

HEBREWS 30

THE JUDAIZING OF CHRISTIANITY

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(April 15, 2012)

INTRODUCTION

Last week we finished the doctrinal portion of Hebrews. And we have learned many great things about Christ and about Christianity especially as it is contrasted to that old covenant religion called Judaism.

We have learned that the old Mosaic system was a shadowy type of true Christianity. It was a very temporary carnal representation of true spiritual things.

The most glaring of these carnal representations under the Mosaic Covenant were the animal sacrifices. Under this carnal covenant, they sacrificed bulls and goats and lambs. Now the sacrifice of animals cannot atone for the sins of a man. And the writer of Hebrews states this quite clearly.

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Hebrews 10:4

So, this most prominent act under the old covenant of sacrificing animals was clearly not an effective sacrifice. It was not designed to be an effective sacrifice. It was a picture. It was not the substance of things, it was the shadow. The sacrifice of Christ which would come later was the real sacrifice that took away sins.

Another glaring example of a carnal representation under the Mosaic Covenant was the Levitical priesthood. The priests under this old covenant were mere men. They were mortal men who eventually died themselves. They were sinful men who needed atonement for themselves. And so, it is obvious that a man who is sinful himself and who needs a mediator himself cannot be an effective mediator for other sinful men. The problem was that God was angry with sinners. And under the Levitical system, there were sinful priests. This could never be an effective mediation.

Ah, but then Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice. See how much better his sacrifice is. His sacrifice was of infinite value. The Son of God was of much greater value than an animal. And therefore the sacrifice of Jesus is efficient to take away sins.

Now one of the most significant differences between the sacrifice of Jesus and the sacrifice of animals is that the sacrifice of Jesus was once for all. Animals were offered over and over. But Jesus died once to take away sins. So, one of the great differences between Judaism and Christianity is this concept of finality. There was no finality in Judaism because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. But there was finality in the sacrifice of Jesus because his sacrifice took away sins.

There was no relief to the conscience, that is, to the inward man, under Judaism. (See Hebrews 10:1-3) And therefore, by the very nature of Judaism, there was no end to sacrifices. They offered them year by year continually. (10:1) Finally, Jesus came to mercifully put an end to that Old Covenant and to those ineffective rituals.

When Jesus offered his sacrifice, there was an end to sacrifices.

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.
Hebrews 10:18

Now here is the principle. When it comes to atonement, Christ does his work completely and thoroughly and forever. There is no more repetition. There are no more sacrifices. There are no more offerings for sin. There are no more rituals and ceremonies which prefigure his atonement. There is no more work for human priests to do – our great high priest is here and he has done what the other priests could not do.

Now the writer of Hebrews has written this great epistle, to encourage Jewish believers not to go back to the old repetition of rituals; not to go back to that which could not get the job done; but to hold fast to Christ. The great truth of Christianity is that the work of Christ was efficient and sufficient; that is was final and complete. The work of Christ was so great and effective that there is no more sacrificial work to do.

Continuance in Judaism after the work of Christ was complete was in effect a denial of the work of Christ. In essence they said, we don't believe that the sacrifice of Jesus was the substance behind our rituals. We are going to keep trusting the blood of animals instead of Christ. And that was a very fatal decision because it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Now this afternoon, I want to say a word or two about Roman Catholicism because I think our study in Hebrews is very instructive with regard to their religion.

Now I offer my thoughts this afternoon knowing that some of our own members came from a Catholic background. And some that may hear this message may actually be Roman Catholic presently. So, I say these things with love toward them and without trying to trample on their feelings.

But I want to point out that in many ways Catholicism is a Judaizing of Christianity. And some of the great principles of the book of Hebrews is thoroughly denied by Roman Catholics. One such principle that they deny is,

The finality of the death of Christ.

Now in the Catholic religion the people go to mass every week. And I think many of us who are not Catholic do not understand the significance of the Catholic mass. Some think of the Catholic mass as merely a church assembly much like ours. Some think of it as just another form of the Lord's Supper. But the mass is quite a different thing from the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper, as we observe it, is a memorial service, recalling to mind the glorious person of Christ and the great service that he rendered us on Calvary.

But for Roman Catholics, the mass is something quite different. To them, the mass is also an ongoing sacrifice administered by a priest. And this sacrifice is the central point in the worship. They teach that the bread and the wine are changed by the power of the priest into the actual body and blood of Christ. The wine is in a golden cup. The bread is in a golden dish. And when the elements are changed into the body of Christ they are then raised before the altar in the hands of the priest and offered up to God

for the sins both of the living and the dead.

Catholics believe that the mass is the same sacrifice that was offered on Calvary.

In a Roman Catholic Catechism of Christian Doctrine the question is asked: "Is the Holy Mass one and the same sacrifice with that of the Cross? (Question 278) And listen to the answer.

