

## **Does purgatory offer a second chance to those who rejected Christ in this life?**

This question and others like it reflect a widespread Protestant belief that purgatory is one of those “unbiblical” Church teachings that Catholics manufactured.

Three ecumenical councils affirm the Church’s teaching on purgatory, two of which preceded the Protestant Reformation: Lyons II (1274), Florence (1439), and Trent (1563). These councils did not “create” this teaching, but explicated the faith of the Church, found in Scripture and Tradition, and attested by Church leaders throughout the first Christian millennium. Check out the resources below for more information.

Purgatory is not a “second chance.” Christ judges each one of us upon our death, and at that time our eternal destination—heaven or hell—is determined. Purgatory does not offer a third way or some sort of end run, as though we could earn our way to heaven after death despite rejecting Christ during our life. It doesn’t work that way. If we reject Christ, we will not be saved (Jn. 3:18). Thus, the spiritual purification of purgatory is possible only for those who are reconciled to God through the saving death of Christ.

But what about that? Isn’t Christ’s saving death sufficient? If we died in friendship with Christ, why then do we need this “purification”?

Surely Christ’s death was sufficient to redeem us. Christ sent His Holy Spirit to apply the fruits of this redemption to us through His Church. The work of the Holy Spirit in us is to make us holy, to sanctify us, which includes the ongoing work of purifying us—in this life and in purgatory—thus preparing us for abundant, eternal life in heaven.

Our faith works through charity (Gal. 5:6), and Our Lord in words and deeds showed us that Christian love is complete self-giving. To the extent we cling to our sins, we’re holding back and not quite able to love as Christ loves. Seen in this light, purgatory is a continuation of the work of the Holy Spirit on us, equipping us for a new way of life that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Additional resources:

Curtis Martin, “The Burning Truth About Purgatory,” published in Hahn and Suprenant, eds., [\*Catholic for a Reason: Scripture and the Mystery of the Family of God\*](#) (Emmaus Road, 1998).

[“Purgatory”](#) (Faith Fact published by [Catholics United for the Faith](#))

[“The Roots of Purgatory”](#) (by [Catholic Answers](#), containing many quotes from early Church sources)

James Akin, [“How to Explain Purgatory to Protestants”](#)

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