

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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I'll Take Heaven

My topic today is something I never imagined I would write about if I had not watched the news and read the published accounts of what took place.

The question then is, "What exactly happened?" This is where it gets a little bit murky. I'm talking about the recent news story attributing to Pope Francis remarks he allegedly made in which he appears to suggest that Hell does not really exist. As you might surmise, battle lines have been drawn over the issue of where the Pope stands concerning the existence of Hell.

Well, whether he said those exact words, or implied Hell does not exist, is something for each person to decide for themselves. I am not attempting to defend or be critical of the Pope. He made remarks to a journalist who is a long-time friend of his in an interview last month. It is important to note that this Italian journalist is an avowed atheist (there is no God), and does not take notes, nor use recording devices in his interviews.

However, from other interviews and comments the Pope has made over the years it seems as though he has theological leanings that do not always square with the Bible, or with Catholic doctrine. From what is reported the Pontiff has said that those who earnestly seek God with a whole heart will enjoy His presence in Heaven forever. On the other hand, those who are outside of the faith will disappear. They will not suffer the torments of Hell for eternity. They will no longer exist.

Such a position has a name within theological circles. It's called Annihilationism (also known as extinctionism, or destructionism). The soul of the person who has rejected God in Christ will be judged at the Final Judgement. When it is determined that the person being judged has rejected God, then that person will pass into a condition where they no longer exist.

The position of annihilationism may bring a modicum of comfort to those who fear for the eternal loss of a loved one by suggesting they no longer exist. It is difficult to fathom, and painful to imagine a loved one suffering in Hell for eternity, I grant you that. But, if the Bible is correct and true, and is God's holy word, then my discomfort with an endless eternity of suffering for those who are lost, is moot.

This brings out another problem within the broader church worldwide today. Too often unpopular doctrine firmly based upon biblical teaching, is ignored or replaced with a new doctrine which carries little or no biblical support.

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For instance, it is popular today to suggest that all religions, faiths, doctrines, creeds, and so forth are as valid as any other. The popular bumper sticker COEXIST is printed in such a way as to use symbols from various world religions and beliefs to infer that we should all just be able to get over our differences and get along. That sounds wonderful on the surface, but totally impracticable in its implementation. A cursory review of the texts deemed holy by any of these beliefs will quickly identify the fly-in-the-ointment, so to speak. Islam, which is bent on world domination, cannot and does not want to get along with anybody, especially Christians and Jews. The very first chapter (Surah 1) of the Koran (Qur'an, if you like), attacks Christians and Jews, claiming that Allah is angry with them. That would be a little bit difficult to ignore, don't you think?

Whether the Pope said Hell does not exist, or implied it, or didn't make any such comment, is irrelevant in the final analysis. True, to faithful Catholics he is the Vicar of Christ, the bodily representation of Christ on earth. This would then beg the question: If he is the representation of Christ on earth, would he not be in error to go against two thousand years of Christian doctrine by asserting that lost souls merely disappear, and not suffer for eternity? The Bible is crystal clear on several points. First, there really is a Hell. Second, the ruler of this dreadful place is Satan, the devil. Third, Jesus warns of Hell throughout his three plus years of earthly ministry. Fourth, the Apostle John wrote the final book in the Bible, Revelation. You cannot escape the reality of Hell reading through the twenty-two chapters of this hair-raising epistle.

Someone might say, "Well, I don't believe in the Bible." Fine. Then what do you believe in? And what is that belief based on? You see, I accept the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. That he loved me and died on a cross for my sins so that I might know him personally, experience his forgiveness, and live with him for eternity in Heaven. That's why the message of the Bible, the Gospel, is referred to as Good News!

Another reason I believe what the Bible says is that Jesus rose from the dead. Anyone who can do that has my attention! And I figure he ought to know. If he says there's a Hell, then there's a Hell.

Someone might want to imply that I surely grew up in an environment where the Bible was used to make me fearful and cower under the thunderous preaching of the fire-breathing preachers. Nope! Not my experience. In fact, my brother, sister and I grew up in a very liberal environment. Church? To be decided when we were older. Playboy magazine was on the coffee table. Conversation in the home and around the dinner table ran the gamut of topics.

I accepted Jesus as my Savior at twenty-four. You see, for me, Heaven seemed a much better place to spend eternity.