

PROJECT TITLE: HOPE AFTER DEATH  
PROGRAM TITLE: PURGATORY  
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Six hundred years ago two German monks got into a squabble that changed the Christian world forever. Historians call that squabble the Protestant Reformation. It split the Catholic world and eventually spawned hundreds of denominations and churches. Most of them are still separated from the Church of Rome to this day.

The affair was driven by money. The church needed to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and it was a very expensive project. The whole deal ended in disaster for the church.

One of the monks, Johann Tetzel, was the pope's head fundraiser in Germany. The other was Martin Luther, a professor at the university in Wittenberg.

Tetzel preached powerful sermons that ended with strong appeals for money. Like many preachers even today, he used guilt and fear to motivate his listeners. His favorite topic was Purgatory, a church teaching that is still controversial to this very day.

In Catholic teaching, Purgatory is an intermediate place, or maybe more of an intermediate experience, that happens after death. Basically, it's for good people who die without adequate preparation for life with God in heaven.

Tetzel described it as a place of purification through agony and torment. He reminded his audiences that their departed loved ones were there in Purgatory, serving their terms in anguish and pain. But there was GOOD news. Tetzel was selling indulgences.

What's an indulgence? It's a blessing the Church of Rome confers upon its members. It cancels or at least reduces some poor soul's sentence in Purgatory. Tetzel had an unlimited supply of indulgences on sale – for a price. He claimed that every time someone dropped a coin in the money box, a soul flew out of Purgatory.

Now, about that other monk, Martin Luther. When he heard what Tetzel was doing, he was horrified. Tetzel was beguiling faithful believers, firing up their worst imaginations in order to extract their money. What bothered Luther even more was the report that Tetzel had persuaded some folks to pay in advance – they could shorten their OWN time in Purgatory. His doctrine of Purgatory was the perfect excuse for greed and corruption.

At the time, Luther was a faithful, devout Roman Catholic. He had no intention of splitting his church or starting a new religion. But he wanted to stop Tetzel. So he wrote his 95 Theses — 95 separate challenges to the very idea of indulgences.

Luther meant to get the attention of church leaders, and stir up some theological

discussion. But once the 95 Theses were printed and circulated, they ignited a much wider controversy, and started the Protestant Reformation.

Eventually the Church of Rome banned the sale of indulgences for money. Instead, members can “purchase” indulgences with deeds of mercy and acts of penance.

Purgatory is still a part of Catholic theology, but most Protestants reject it. They have other ideas about the “INTERMEDIATE STATE,” as theologians call it. What DOES happen between the moment you die and the time of final judgment, when you get your eternal reward or punishment? If not Purgatory, then what?

All intermediate state ideas have something in common. They are tied to traditional teachings about human immortality, where death is a transition between earthly life and an eternal spirit life. People who are hopelessly wicked go directly to hell. The pure and saintly go directly to heaven or to some other place of eternal bliss.

But most people are neither so wicked nor so saintly. They have to go to some in-between place where they can pay for their sins, be purged or purified, and prepare for eternal life with God.

The idea of an intermediate state makes the topic of death much more complicated than it needs to be. The Bible makes it clear. If you can get past the distortions of pagan philosophy and religious traditions, you find the truth.

In the Bible, there is no such thing as an immortal soul. You’ll never find those words “immortal” and “soul” together in the holy Scriptures.

In the Bible there is no consciousness after death. “For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing.” Ecclesiastes 9:5 NKJV. In fact, the Bible describes death as “sleep” more than 50 times

According to the Bible, the next thing that happens to believers after they die is the resurrection, when Jesus Christ comes back to this earth.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16 NKJV.

So there really is no room for Purgatory — or anything like it — in the Bible view of death and the hereafter. It’s important to know that, because it means there is no second chance to prepare for heaven after we die. Now is the time, now is our chance, to prepare for heaven. NOW. Not after we die.

Besides that, the very idea of Purgatory or anything like it distorts the truth of the gospel. There is nothing that can take the place of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. His

death satisfied the demands of justice for ALL of our sins. He paid the redemption price, in full. The doctrine of Purgatory, and anything similar to it, denies the sufficiency of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Our part is to accept Him as our Savior, depend on Him to save us, and trust our lives to Him as He prepares us for eternal life.