THE ASCENSION

"THE VANGUARD" REPRINTS—93

PURGATORY

Purgation. 
It is a supreme peculiarity of our Lord's love to His own that it can never stop short of the perfection of the person loved. "As many as I love, I chaste" (Rev. iii. 19). "He chastens us for our profit, that we may become partakers of His holiness" (Heb. xii. 10). His holiness is perfection; so that our discipline, however drastic or prolonged, is never a proof of His enmity, but of His love; and is never a sign — either now, or at the Judgment Seat — of a disciple's ultimate destruction, but of His ultimate perfection. Where others show their love by indulgence, Christ shows His by chastisement. "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it" (John xv. 2).

Purgatory. The Roman doctrine of Purgatory would have been impossible had the Church always held and taught the full Scripture truth of a believer's purgation. Only twice has the Roman doctrine been officially defined. "If such as be truly penitent die in God's favour before they have satisfied for their sins of commission and omission by worthy fruits of penance" — i.e., assisted their own atonement — "their souls are purged after death with purgatorial punishments" (Council of Ferrara); and the souls delivered there are assisted by the suffrages [prayers and devotions] of the Faithful, and especially by the most acceptable sacrifice of the Mass" (Council of Trent).
Errors of Purgatory. The manifest errors here—apart from such fearful accretions as the sale of indulgences, or the efficacy of the Mass—are three. (1) The doctrine of Purgatory locates the purgation in Hades: Scripture locates it in this life, and at the Judgment Seat after resurrection, but never in Hades. Paradise, for all believers, is the 'very far better' of the immediate presence of Christ. (2) No power of pope or priest, and no prayers of fellow-believers, can in the slightest degree modify the judgments due to any man, believer or unbeliever, after he has once passed into the other world. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (Heb. ix. 27). Paul, most remarkably, does pray for a believer "that he may receive mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. i. 18); but Onesiphorus was still alive; and there was still room for Paul's prayer to become operative in his life. Prayer for the dead is unknown in the Scriptures. This cuts away the root of all abominations (indulgences, etc.) that have grown around the Roman doctrine. (3) But the vital error lies in confusing discipline with salvation. Chastisement is necessary and salutary: it is inflicted by God in this life upon all believers without exception (Heb. xii. 8): it may, in extreme cases, be fearful bodily disease (Ex. xv. 26), or even be mortal (1 Cor. xi. 30); since death produces no magical change, converting the sinning into the sinless, and since much less can—it cancels unpunished offences during discipleship, chastisement may be equally necessary and salutary at the Judgment Seat—but disciplinary suffering has no connection whatever with eternal life. There are no atoning sufferings but the sufferings of Calvary: works with a view to salvation are sinful and deadly. "Not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. ii. 9).

Purging by Blood. Now we turn to the Scripture truth. God has provided two purgings—one by blood, and one by discipline: and the purging by blood must precede the purging by discipline. "According to the law, all things are purged by blood" (Heb. ix. 22); "how much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works"—the deadly efforts of self-righteousness—"to serve the living God" (Heb. ix. 14). For Christ has affected the essential and fundamental purging once for all: "who when He had purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. i. 3); and this purging is the sole basis, and predisposing cause, of all subsequent purging. For only a saved soul can be purged by chastisement. No amount or degree of suffering can improve into life a soul dead in trespasses and sins, any more than dead wood can be made to grow fruit by pruning; chastisement cannot purge him; he can be purged, but not by chastisement: and God is not habitually chastening the wicked at all. For "if ye are without chastening, whereby all [believers] have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. xii. 8). Corrective sufferings are only granted and effective to those already purged by the sacrificial sufferings of Calvary.

Purging by Discipline. The second purging is discipline. "Every branch that beareth fruit"—discipline, i.e., living wood, set in the living Vine—"He purgeth it" (John xvi. 2). A soul which...
"John 1, 10."

Also for the whole world, Christ... the Father... the Father... every man who believes in the Son has everlasting life. "John 3, 16."

The blood of Jesus, the Son of God, washes away our sins. "1 John 1, 7."

Ours is a spirit, not a spirit of fear, but one that gives birth to life and leads to the acquisition of God's Holiness. "Romans 8, 15."

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