entails an unhealthy attachment to earthly things which must be purified either here on earth or in Purgatory.
- If I stab you in the heart with a knife you will die unless your wound is healed. After surgery you live, but the scar and side effects from the wound remains. Purgatory is the state where all the “scars” from our healed souls are purified and removed.
 - A perfect analogy is to think of a bowl filled with water. This represents our souls filled with God’s Sanctifying Grace. When we commit a mortal sin, it is like a huge crack in our bowls (souls) that drains all of the water (God’s Grace) out. Confession is like putting super glue on the crack and refilling our bowls back up with water. The glue holds the crack firm and no water escapes, but nevertheless the bowl is still cracked. Purgatory is the state where the bowl is put back in the kiln and refined to where the crack disappears entirely. There are no cracks – no scars – allowed in Heaven! Nothing unclean will enter!

What is Purgatory like?

The Church does not say that purgatory is a place that can be located, like the moon is a place that we can see and we know where it is. Neither does the Church say that there is a physical fire as we understand fire to be. Sometimes the souls in Purgatory are depicted as being tortured or Purgatory itself is likened to a “temporary hell.” But with this line of thinking it is easily overlooked that the souls in Purgatory are assured of salvation and that they are actually closer to God than we are!

The Baltimore Catechism has an excellent explanation of Purgatory:

“Love is purified, increased and perfected by suffering. This means not only bodily pain, but crosses of all kinds. God sends everyone all the sufferings they need on earth to cleanse, strengthen and perfect their love, but most people waste their sufferings. They don’t want them, complain about them, and try to escape them in any manner possible, even by committing sin. Because of this, the fires of their suffering is unable to perfect their love. Then they must go to Purgatory.”

Suffering now takes on new meaning. Instead of it being a hindrance, we can and should embrace our sufferings as a way to perfect our love.

Indulgences

Definition:

A remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.

Biblical Support:

Matt 16:19 – Christ gives Peter the keys to Heaven and the power to bind and loose.

1 Colossians 1:24 – Suffering for the sake of others.

1 Cor. 12:12-27 – We are all one body: when one suffers we all suffer; one rejoices we all rejoice.

At first, you may not understand how these verses refer to an indulgence. But since these verses speak of suffering for others and how we are all together in our joys and in our sufferings, we can begin to see how indulgences apply, particularly to the souls in Purgatory.

Here is a good place to address a common misconception about indulgences. One never could "buy" indulgences. The financial scandal around indulgences, the scandal that gave Martin Luther an excuse for his heterodoxy, involved alms— indulgences in which the giving of alms to some charitable fund or foundation was used as the occasion to grant the indulgence. There was no outright selling of indulgences. The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

"[I]t is easy to see how abuses crept in. Among the good works which might be encouraged by being made the condition of an indulgence, almsgiving would naturally hold a conspicuous place. . . It is well to observe that in these purposes there is nothing essentially evil. To give money to God or to the poor is a praiseworthy act, and, when it is done from right motives, it will surely not go unrewarded."

Types of indulgences

- 1) Partial Indulgence – Removes a part of temporal punishment
- 2) Plenary Indulgence – Removes all temporal punishment

How to gain a plenary indulgence:

- 1) Perform the work to which the indulgence is attached. (For a complete listing of indulgenced acts visit: <http://www.ourladywarriors.org/indulge/>)
- 2) Confession within 8 days of indulgenced act
- 3) Communion within 8 days of indulgenced act
- 4) Prayer for the Holy Father’s intentions (fully satisfied by reciting one Our Father and one Hail Mary; nevertheless, each one is free to recite any other prayer according to his piety and devotion) within 8 days of indulgenced act
- 5) All attachment to sin – even venial sin – must be absent.

*If any of the above conditions are absent, the indulgence is partial.

Indulgences can be applied to yourself, or to the souls in Purgatory for the removal of part or all temporal punishment. As you can see from the fifth condition, it is pretty difficult to achieve a plenary indulgence, since we are almost always attached to at least venial sins every day, much less for eight days. However, there are ways to increase your chances for obtaining a plenary indulgence. The best way is to plan on going to confession immediately before Mass. Before Mass and confession, perform the indulgenced act.

After performing your penance pray for the Holy Father's intentions. Hopefully Mass will start shortly thereafter and you will be so caught up in the Mass that you will not have any attachment to sin whatsoever. After receiving the Eucharist you will hopefully will have also gained a plenary indulgence for yourself or for a soul in Purgatory.

We should offer our prayers, sufferings, and especially any indulgences that we may gain throughout the day for the souls in Purgatory. When we pray for the souls in Purgatory, we not only help that soul, we help ourselves. Once that soul leaves Purgatory, we have one more Saint in Heaven to help those of us on earth.

A Brief Discussion on the Old Testament Canon

In Jesus' time, there were two versions of what we now call the Old Testament. One is the Hebrew and the other is the Septuagint. During the first century, the Jews disagreed as to what constituted the canon of Scripture. In fact, there were a large number of different canons in use, including the growing canon used by Christians. In order to combat the spreading Christian cult, rabbis met at the city of Jamnia or Javneh in A.D. 90 to determine which books were truly the Word of God. They pronounced many books, including the Gospels, to be unfit as scriptures. This canon also excluded seven books (Baruch, Sirach, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, and the Wisdom of Solomon, plus portions of Esther and Daniel) that Christians considered part of the Old Testament. The group of Jews which met at Javneh became the dominant group for later Jewish history, and today most Jews accept the canon of Javneh. However, some Jews, such as those from Ethiopia, follow a different canon which is identical to the Catholic Old Testament and includes the seven deuterocanonical books (cf. Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 6, p. 1147).

Needless to say, the Church disregarded the results of Javneh. First, a Jewish council after the time of Christ is not binding on the followers of Christ. Second, Javneh rejected precisely those documents which are foundational for the Christian Church—the Gospels and the other documents of the New Testament. Third, by rejecting the deuterocanonicals, Javneh rejected books which had been used by Jesus and the apostles and which were in the edition of the Bible that the apostles used in everyday life—the Septuagint. The Christian acceptance of the deuterocanonical books was logical because the deuterocanonicals were also included in the Septuagint, the Greek edition of the Old Testament which the apostles used to evangelize the world. Two thirds of the Old Testament quotations in the New are from the Septuagint. One example is Hebrews 11:35 which cites a story only told in 2 Maccabees 7.

The deuterocanonicals teach Catholic doctrine, and for this reason they were taken out of the Old Testament by Martin Luther and placed in an appendix without page numbers. Luther also took out four New Testament books—Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation—and put them in an appendix without page numbers as well. These were later put back into the New Testament by other Protestants, but the seven books of the Old Testament were left out. Following Luther they had been left in an appendix to the Old Testament, and eventually the appendix itself was dropped (in 1827 by the British and Foreign Bible Society), which is why these books are not found at all in most contemporary Protestant Bibles, though they were appendicized in classic Protestant translations such as the King James Version.

To justify this rejection of books that had been in the Bible since before the days of the apostles (for the Septuagint was written before the apostles), the early Protestants cited as their chief reason the fact that the Jews of their day did not honor these books, going back to the council of Javneh in A.D. 90. But the Reformers were aware of only European Jews; they were unaware of African Jews, such as the Ethiopian Jews who accept the deuterocanonicals as part of their Bible. They glossed over the references to the deuterocanonicals in the New Testament, as well as its use of the Septuagint.