

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

XX. The Believer's Call To Holiness Versus Catholicism's Ritualism

(Hebrews 12:12-17)

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 12:12-17 wrote of the believer's call to holiness, what contrasts sharply with the ritualism of Roman Catholicism, and we view this passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. The Believer's Call To Holiness Versus Catholicism's Ritualism, Hebrews 12:12-17.

- A. "If we search for" reasons "for the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church . . . over its own members" and "over many others who have no personal connection with that church . . . one of the most important is its ritualistic worship. The gorgeous vestments, colorful processions, pageantry and mystifying symbolism, the stately music, the solemn intonations of the priests in a singsong voice, the flickering candles, the tinkling bells, the sweet smelling incense, the dim light of the cathedral . . . all are designed to impress the senses and the emotions . . . (W)hen thirty-two new cardinals were created by pope Pius XII . . . the scarlet robes alone of each new American cardinal's outfit cost \$10,000 . . . The jewels in the pope's triple-decked crown alone are said to be worth \$1,300,000." (Loraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 270-272)
- B. In sharp contrast, Hebrews 12:12-17 calls believers in Christ to holy living versus such worldly materialism:
 - 1. The author of Hebrews was aware of the spiritual weakness in his readers who were tempted to yield to ritualistic Judaism and turn away from the simplicity of the Christian faith. He thus told them figuratively to strengthen their feeble arms and weak knees, to make level paths and hence reasonably attainable goals for their feet in life's activities that the lame might not be disabled, but rather healed, Hebrews 12:12-13.
 - 2. By application, this admonition calls all believers not to put themselves in harm's way by needlessly exposing themselves to what tempts them to sin, but to avoid needless exposure to such temptation.
 - 3. In addition, the Hebrew believers were to make every effort to live in peace with everyone, not to complicate their lives with added stress of relationship conflicts that might add to the pressure they faced to return to errant Judaism, Hebrews 12:14a.
 - 4. The readers were also to be "holy," that is, separate from errant theology and religion, for without separation from such sin no one would see the Lord, Hebrews 12:14b. This directive did not mean that one would lose his salvation if he sinned, but that since "no sin can stand in God's presence, Christians must – and will be – sinless when they see the Lord (cf. 1 John 3:2). That realization offers motivation for pursuing holiness here and now." (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 810)
 - 5. Building on this theme of separation from sin, the author of Hebrews urged his readers not to fall short of the grace of God, that is, that "no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many," Hebrews 12:15 NIV. "Here the author had in mind Deuteronomy 29:18 where an Old-Covenant apostate was called a 'root . . . that produces such bitter poison.' Such a person would be godless (*bebelos*, 'profane, unhallowed, desecrated')," Ibid.
 - 6. The author further clarified that his readers should not be "sexually immoral," what in this context refers to immorality in the spiritual sense of clinging to worldly materialism in returning to Judaism and not remaining true to the Lord as one's God, Heb. 12:16; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Heb. 12:16.
 - 7. Esau was a worldly, materialistic person, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son, and later, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected, although he sought it with tears, being unable to change what he had done, Hebrews 12:17 NIV (cf. Genesis 25:27-34; 27:30-40).

Lesson: Since returning to Judaism from Christianity was apostasy and materialistic, spiritual immorality to be avoided by the Christian Hebrew readers of the epistle to the Hebrews, God called them to strengthen their resolve to avoid returning to materialistic, ritualistic Judaism lest they commit apostasy and spiritual immorality.

Application: May we strengthen our resolve to avoid returning to or compromising with ritualistic faiths such as Roman Catholicism by not putting ourselves in temptation's way to commit such sin and by adhering firmly to faith in Christ as opposed to the spiritual idolatry in materialistic ritualism.