"The Holy Mass is one and the same sacrifice with that of the Cross, inasmuch as Christ, who offered Himself, a bleeding victim, on the Cross to his heavenly Father, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner on the altar, through the ministry of His priests."

In other words, the sacrifice of Christ is a continuing sacrifice.

But this is the very point made in Hebrews. The sacrifice of Christ is not a continuing sacrifice. The sacrifices of Judaism were continual, but the sacrifice of Christ was once for all. Nothing could be clearer in Hebrews.

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Hebrews 9:12

Now there are two emphatic ideas in this verse. There is an emphasis on the word once. Jewish high priests had to enter the holy of holies every year. Jesus entered once. This is because his offering was effective. He offered it once and God accepted it once. And that was the end of it.

But also notice in Hebrews 9:12 the final and complete efficacy of his sacrifice. He entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

There is no need for further sacrifices. Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for us. To suggest that more sacrifices must be offered every week at mass is a denial of the complete efficacy of his sacrifice on Calvary.

But there is even more Scriptural evidence in Hebrews 9:24-28.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with the blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Hebrews 9:24-28

So, the concept of offering continual sacrifices in the mass, sacrifices for the remission of sins, is more akin to Judaism than to the Christianity of the Bible.

Now there is another way that Catholicism is more like Judaism than Christianity, and that is in the maintenance of an earthly priesthood. And this denies the principle of,

The singularity of the Priesthood of Christ

Under Judaism there were many priests, but in Christianity there is one priest and one only. The thing that characterized and distinguished Christ's priesthood from other priests was his endless life. He was a priest after the order of Melchisedec. All of the Levitical priests died. But there is no record of Melchisedec's birth or death. And so, Melchisedec prefigured a coming priest who would live forever.

And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

Hebrews 9:15, 16

Under Judaism there were many priests, they were born and then they died. But then, along came a priest after the order of Melchisedec and he lives forever. He is so much different from all those other priests. And he is so far superior. There is none like him. He is the only one of his kind.

And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 9:23-25

And when Jesus came as our great high priest, it put an end to that other priesthood. Hebrews calls it changing the law. You see the Levitical priesthood was a temporary priesthood under a temporary covenant. And when Christ came, there was a change in the law.

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

Hebrews 9:12

Now if there was to be a human priesthood continuing through the New Testament, you would think that it would be extensively discussed in the New Testament. But in the New Testament the word priest is only used in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts – that is, it is used in the historical portion of the New Testament referring to the existing priesthood at the time of Christ. But in all of the epistles, the word priest is never used again until the book of Hebrews where it is asserted that Christ is now our priest and that other priesthood is vanished away. The word priest is not used in Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus or Philemon. It is also not mentioned in James, II Peter, I, II and III John, or Jude. In I Peter 2:5 it says that believers are priests and in Revelation 1:6; 5:10; and 20:6 believers are said to be priests.

The presiding officer in the New Testament Church is a pastor. It is not a priest. This is because there is one priest and one priest only – the Lord Jesus Christ. No other officers in the church are able to mediate between God and man. Only Jesus is our priest. Only Jesus is our mediator.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

I Timothy 2:5

Even the great Apostle Paul bowed to Jesus as the one mediator.

Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not,) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

I Timothy 2:6

Paul admitted that he was a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. But he said, “there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”

And yet, in Roman Catholicism, there is a whole hierarchy of priests from the Pope on down to the lower levels of priesthood.

Now some would say, “Well these priests correspond to pastors and preachers in other churches.” But they don’t correspond at all.

The primary function of the Catholic Priest is to offer the sacrifice of the mass continually for the sins of the people. Every week, another sacrifice is offered. The preaching of the Word of God is totally secondary and in many cases almost nonexistent. The Catholic Priest is the mediator for the people. During the mass, there is almost no participation by the people. They are mere observers. The priest goes through an elaborate ritual and then offers a sacrifice for their sins.

Furthermore, when the people sin, they come to the confessional and they tell their sins to the priest and they do this so that their sins will be forgiven.

Listen to the Baltimore Catechism which defines confession as follows:

“Confession is the telling of our sins to an authorized priest for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness.”

And further it says,

“An authorized priest is one who has . . . the power to forgive sins by reason of his ordination to the priesthood . . .”

You can see that the Catholic priest is nothing like a New Testament pastor or preacher. The Catholic priest claims to have the ability to forgive

sins in the name of Christ. And furthermore, he determines the gravity of your sin and assigns certain works that you may do to be absolved from your sins.

But the Scriptures clearly teach that there is one and one only who can forgive sins. And that is God. Even the Jews knew this great truth.

Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?

Mark 2:7

Jesus had power to forgive sins, but this was his exclusive prerogative.

