

## **So What's The Difference?**

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### **Chapter Three: Eastern Orthodoxy: Just Like The Catholics Except for the Pope?**

- PLUMB LINE

1 Cor. 15:3-4: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was buried...he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

#### **Synopsis of Eastern Orthodoxy**

- There are possibly 6 million members of the Orthodox Church in the United States.
- Orthodoxy is not one big church that split away from the **Roman Catholic Church** at Rome in 1054.
- There are at least 13 independent and self-governing churches, including the four ancient patriarchates that still exist in the Middle East: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.
- The current number of Orthodox believers worldwide exceeds **200** million.
- Most of those who are heads of Orthodox Churches are called patriarchs, archbishop, or metropolitan.
- For historical reasons, the Orthodox Church at **Constantinople** and its patriarch enjoy a certain “primacy of honor” but have no power to interfere in the internal affairs of the other Orthodox churches.

#### **Beliefs and Worship of Orthodoxy**

- Orthodox **disputes** that Rome has claim to be the one true Church.
- Orthodox beliefs teach that there is one true church-Orthodox
- Constantinople and Rome split in **1054**.
- The Eastern Church (Orthodox) sought to preserve the faith as they had understood it for 1,000 years, sticking closely to the decisions of the first seven General Councils of the Church, held between 325 and 787.

#### **Orthodoxy's View of Apostolic Succession**

- Like Roman Catholics, the Orthodox place much stock in **apostolic** succession, but their viewpoint of the role of bishops differ.
- Orthodox believe the bishops have continued in apostolic succession, but while they give Peter (and even today's pope) a certain primacy, they do not grant the pope supremacy.

- Evangelical **Protestants** do not agree with apostolic succession, thereby differing with both Orthodoxy and Roman Catholic.
- (See Acts 6:7; 2 Pet. 1:19; Jude 3-Protestants see the message of the New Testament itself as what “succeeded” the apostles)
- Scripture is **silent** concerning anyone succeeding the original apostles by being endowed with their supernatural power and divine capabilities.
- The apostles appointed pastors (bishops) and deacons to lead local congregations that sprang up, but they could not give these men the power to be **apostles**.
- Pastors, bishops and deacons only had authority inasmuch as they held true to the proclamation of the gospel as given by the original apostles.

### **Orthodoxy Adds Tradition to Scripture**

- Orthodox believes that the Church is **authoritative**.
- Protestants believe that only the Scriptures are authoritative and all believers have the right and responsibility to examine Scripture for themselves.
- Orthodox speak of an “**internal norm**” for determining authority-the Spirit of God living within the Church
- Orthodoxy believes that authority comes from the Bible but also the Nicea/Constantinople Creed, the Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the writings of the Fathers, the canons of the Church, the service books (liturgy) and holy icons.
- Orthodoxy believes that the Bible gets its authority from the **Church**, not vice versa. Orthodox believes that the Church existed and flourished before any of the New Testament books were ever written.
- The Orthodox stress that the Church originally decided which books would be in Holy Scripture; therefore, only the Church can interpret Holy Scripture with authority.
- Protestants believe the Bible does not get its authority from the Church, but as John Calvin put it, the Word of God gave **birth** to the Church.
- The Bible gets its authority from being the inspired (“God-breathed”) writings of men who were led by the **Holy Spirit** (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
- The Church did not “decide” which books would be in Holy Scripture; the church took approximately 200 years to recognize which writings had “divine authority” and belonged in the canon of Scripture.

### **Orthodoxy Believes the Reformers Were Wrong**

- Orthodox refers to “the sin of the Reformation” when the Reformers put the Bible above the Church and tradition and believing in subjective interpretation of Scripture.

- Roman Catholics and Orthodox believers feel that the **Reformation** led to the many Protestant denominations that have sprung up due to personal interpretation.
- This possible weakness is viewed by the Protestants as a strength since no one group can be in total control of interpreting Scripture.

