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The Doctrine of Man: Is there a difference between purgation and purgatory?

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THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

ARTICLE EIGHT

Is there a difference between purgation and purgatory?

Purgation? Yes. Purgatory? No.

Purgation does not require purgatory. Another way of putting it is to say purgatory is required, but it is past. A vital distinction is expressed in these statements. It preserves the separation between the biblical method of purging and the postbiblical alternative to purging.

Before we can answer *why* purgatory *is not*, we must answer the question *where* purgatory *is*. By focusing on the place of purgation, we discover there is no need for purgatory. Purgation is something in the past. Purgatory is thought to be in the future.

There is no need for purgatory in the future because purgatory is past. This is a unique approach, but it is a forgotten old approach. Purgatory in the past? How can that be? The Bible tells us where purgatory *was*. The place was Calvary, where Jesus died for our sins. He became our purgatory and took our hell. Hebrews 1:3, NEB says:

"When he had brought about the purgation of sins, he took his seat at the right hand of Majesty on high ... "

Several other texts say essentially the same thing (Titus 2:14; Rev. 1:5). The combined message of the New Testament is that all our sins were judged, exacted, and punished in Jesus Christ on the cross. He felt the banishment of a holy God in bearing away our sins. The conclusion of Scripture is that while purgatory was necessary for the sinner before he could enter heaven, Jesus Christ did the purging and completely absorbed the pain caused by all our iniquities.

Historically, the original Protestants took offense at a purgatory *ahead*, because Scripture said it was *behind*. Calvin wrote:

[It] is a deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ ... If it is perfectly clear ... that the blood of Christ is the sole satisfaction for the sins of believers, the sole expiation, the sole purgation, what remains but to say that purgatory is simply a dreadful blasphemy against Christ? (John Gilmore, *Probing Heaven*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, pp. 141, 142)