

## **ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

### **XVIII. The Believer's Life Of Faith Versus Catholicism's Insecure Faith**

**(Hebrews 11:1-40)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. A number of our Church members have come from Roman Catholic backgrounds, and they often seek support in Biblical truths that counter the strong, errant indoctrination they faced 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. The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 11:1-40 contrasted the believer's life of faith with Catholicism's insecure faith, and we view this passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

#### **II. The Believer's Life Of Faith Versus Catholicism's Insecure Faith, Hebrews 11:1-40.**

- A. The Roman Catholic Church holds to the Pelagian heresy that man's faith contributes to his salvation as a work so that one's salvation rests on the strength of his faith. Thus, if one's Pelagian-style faith in Christ ever falters or fails, he loses his salvation. (Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology, 1970, p. 864)
- B. Accordingly, The New American Bible for Catholics (1970, p. 1337) has in its study notes for Hebrews 11:40 this statement: "*So without us they should not be made perfect*: the heroes of the Old Testament obtained their recompense only after the saving work of Christ had been accomplished. Thus they already enjoy what Christians who are still struggling do not yet possess in its fulness." In other words, this Catholic Bible claims that the acts of faith recorded in Hebrews 11:1-38 were the deeds by which the Old Testament saints helped get themselves saved, that we today still struggle to maintain a strong enough faith that we can gain salvation!
- C. In great contrast, the Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 809 states of Hebrews 11:40 that "the great heroes of faith he had spoken of had not yet realized their eschatological hopes. This fact shows that God had planned something better for them and us. It is indeed 'better for us' that the future hopes they strove toward be delayed, since only thus could believers enjoy the present experience of becoming companions of the Messiah who leads them to glory. As a result, the perfecting . . . of the Old Testament worthies – that is, the realization of their hopes – awaits that of all believers."
- D. Thus, where the Roman Catholic Bible presents the Old Testament saints as having gained eternal life by their acts of faith and we Christians as still struggling to keep the faith so as to gain our salvation, the non-Pelagian view of faith offered in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament makes salvation a settled issue for both Old Testament and Christian believers. Then, the life of faith as eternally secure believers is a quest toward joining with the Old Testament saints in our mutual rewards of the Millennial Kingdom to come due to living by faith in God during our saved and eternally secure lives in this earthly life on earth!
- E. Also, The New American Bible for Catholics with its Pelagian view of faith actually questions the accuracy of God's Word at Hebrews 11:3! This Bible's translation of that verse reads, "By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God . . ." and its study notes for that verse state: "(T)his verse does not speak of the faith of the Old Testament men and women but is in the first person plural. Hence it seems out of place in the sequence of thought." (p. 1336) Since this Catholic Bible's study notes author holds that Christians still struggle to maintain a strong faith to gain salvation where the Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11:1-38 have gained salvation in part by a successful Pelagian faith, the thought of our trusting God as believers being stated in Hebrews 11:3 seems out of place in the Catholic view. However, if the author of Hebrews referred to a life of faith by saved, eternally secure believers *either* of the Old Testament *or* of the Church era, Hebrews 11:3 perfectly fits the context! Sadly then, a Pelagian view of faith has led the Catholic Bible's study notes author to view Hebrews 11:3 as suspect and thus to question the accuracy of God's Word!

***Lesson:*** *The pilgrimage of faith in this life is a quest for God's eternal rewards for eternally secure believers for their lives of faith, not man's quest for salvation with a Pelagian, self-help saving faith! Thus, the non-Pelagian view of salvation – that it is entirely the work of God – liberates the believer to grow in a life of faith to gain God's rewards in the Millennial Kingdom with the Old Testament heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 as opposed to the fearful insecurity of a Catholic who struggles to gain salvation with no assurance that his effort will even succeed.*

***Application:*** *May we not hold to the Pelagian view that salvation is partly the result of man's work, but solely the work of God! That way we can rest in God's finished work for our salvation and grow in a life of faith as believers to join the Old Testament saints of Hebrews 11 in being rewarded by God in the Kingdom for a life of faith.*