

I realize now -- that as a Protestant -- I misquoted the Bible when challenging Catholics about Purgatory. Catholics taught that there may be a “transition” between earth and heaven—a place or state of final purification called Purgatory.

“But how can there be a Purgatory?” I asked. “Doesn’t St. Paul teach that ‘to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord’? Since ‘absence from the body’ means that we are immediately in ‘the presence of the Lord,’ there can’t be anything called Purgatory. Catholics deny the clear teaching of the Bible!”

Whoa! Slow down! Is this really what the Bible says?

First, that is a misreading of the Bible—a twisting of Scripture to score a point. The Bible does NOT say “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” Rather it says,



“So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6-8).

This is very different from my old argument. Paul would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord, but certainly doesn’t say it the way I twisted it in my old anti-Catholic days.

If I want to be away from Michigan in the winter I might say “In the winter we would rather be away from Michigan and present in Arizona.” It does NOT say that to be away from Michigan that I am instantly or automatically in Arizona.

My in-laws go between Arizona and Michigan twice a year and they stop a lot along the way. It usually takes them 3-4 weeks to get from one to the other as they visit and camp along the way.

We understand that this language leaves room for a transition period—especially in an automobile or plane with a possible motel or visit along the way. Paul's words also leave room for such a transition; it does not exclude Purgatory.

Second, Paul teaches that we will pass through fire. Notice what he says in 1 Corinthians 3:15: On “the Day” if “any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” Sounds like Purgatory to me.

Third, Purgatory is not “away from the Lord” strictly speaking. Those in Purgatory—whether it is a place or a state of transition—are not *apart* from the Lord.

In fact, it is the love of God that is purifying them. I have always said that Purgatory is like the front porch of heaven. Those who are in Purgatory know they have arrived! But you can read more about that in my article on Purgatory [here](#).

So, don’t let someone trick you with the old “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” argument. It is fallacious and deceptive. Again, the Catholic Church is correct.