

The Early Church Fathers on Purgatory

The Early Fathers spoke of a place after death where expiation is made for sins. Paul also speaks of such a place in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 he says: "Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

Acts of Paul and Thecla

And after the exhibition, Tryphaena again receives her. For her daughter Falconilla had died and said to her in a dream: "Mother, thou shalt have this stranger Thecla in my place, in order that she may pray concerning me, and that I may be transferred to the place of the just" (A.D. 180).

Clement of Alexandria

The believer through discipline divests himself of his passions and passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, passes to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance for the faults he may have committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more, not yet attaining what he sees others have acquired. The greatest torments are assigned to the believer, for God's righteousness is good, and His goodness righteous, and though these punishments cease in the course of the expiation and purification of each one, "yet" etc. (*Stromata* 6:14 [A.D. 202]).

Origen

If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones (1 Cor., 3); but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into heaven with your wood and hay and stubble and thus defile the kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood, and hay and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions and then returns to us the reward of our great works. (*Homilies on Jeremiah* 13: 445, 448 [A.D. 244]).

Abercius

The citizen of a prominent city, I erected this while I lived, that I might have a resting place for my body. Abercius is my name, a disciple of the chaste shepherd who feeds his sheep on the mountains and in the fields, who has great eyes surveying everywhere, who taught me the faithful writings of life. Standing by, I, Abercius, ordered this to be inscribed; truly I was in my seventy-second year. May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray for Abercius (*Epitaph of Abercius* [A.D. 190]).

Tertullian

The faithful widow prays for the soul of her husband, and begs for him in the interim repose, and participation in the first resurrection, and offers prayers on the anniversary of his death (*Monogamy* 10 [A.D. 213]).

Cyprian of Carthage

It is one thing to stand for pardon, another thing to attain to glory; it is one thing, when cast into prison, not to go out thence until one has paid the uttermost farthing; another thing at once to receive the wages of faith and courage. It is one thing, tortured by long suffering for sins, to be cleansed and long purged by fire; another to have purged all

sins by suffering. It is one thing, in fine, to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the Day of Judgment; another to be at once crowned by the Lord (Letters 51[55]:20 [A.D. 253]).

Cyril of Jerusalem

Then we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition, next, we make mention also of the holy fathers and bishops who have already fallen asleep, and, to put it simply, of all among us who have already fallen asleep. For we believe that it will be of very great benefit to the souls of those for whom the petition is carried up, while this holy and most solemn sacrifice is laid out (*Catechetical Lectures* 23:5:9 [A.D. 350]).

Serapion

We beseech you also on behalf of all the departed, of whom also this is the commemoration (after mentioning the names) Sanctify these souls, for You know them all; sanctify all who have fallen asleep in the Lord and count them all among the ranks of your saints and give them a place and abode in your kingdom (*Anaphora* 13:5 [A.D. 350]).

Basil the Great

I think that the noble athletes of God, who have wrestled all their lives with the invisible enemies, after they have escaped all of their persecutions and have come to the end of life, are examined by the prince of this world; and if they are found to have any wounds from their wrestling, any stains or effects of sin they are detained (*Homilies on the Psalms* 7:2 [ante A.D. 370]).

Epiphanius of Salamis

Furthermore, as to mentioning the names of the dead, how is there anything very useful in that? What is more timely or more excellent than that those who are still here should believe that the departed do live, and that they have not retreated into nothingness, but that they exist and are alive with the Master. And so that this most august proclamation might be told in full, how do they hope, who are praying for the brethren as if they were but sojourning in a foreign land? Useful too is the prayer fashioned on their behalf (*Against all Heresies* 75:8 [A.D. 374-377]).

Gregory of Nyssa

If a man ... after his departure out of the body, gains knowledge of the difference between virtue and vice, and finds that he is not able to partake of divinity until he has been purged of the filthy contagion in his soul by the purifying fire (*Sermon on the Dead* [A.D. 383]).

John Chrysostom

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job 1:5], why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 41:5 [A.D. 392]).

Ambrose of Milan

Give perfect rest to thy servant Theodosius, that rest which thou hast prepared for thy saints... I have loved him, and therefore will I follow him into the land of the living; nor will I leave him until by tears and prayers I shall lead him wither his merits summon him, unto the holy mountain of the Lord (*Funeral Sermon of Theodosius* 36-37 [A.D. 395]).

Augustine

Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. But not all who suffer temporal punishments after death will come to eternal punishments, which are to follow after that judgment (*The City of God* 21:13 [A.D. 419]).