

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

V. Catholicism's Reliance On Works Versus Hebrews' Reliance On Faith

(Hebrews 3:7-4:10)

I. Introduction

- A. A number of the members of our Church have come from Roman Catholic backgrounds, and they often seek support in Biblical truth to counter the strong, errant indoctrination they experienced in their past.
- B. The epistle to the Hebrews was written to counter the errant traditionalism of first century Judaism that was similar in theological thrust to much of Catholicism, so we study Hebrews for edification in this matter.
- C. We thus view Hebrews 3:7-4:10 on Catholicism's reliance on works versus Hebrews' reliance on faith:

II. Catholicism's Reliance On Works Versus Hebrews' Reliance On Faith, Hebrews 3:7-4:10.

- A. The Roman Catholic Church puts constant pressure on its members to rely on works to complete their salvation and for sanctification even as professing believers to gain forgiveness and release from guilt and sin:
 - 1. "The Roman Catholic, though baptized and confirmed, can never have . . . assurance of his salvation . . . he can never do as much as he should . . ." (Lorraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 267).
 - 2. For a variety of examples, we note the following requirements the Catholic Church places on its members:
 - a. Fasting at Lent is taught for members to gain merits to lessen their future time in purgatory, Ibid., p. 275.
 - b. The Council of Trent asserts, "The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and to be kept . . . and due honor and veneration are to be given them" (Ibid., p. 279).
 - c. The rosary (15 Our Fathers; 15 Glorias; 150 Hail Marys) is to be said for merits (Ibid., p. 284-285).
 - d. Pilgrimages to Fatima in Portugal or to Lourdes in France are available for gaining eternal merits, and at Lourdes, the alleged appearance of Mary to a peasant girl allegedly ordered the girl to dig in a nearby place, what produced a spring that is believed to have curative powers for the faithful (Ibid., p. 293).
 - e. Prayers for the dead are encouraged to lessen the time of dead members in purgatory (Ibid., p. 295).
 - f. Catholicism holds that "God does not cancel out all the punishment due to the sinner when He forgives his sins. No limit is set to the works and services that can be demanded" by "the priest" (Ibid., p. 255).
- B. In great contrast, Hebrews 3:7-4:10 warned Hebrew Christians not to return to the dead works for justification and sanctification in unbiblical Judaism, but to enter into God's rest from their own works (as follows):
 - a. The recipients of the epistle were Christian Hebrews who were being pressured by fellow Hebrews "to give up their Christian profession and to return to their ancestral faith" (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 779).
 - b. The author of Hebrews likened those who exerted this ungodly pressure to Israel's forefathers who hardened their hearts against trusting and obeying God's Word through Moses, what kept them from entering the "rest" of entrance into the Promised Land so that they died in the wilderness, Hebrews 3:7-19.
 - c. Thus, the author of Hebrews urged his readers to fear that if a promise of God left to them of entering His "rest" from one's own works for salvation and sanctification was not trusted, that they would face God's severe discipline as did their faithless forefathers in the wilderness, Hebrews 4:1-3.
 - d. This "rest" was initially prepared by God Himself back in Genesis 2:1-3 when He "rested" on the seventh day from his "work" of creation that he performed in the first six days, Hebrews 4:4.
 - e. This "rest" was offered to Israel's forefathers in the wilderness during the Exodus and is recalled in Psalm 95:11 that the writer of Hebrews mentioned in Hebrews 4:5.
 - f. That "rest" was still being offered to believers in Israel after that nation had entered the Promised Land, for Psalm 95:7 urged the Hebrews in the land in David's era not to harden their hearts against entering God's "rest" from their own works of disobedience, but to live by faith in God in the land, Hebrews 4:7-8.
 - g. Therefore, God has a perpetual offer through all the dispensations of a "rest" for believers from their own works for justification and sanctification even as believers, what we do well to heed, Heb. 4:9-10.
 - h. Thus, God does not want us to work to gain salvation, to gain assurance of it or to lessen our time in alleged purgatory, but to "rest" from our works in His finished salvation and forgiveness in His grace!

Lesson: *Where the Catholic Church burdens its members with endless works for justification and sanctification, God calls us to "rest" in His finished work of Christ in our behalf for justification and sanctification.*

Application: *(1) May believers out of the Roman Catholic Church enter the "rest" from their own works for justification and sanctification in accord God's will. (2) Broadening this application, may believers from any form of religious legalism enter God's "rest" from their own works for justification or sanctification in the Christian life.*