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

Matthew 9:6

Now I have tried to show you that Roman Catholicism errs by Judaizing Christianity. And specifically, it errs in (1) not recognizing the finality of the death of Christ and (2) not recognizing the singularity of the priesthood of Christ.

And next, they err, by denying the New Testament principle of,

Spirituality rather than ritualism

Fallen man much prefers rituals to spirituality. Ceremonies are much preferred to repentance and faith because ceremonies are doable by fallen man, but repentance and faith are impossible without regeneration. So, the world loves rituals. Perhaps this explains the huge numbers within the walls of the Catholic Church.

Fallen man loves gorgeous vestments, colorful processions and pageantry. They love huge cathedrals with pipe organs. They love flickering candles and tinkling bells and sweet smelling incense. They love liturgies in Latin which no one can understand. They want to be dazzled with a theatrical display of religion, and the Roman church readily obliges.

And this is so much like Judaism. You see, Judaism was a religion of ceremonies. And at least in Judaism, these ceremonies were authorized by God as a picture of the coming Christ. But all of these rituals had no saving power at all!

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

Hebrews 10:4

And the time for ceremonies has vanished away with the coming of Christ. Put away the altar. Put away the laver where the priests washed continually. Put away the lamp stand and the showbread and the bowl of incense. Take the temple down. The veil has already been torn in two. Go ahead and take it down. Don't bring any more lambs. Don't bring any more meal offerings. Don't come anymore to the priest to be ceremonially cleansed.

You see, the real thing is here and the shadows are now swallowed up in the great light of the coming of Christ.

Jesus told the woman at the well,

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

John 4:23, 24

Hebrews has taught us that the ritualism of the old covenant has given way to the reality and substance of the new. And the new way is much better. We can come right to the very throne of God and we can come there boldly without any further ceremonies because of what Christ has done. He has rolled back the heavens by his great sacrificial offering and now we can approach God without ritual and ceremony.

We can fold our hands and bow our heads and come directly to the Father. In fact, we can come to him even without the bowing of the head or the folding of the hands because there is no ceremony required. The only requirement is that you come by faith in Christ Jesus.

I hope that you can see, that any religion that centers on ritual and ceremony, is closer akin to Judaism than to Christianity. God is interested in a sincere heart and he is not moved by ceremonies.

But our study of Hebrews convinces us of another error which runs to the core of Roman Catholicism. By clinging to rituals and ceremonies and by declaring that sinners can be forgiven by human priests and by offering certain penances which can absolve men from their sins, the Roman system denies the New Testament principle of,

Salvation by grace instead of works

Sinners love to think that they can be justified by some other method than by repentance and faith. They love to be justified by something other than a change of heart. Thieves love their thefts. Liars love their lies. Drunkards love their alcohol. Adulterers love their adulteries. And, sinners love their sins.

And sinners will always love to think that they can do something to atone for their sins. Tell them to observe a ritual and they will do so until the day they die, thinking that in these rituals there is salvation.

Tell a sinner that all he has to do is go ever so often to a priest, and he will feel safe.

Tell a sinner that all he has to do is pay a fee to the church and he will try to pay his way to heaven.

The whole system of penance, whereby sins after conversion are paid for by doing various works, is a system that denies the once for all forgiveness of Jesus Christ. It denies that Jesus made full atonement. It denies that Jesus has opened up a way to the throne of God by his perfect sacrifice. It denies that salvation is wholly by grace.

To any of you who have Roman Catholic roots, to any of you who may yet have ties to the Roman Catholic religion, I urge you to study the book of Hebrews.

I heard someone tell once of a Roman Catholic Priest who was conducting a mass as usual. And one of the readings in the liturgy was

from Hebrews 10. And when this priest got to Hebrews 10:18, it suddenly occurred to him what all of this meant.

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.
Hebrews 10:18

And this priest laid down his book and he asked the people there at mass, "Do you hear what this is saying? There is no more offering for sin." And he asked the people, "What are we doing? Why are we here continuing to offer sacrifices week after week, when the Scriptures say, there is no more offering for sin."

This Roman Catholic priest was not a Roman Catholic priest much longer. In fact, he was ostracized and threatened by the authorities in the church and he was excommunicated.

And he was excommunicated because he finally saw and believed the full sufficiency and the finality of the atonement of Christ.

What a Savior we have! He is the one and only mediator between God and man. He is the only authorized priest. He is the one and only effective sacrifice. He is the only one who can forgive sins. And there is no way to God except by faith in Him.

God has devised a way of salvation and it not by rituals or ceremonies. It is not by pageantry. Nor is it by pomp and circumstance. It is not by works as in many of the religions of the world. But it is by the sheer grace of God.

I invite you to come to God by Jesus Christ. Would you bow your head with me as we go to Him in prayer?