### **How the Orthodox view the Seven Sacraments**

- The Orthodox observe the same **seven** sacraments practiced by the Roman Catholic Church but differ at certain points regarding interpretation and emphasis.
- For the Orthodox, everything starts with **baptism**-it is the foundation of the believer's life in the Church.
- Orthodox baptism is administered to infants as well as adult converts through whom a person is born again and cleansed from **original** and actual sins.
- The Eucharist (Holy Communion)-The Orthodox believe that the very body and blood of Christ are present in the elements of the bread and wine but they hesitate to use the Roman Catholic term "transubstantiation."
- The Orthodox believes that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was only once and for all time.
- The Last Supper, Crucifixion and Resurrection are made present even though they are not repeated.
- In Orthodoxy, sins committed following baptism are atoned for through **confession** or repentance.
- Confession is open and the priest stands to one side symbolizing that only God is the judge.
- The priest may give advice and may occasionally assign a penance.
- Orthodoxy does not teach the paying for temporal punishments nor are there any indulgences invoked to expiate sins for persons living or dead.
- Orthodoxy does not teach **purgatory**. However, they do pray for the dead since they are in a place of rest and are in a state of preparations for the judgment seat of Christ on the Last Day.

### **Why the Orthodox Pray to Saints and Icons**

- The orthodox feel that Mary and other saints are not mediators but **intercessors** and praying to them is not worshipping but venerating them.
- Mary is the saint considered to have most completely achieved the goal of **deification**.
- Orthodox believe, like the Catholic Church, in Mary's perpetual virginity but they do not agree with the Roman Catholic doctrine of her immaculate conception.

- Great emphasis is placed on **icons**-colorful stylized paintings of Christ, the apostles, Mary and other saints.
- Some orthodox believers prostrate themselves before the icons, kiss them and burn candles in front of them.
- The icon is not an idol but a **symbol** of the one being venerated.
- The icons also serve as a learning tool or as a time to study the Church's teaching of the faith especially to those who lack learning or the time to study.
- The icons are considered a source of revelation equal to the Bible.

### **Orthodoxy Stresses Deification Above Justification**

- Orthodoxy teaches that Adam's fall did not separate us from God but brought us death, mortality and corruption.
- Through Christ's death, we become deified-**Gods** with a human nature.
- Orthodoxy leaves out the doctrine of justification by **faith**.
- Orthodox understanding of salvation actually pertains to sanctification (becoming mature in Christ).
- They take 2 Peter 1:4 and interpret its meaning as taking on a divine nature.
- 2 Peter 1: 3-11 talks about sanctification (becoming mature in Christ) not becoming deified.

### **Jesus Christ: The "Someone at the Center"**

- Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestant beliefs **all** center on several important themes:
  - Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe, who died, was buried and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.
- His words of invitation are open to **all** who are willing to put their faith directly in Him alone: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37)

### **Summing up Major Differences Between Orthodox Believers and Evangelical Protestants**

#### **Regarding authority**

- Orthodoxy teaches that apostolic succession occurred through bishops and **Church fathers** who developed a tradition equal to Scripture.

- Evangelical Protestants say the apostles were succeeded, not by bishops or Church fathers, but by the Scriptures only (Titus 1:1-4; Jude vv. 3,17).
- Orthodoxy also says the Church is in authority over Scripture, which is only part of a larger tradition.
- Protestants believe the Scripture is in **supreme** authority over the Church, the sole guide for faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 5:13; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

### **Regarding Salvation**

- Orthodoxy teaches that man did not fall from perfect fellowship with God but departed from the path for attaining perfect fellowship and that man inherited mortality and corruption but **not** Adam's guilt.
- Protestants teach that man fell from his perfect state with God and **inherited** Adam's guilt (see Rom. 5:12-21).
- The Orthodox believe salvation is attained through the process of theosis, becoming deified (like God).
- Protestants say justification comes through **faith** in Christ (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8-9), and then the Christian becomes sanctified by walking with Christ (Eph. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-11).