Does Hell Exist?

by Sebastian R Fama

One popular belief is that hell cannot be real because God is merciful. Another, that hell is here on earth in the day-to-day trials that we experience. But the evidence says otherwise. Jesus talks more about hell than He does about heaven. In Matthew 10:28 He says: “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna [hell].” And again, in Matthew 13:41-42, He says: “The Son of man will send His angels, and they will collect out of His kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”

But what about God’s mercy? We must not forget that God is perfect in every way. He truly is perfectly merciful. But He is also perfectly just. Justice demands satisfaction for transgressions. In reference to purgatory, Jesus told St. Faustina: “My mercy does not want this, but my justice demands it.” The same principle applies to hell.

As for God’s mercy, we must accept it on His terms, and not on our own. In Luke 13:3 He tells us: “But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish.” To repent means to turn from your sin. Next, we must seek His grace and forgiveness. For that, He gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation (John 20:21-23). However, if we are at the point of death, and there is no priest available to hear our confession, a heartfelt sorrow for our sins and a prayerful request to God can also obtain forgiveness.

Some have said they do not need to confess because they do not sin. Scripture addresses this issue in 1 John 1:8: “If we say, ‘we are without sin’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” We all sin. We may not all rob banks or commit murder, but we all sin. Consulting a good *Examination of Conscience* can be helpful if you are unaware of what constitutes sin.

This is not an issue to be taken lightly. Jesus said: “The gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those that enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those that find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14). In other words, most people are headed for hell. As Paul tells us: “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

If you were told there was a lion loose in the neighborhood you would be very cautious when leaving your house. Well, there is. Peter tells us to: “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). It may not be a physical lion, but it is a lion nonetheless. A physical lion can only “kill the body.” But this lion “can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna [hell].”

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