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During Holy Week the media was hit with a story about the latest Pope and his denial of hell's existence. Obviously it got a lot of play from multiple sources. Even good Roman Catholics like Pat Buchanan voiced their displeasure at his comments. Apparently when asked about the reality of hell, the Pope said it isn't a place where evil souls go to suffer everlasting torment. Instead, those souls just cease to exist in nothingness. As Mr. Buchanan wrote in a column: "If hell doesn't exist, what did Jesus save us from?" That pretty much sums it up.

Since the Pope's original comments, the Vatican has been scrambling with their damage control people in full swing. It's the standard stuff you would expect: "He was misunderstood. He was misquoted in the interview. The RC church hasn't changed their doctrine." Etc. So, exactly what does Scripture really say about the reality of hell?

Here are a couple of passages from St. Matthew spoken by Christ: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." 25:41. Also, "Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." 10:28. Then there's the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus in Luke 16. We'll pick up on verse 22ff: "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man died also and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'" So, according to Christ's own words, hell is real and a place to be avoided at all costs.

I've known various people who deny, don't talk about, or just ignore the reality of hell. They generally want a God and a Savior Who is kind, loving, gentle, and in whom everyone of every creed will find serenity and bliss. (After all, no sane human can be against serenity and bliss.) But, they don't like any talk of judgment. They get angry with traditional Christians and accuse them of being judgmental. These are the same folks for whom the 10 commandments are suggestions. In other words, they want God to be defined by them and their feelings and emotions. If you ask them: "What about justice? Isn't hell the ultimate in true justice?" They just stare back blankly and mumble something about being loving and not judging others.

I suppose it all goes back to one's understanding of good vs. evil. Everyone admits good exists, but a lot of liberals don't want to brand anything as evil.—That's "hate speech." So, I can well visualize the day when preaching about hell will be called: hate speech. (Maybe it's already going on....?) It seems strange to think of the Pope mocking our Lord around the time of Holy Week, yet that's exactly what has happened. Pat Buchanan was

right: "If hell doesn't exist, what did Christ come to save us from?" Isn't it nice to be a real Lutheran who knows the answer? Pastor Thomas H. Fox