

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

XIX. The Believer's Current Chastening Versus Catholicism's Purgatory

(Hebrews 12:1-11)

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 12:1-11 wrote of the believer's current chastening, what contrasts greatly with Catholicism's belief on purgatory, and we view this passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. The Believer's Current Chastening Versus Catholicism's Purgatory, Hebrews 12:1-11.

- A. Based on 2 Maccabees 12:42, 45 of the Apocrypha, the Roman Catholic Church developed the doctrine of purgatory, that "all who die in peace with the church, but who are not perfect, must undergo penal and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory" (Loraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 218; Rene Pache, The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, 1971, p. 173). This belief assumes that "while God forgives sin, His justice nevertheless demands that the sinner must suffer the full punishment due to him for his sin before he will be allowed to enter heaven" (Ibid., p. 219).
- B. Bellarmine, a noted Roman Catholic, claimed, "The pains of purgatory are very severe, surpassing anything endured in this life." (Ibid., p. 220) He also asserted, "There is absolutely no doubt that the pains of purgatory in some cases endure entire centuries." (Ibid.) Thus, fear of purgatory drives fear of the priest, fear of the confessional, fear of the consequences of missing mass, fear of the discipline of penance, fear of death, fear of purgatory itself and fear of righteous judgment before an angry God, Ibid., p. 221.
- C. In contrast to Roman Catholicism's doctrine of purgatory, Romans 8:1 declares that believers in Christ have no eternal condemnation before God, and 2 Corinthians 5:8 declares that for a believer to be absent from his body in physical death is for him to be present with the Lord Who is in heaven. There is no purgatory.
- D. Significantly, Hebrews 12:1-11 counters the Catholic doctrine of purgatory by teaching on God's chastening of the believer in **this earthly life** that he might partake of God's holiness in righteousness in **this earthly life**:
 - 1. The author of Hebrews stated that his Hebrew Christian readers were obligated by God to heed the example of the Hebrews 11 Old Testament saints to live by faith. Indeed, he noted that Jesus Himself also exemplified a life of faith and its eternal reward of being seated at the Father's right hand, Hebrews 12:1-2.
 - 2. Christ endured opposition by sinners even to the point of death, so Christian believers must follow His example and resist sinning by a life of unbelief even if doing so costs believers their lives, Heb. 12:3-4.
 - 3. Lest we be tempted not to resist sinning in unbelief, we must recall that God chastens us because He loves us, so we should not faint if rebuked by Him, but respond with obedience or be chastened, Heb. 12:5-7.
 - 4. If we were not chastened by the Lord for sin, we would not be a true child of God, so we need to appreciate God's expression of love in chastening us to make us righteous in our earthly walk, Heb. 12:8.
 - 5. Our earthly parents chastened us as children, so we respected them, and we need to revere the Lord when He chastens us, that we submit to His rule that we might live relatively long lives on the earth, Heb. 12:9.
 - 6. Our parents chastened us as it seemed good to them, but our heavenly Father in His infinite wisdom and grace chastens us for our spiritual benefit, that we might partake of His holiness, His separation from sin, Hebrews 12:10 NIV. Thus, contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of purgatory, God works with us that we might be holy in our experiential walk in this life!
 - 7. God's discipline is not immediately joyful, but painful, yet His discipline later yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in this life for those who have been trained by it, Heb. 12:11. Apart from a purgatory, God arranges to discipline us in this life that we might partake of His righteousness and blessing in this life!

Lesson: *Where the Roman Catholic Church teaches that a Christian at death who is not perfect must go to the fires of purgatory that are more painful than any suffering of this life to pay many years for all of his sins in this life to enter heaven, God fully positionally forgives the believer when he is justified and then disciplines him in his earthly walk to gain the experiential holiness and righteousness of God for blessing and peace in this earthly life.*

Application: *May we rejoice in our release from God's eternal condemnation to hell and a dreadful purgatory to be disciplined in this life that we might partake of the Lord's holiness and righteousness for blessing in this life.*