

# Indulgences and Purgatory

Rev. Adam Moline

The Lutheran Reformation came about as a return to the scriptures, especially their clear teaching that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2). In other words, God doesn’t need our help to save us. He has done all that is necessary in Jesus.

At the time of the Reformation, however, the church had forgotten these words. Instead it taught that you had some role to play in your salvation. This was taught in two doctrines: Purgatory and Indulgences.

The teaching of purgatory (which still is officially in the Roman Catholic Catechism today) is idea that something must occur (besides death) to remove the accumulated sin from a believer before they enter heaven. A person who was baptized as a child has still committed countless sins. The medieval church taught Jesus died for the eternal consequences of those sins, but that people still must pay the temporal price (liabilities according the Catholic Catechism) for those sins. They did this by making donations to the church, praying special prayers, and buying masses. By doing these things, they were making amends for their sin.

But sin is so great that it is impossible to make amends for all of it. If you died before you paid back your sin, you would have to pay for it after death. That is purgatory.



**500 Years of the Lutheran Reformation**  
**Southeast Circuit North Dakota District**

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A believing Christian might have to spend thousands of years in purgatory, suffering for the temporal consequences of sin. If they were wealthy enough, they might buy masses to shorten their time in purgatory. (Jacob Fugger the Rich set up an endowment to give people free housing so long as they said a prayer to get him out of purgatory twice a day)

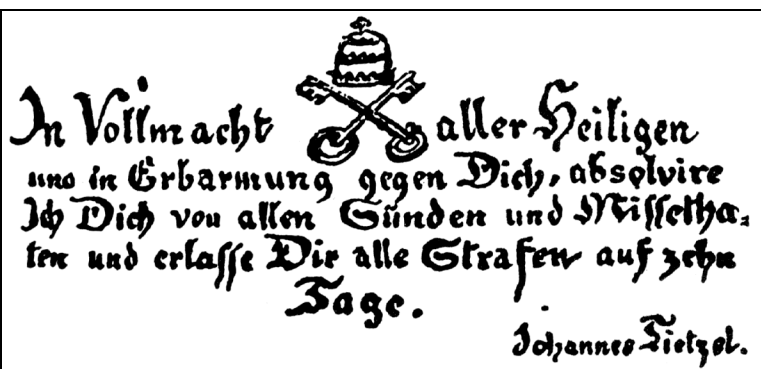
To help people shorten their sentence in purgatory, the church also invented indulgences. Indulgences were a way that you could make a financial donation to the church and, as a result, have your time in purgatory lessened. There were two types, partial or full. Partial indulgences lessened purgatory partially, and full indulgences allowed a Christian to skip purgatory completely.

The problem with these teachings is that they completely remove Jesus from the picture. A person is able to save themselves simply by financial donations to the church, either in masses or indulgences.

The true teaching of scripture, however, is that only Christ can save. He paid all the punishment you deserved—there is no need to be purged from temporal sin's effects. You cannot buy your way into heaven. Praise be to God that He has saved us by His cross and

empty tomb.

More next week on the selling of indulgences in the time of the Reformation.



The Indulgences sold by John Tetzel—which you'll read about next week.

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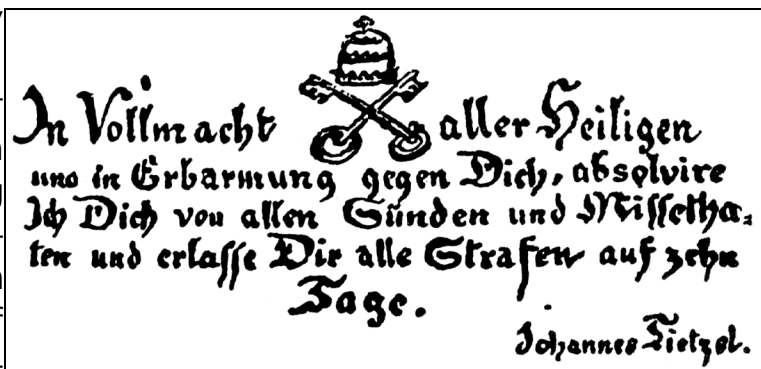
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