

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

VIII. God's Warning To Mature In Spiritual Discernment

(Hebrews 5:11-14)

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 5:11-14 on God's warning to mature in spiritual discernment, what applies to handling all error, be it errant Roman Catholic views and practices or the errant views and practices of any other entity:

II. God's Warning To Mature In Spiritual Discernment, Hebrews 5:11-14.

- A. The author of Hebrews wrote to Hebrew believers who were under pressure from unbelieving fellow Hebrews "to return to their ancestral faith" that consisted of dead, legalistic Judaism (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 779).
- B. This warning thus applies to believers today who have come out of Roman Catholicism and who are tempted to yield to pressures from former Catholic associates to return to or to compromise with the Catholic faith.
- C. However, other errant belief systems can pressure believers to yield to their errors. For example, we here at Nepaug Church face the pressure to abandon the "dispensationalist view" of the Bible that we have had for over 50 years with its "pre-tribulation rapture" and "premillennial" view of Bible prophecy. Amillennialists and posttribulationists tend to unite with Marxists to promote social reform versus we dispensationalist, pre-tribulationist, premillennial believers who hold that social reform is futile due to man's sin until Christ returns, so we instead focus on discipleship (Brannon S. Howse, Marxianity, 2018, p. 190-191).
- D. Accordingly, Hebrews 5:11-14 briefly but poignantly addressed the cause and cure of this lack of discernment:
 - a. The author of Hebrews noted that though he had much to write on Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood, he found it hard to explain since his readers had become "sluggish in hearing = hard of hearing" (*nothros*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 549), Hebrews 5:9-10, 11.
 - b. Indeed, the readers by the time the epistle was written should have been teachers of the truth, but they still had need of one to teach them again the "very elements of the truths of God" (*stoicheia tes arches ton logion tou Theo*, Ibid., p. 776, s. v. *stoicheion*), that is, the very basics of the Christian faith (Heb. 5:12a).
 - c. The readers as spiritual babes needed the milk of the Word, not the solid food of maturing believers, for they were unskilled in the word of righteousness since they were immature believers, Hebrews 5:12b-13.
 - d. The cure for such an immature lack of discernment is provided in Hebrews 5:14 (as follows):
 - i. Hebrews 5:14 from the Greek text asserts that mature believers who can handle the solid food of Scripture can do so due to the "practice" (*hexis*, Ibid., p. 275) of their discerning "sense, faculty" (*aistheterion*, Ibid., p. 24) so that they have become "permanently trained by exercise" (*gegumnasmena*, perfect passive participle of *gumnazo*, lit. "train by practice," Ibid., p.166) to the "distinguishing (discerning)," (*diakrasis*, Ibid., p. 184) of both good and evil, Hebrews 5:14.
 - ii. This development of spiritual discernment involves several important steps (as follows):
 - 1) To **start** to mature in discernment, a believer must **apply Scripture** to his **life**.
 - 2) Such an application must occur **consistently** over an **extensive period** of **time**.
 - 3) In the **process**, through experience, the believer has his **spiritual insight sharpened**.
 - 4) That **sharpened** insight equips him to **grow** in a **discernment** of **both good and evil**.
 - e. The initial readers of the epistle to the Hebrews had thus failed to apply Scripture to their lives over a long period of time so that their insight could be sharpened to discern good from evil so that they would withstand pressures to return to dead, errant Judaism and rather devotedly adhere firmly to Christ for blessing. They were thus spiritually lethargic, blind and vulnerable to pressures to compromise with error.

Lesson: *The readers of Hebrews needed to repent of their failure to apply Scripture extensively and consistently to their lives so they could by experience have their discernment grow to equip them to withstand pressures to compromise with destructive error and a loss of God's reward and to desire to do righteousness for its blessings.*

Application: *(1) If we have not grown in discernment, may we heed the Hebrews 5:11-14 call to be consistent applicators of the Word and mature in spiritual discernment to avoid the harmful pitfalls of deception and abound in God's blessing. (2) If we see others fail here, may we NOT copy them, but apply Scripture consistently to mature.*