

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS
VI. Catholicism's Authority In Tradition Versus Hebrews' Authority In Scripture
(Hebrews 4:11-13)

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 4:11-13 on Catholicism's authority in tradition versus Hebrews' authority in Scripture:

II. Catholicism's Authority In Tradition Versus Hebrews' Authority In Scripture, Hebrews 4:11-13.

- A. Roman Catholicism "holds that the Bible must be supplemented by a . . . body of tradition consisting of 14 or 15 apocryphal books or portions of books . . . the . . . church fathers, and . . . church council pronouncements and papal decrees as of equal value and authority . . . Rome . . . maintains that . . . tradition . . . takes precedence over the written Word and interprets it" (Loraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 75, 77).
- B. However, various popes, church councils and church fathers have often erred and/or contradicted one another:
 - 1. Various popes have taught heretical doctrines and/or contradicted each other, and we illustrate some cases:
 - a. Pope "Zozimus (A. D. 417-418) pronounced Pelagius an orthodox teacher but later reversed his position at the insistence of Augustine" (Ibid., p. 248).
 - b. Pope "Vigilinus (A. D. 538-555) . . . boycotted the fifth Ecumenical Council . . . at Constantinople in A. D. 553. When the Council . . . threatened to excommunicate and anathematize him, he submitted to its opinions, confessing that he had been a tool of Satan (Cf. Hefele, one of the best known Roman Catholic writers, *History of the Christian Councils*, Vol. 4, p. 345)." (Ibid., Boettner)
 - c. Pope "Gregory I (A. D. 590-604) called anyone who would take the title of Universal Bishop an antichrist; but (Pope) Boniface III (A. D. 607) compelled the emperor Phocas to confer that title upon him, and it has been used by all later popes" (Ibid., p. 249).
 - 2. As for the church fathers, "they . . . contradict each other and even contradict themselves as they change their minds and affirm what they previously had denied. Augustine, the greatest of the fathers, in his later life wrote a special book in which he set forth his *Retractions*" (Ibid., p. 78).
 - 3. Some Roman Catholic Church councils have presented claims that contradict former Catholic traditions:
 - a. At Martin Luther's famous stand at the Diet of Worms (1521), he stated that "popes and councils had been known to err" (James Atkinson, The Great Light: Luther and Reformation, 1968, p. 67).
 - b. "Pope Gregory the Great declared that First Maccabees, an Apocryphal book, is not canonical. Cardinal Zomenes, in his Polyglot Bible just before the Council of Trent, excluded the Apocrypha and his work was approved by pope Leo X . . . If (these popes) were correct, the decision of the Council of Trent" to pronounce some of the Apocryphal books canonical "was wrong" (R. Laird Harris, *Fundamental Protestant Doctrines*, I, p. 4, cited in Boettner, Ibid., p. 83).
- C. In contrast, the epistle to the Hebrews upholds the divine authority and primacy of Scripture, Heb. 4:11-13:
 - 1. The author of Hebrews called his readers to make every effort to enter into the spiritual rest that God had for them, a rest from their own futile, sinful works where they obeyed God in contrast to the disobedient generation in Israel that perished in the wilderness, Hebrews 4:11 with 3:8-4:2.
 - 2. The author of Hebrews had referred to God's Word in the Scriptures at Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:7-11 on God's direction that believers enter His rest as a divine warning that the readers of Hebrews heed the Lord lest they face divine punishment, Hebrews 4:4-10.
 - 3. Accordingly, in Hebrews 4:12-13, the author commented on the divine authority of written Scripture, that it was living (*zon*) and active (*energes*), penetrating and distinguishing between what "is spiritual in man and what is merely 'soulish' or natural" to reveal spiritually upright versus sinful motivations of the heart (B. K. C., N. T., p. 789-790). Scripture thus bears God's full authority, so it is also our ultimate authority.

Lesson: Where Catholicism treats written Scripture along with church tradition as authoritative, going so far as to make tradition take precedence over Scripture, Hebrews views Scripture as God's authoritative Word we believers must heed in giving full account to the Lord. Hence, Hebrews views Scripture as our ULTIMATE authority.

Application: May we use Scripture as our ULTIMATE spiritual authority on all matters of faith and practice.