

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

VII. Catholicism's Exaltation Of Popes Versus Hebrews' Exaltation Of Christ

(Hebrews 4:14-5:10)

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 4:14-5:10 on Catholicism's exaltation of popes versus Hebrews' exaltation of Christ:

II. Catholicism's Exaltation Of Popes Versus Hebrews' Exaltation Of Christ, Hebrews 4:14-5:10.

- A. Catholicism views its pope as its high priest with the same power and authority of Christ over the Church:
 1. "The terms pontifex maximus and summus pontifex were for centuries used by the Bishop of Rome also known as the pope. After Christ Himself the pope is considered to be the 'high priest' (the veritable meaning of pontifex maximus and summus pontifex)." ("Pontifex Maximus," newforldencyclopedia.org)
 2. The pope is the "vicar" of Christ, the word "vicar" coming from the Latin term *vicarius* that means "instead of." As the alleged Vicar of Christ, the Catholic Church teaches that the pope has the same power and authority that Christ had over the Church. (gotquestions.org, "Is the pope the Vicar of Christ?")
- B. However, the epistle of Hebrews exalts Jesus Christ infinitely far above the Catholic pope, Heb. 4:14-5:10:
 1. Jesus Christ, the sinless, Great High Priest of all true Christians, is passed into the heavens by His ascension after His resurrection, Hebrews 4:14a with Acts 1:9-11. In sharp contrast, all Roman Catholics (allegedly except martyrs) including popes go to purgatory to "undergo penal and purifying suffering" since they like other regular Roman Catholics are "encumbered with some degree of sin," Ibid., p. 218.
 2. Our Great High Priest Jesus Christ is "the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14b), a term in its first century Hebrew context implying equality with God the Father as full deity (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to John 5:17-47) where the Catholic pope is but a mere, mortal man.
 3. Our Great High Priest Jesus Christ can represent us well before God the Father since He can fully sympathize with our weaknesses since He was tempted in all points like we are, but without sin (Hebrews 4:15) where the Catholic pope is corrupted with sin and cannot perfectly represent us before the Father.
 4. Our Great High Priest Jesus Christ's intercession equips us to pray to God the Father with full confidence in God's unmerited favor toward us in Christ where He is ready to forgive and to nurture us. However, the pope's imperfections cannot even equip him to be a mediator with God for us (1 Timothy 2:5), so one through the pope's ministry cannot even gain assurance of his soul's salvation (Ibid., Boettner, p. 267).
 5. Our Great High Priest Jesus Christ was fully qualified by God the Father to serve as our High Priest in vast contrast to the lack of God the Father's qualifications for the Roman Catholic pope, Hebrews 5:1-10:
 - a. The author of Hebrews noted that the Aaronic priests under the Law had to be qualified by God:
 - i. The Aaronic priest was chosen by God to offer gifts and sacrifices for the people, Hebrews 5:1.
 - ii. The priest was to have compassion for those he represented as he himself was sinfully weak, v. 2-3.
 - iii. The honor of being a priest was not self-imposed – one must be called of God to that office, v. 4.
 - b. Similarly, Christ was fully qualified by God to be the Christian's High Priest, Hebrews 5:5-10:
 - i. The Father declared Christ to be the King-Son forever after the order of Melchisedec, v. 5-6; Psalm 110:1. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi, so He could not be a priest of God under the Law of Moses, so the Father assigned Him the order of King-Priest Melchisedec in Genesis 14:18-20.
 - ii. At Gethsemane and likely on the cross, Christ's intense sufferings taught Him obedience to the Father, maturing His humanity and making Him the author of our eternal salvation, Heb. 5:7-10.
 - c. However, no Scripture details any qualifications for the Catholic pope to be a high priest of God. Rather, the pope's title "Pontifex Maximus" was "lifted from paganism" where that title originated with pagan Rome's emperor who was the high priest of Rome's pagan religion (Ibid., p. 125).

Lesson: Roman Catholicism exalts its pope to be Christ's representative on earth as high priest by false pagan authority, bestowing on a sinner an office and function he cannot qualify to fulfill. However, Jesus Christ is fully qualified by God the Father as our sinless, compassionate High Priest through Whom we can pray boldly for help.

Application: May we come boldly to God's throne of grace in prayer and find grace to help in time of need.