

**Catholics** believe that God will judge them based on the actions of their life and based on this judgement they will either go to heaven or hell.



# JUDGEMENT: HEAVEN, PURGATORY & HELL

**Other Christian views on Judgement**  
Catholic teaching focuses on individual judgement. Each person is responsible for their own actions. Some Christians put the emphasis on a final judgement at the end of time, rather than an individual judgement. Jesus talked about a 'final judgement' when he would come to earth again and judge the whole of creation. This idea of a final day of judgement is present in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) and in the Book of Revelation.

## Heaven

Those who have accepted God's grace and forgiveness in this life will enjoy eternal existence in God's presence after they die in the next life. This face-to-face encounter with God is what Christians call heaven. Throughout history, Christians have tried to find language and imagery to describe what this might mean. The language of 'up there', the 'presence of God', 'glorious splendor', the 'beatific vision', a 'transcendent place', and the imagery of 'clouds' and 'harp-playing angels' all try to offer ways of understanding a belief in eternal happiness in the presence of God. All such language and imagery are attempts to describe the indescribable. The reward for living correctly is to be eternally in the presence of God. Heaven is to be totally at one with God.

Heaven and hell are often depicted as real places with heaven being beautiful and peaceful and hell being dark and fiery, however Catholics understand heaven as being in the presence of God and hell as being excluded from his presence.



The New Testament has several stories told by Jesus that refer to a judgement being made about how people lived their lives. These include:

- ✓ *The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*
- ✓ *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*



- ✓ This idea of a final day of judgement is present in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) and in the Book of Revelation.
- ✓ 'It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.'
- ✓ 'If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.' 1 Corinthians 3:13.
- ✓ Judgement: The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.



## The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus tells how a rich man ignored the needs of the poor, using the example of a man named Lazarus, who begged outside his house. Lazarus would beg while the rich man enjoyed his luxuries. The parable emphasises the injustice by saying that Lazarus would have welcomed even the bits of food that fell from the rich man's table. After death though, Lazarus is taken to be with God, while the rich man has an eternal life of 'torment' and misery. The rich man asks for some comfort, but he is reminded:

*'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'* Luke 16:19-31.

Catholic teaching about judgement comes from this Christian understanding that each individual will be held to account by God for the things they do, or fail to do, during their lives.

## Summary

- ✓ 'Eschatology' describes Christian ideas about what will happen at the 'end times'.
- ✓ Catholics believe in personal judgement; God will judge everyone on the basis of how they have lived their lives.
- ✓ 'Heaven' is being in the presence of God for eternity and 'hell' is the absence of God for eternity.
- ✓ Purgatory is the Catholic idea that, after death, people will be cleansed of sin before they can enter heaven.
- ✓ Other Christians hold different beliefs about judgement and about purgatory.

## Knowledge Check

1. What language is typically used to describe heaven?
2. Why is it difficult to describe what heaven is like?
3. What does *purgatory* mean?
4. Which Christians do not accept purgatory?
5. What is the Greek word for fire?
6. What imagery is typically used by artists, writers and poets to describe hell?
7. What do we learn from the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus?
8. What do we learn from the parable of the Unforgiving Servant?

## Purgatory

This term comes from the same root as 'to purge'. It means to cleanse or get rid of sins. Catholic teaching accepts that people are not perfect. While trying to do their best, people will sometimes behave badly or act in ways that cause harm to others. In human relationships when people do something wrong, they can try and make it up to the other person. The same can apply to a person's relationship with God. Eternal life with God is about being in a state of perfection. Cleansing or purging those mistakes and errors in life enables the person to be fully in the presence of God. 'Purgatory' refers to the cleansing of people's sins before they can go on to heaven to spend eternal life with God.

Some art and literature presents purgatory as a place with fire between heaven and hell. This is because the Greek root word for fire is 'pur' and refers to the ancient practice of burning land in an attempt to cleanse it. St Paul uses the same fire imagery in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth:

'It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.' 1 Corinthians 3:13.

Rather than a 'place', Catholics use the term purgatory to refer to a state of hope. This is why Catholics pray for those who have died. Catholics pray for purification and removal of sin so that they can spend eternal life with God.

## Hell

If being in the presence of God is the reward then being separated from God is the punishment. Those who through their own free will ultimately reject God's grace and forgiveness, have chosen to live eternally outside of God's presence. This total lack of God for all eternity is what Christians call hell. The two parables (The Unforgiving Servant and The Rich Man and Lazarus) demonstrate that it is the free choices made by humans that led to them going to hell after death. It is not that God chooses to punish, it is that the individual chooses to reject the love, mercy, compassion and God. The imagery of fire and torture has been used by artists, writers and poets to explore the concept of being separated from God for eternity, but again, these are attempts to describe something that we cannot fully understand.

## Other Christian views on purgatory

Most Christians believe in heaven and hell but Protestant Christians do not accept the idea of purgatory. They simply believe that people either accept God and are in a state of grace with God, or they reject God.

## The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant Jesus tells of a man who owes money to the king. Fearing being put in debtors' prison, the man begs the king for mercy. After receiving that mercy and being free from his debt, the man then goes in search of a man who owes him money. This other man asks him for mercy, however he rejects the requests for mercy. The king is furious about such hypocrisy and puts the first man in prison until he pays what he owes! Jesus finishes the story with these words:

*'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart.'*

## Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

### CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

## Exam Question

*b) Describe Catholic teaching on life after death [5]*

*b) Describe Catholic teaching on judgement [5]*