

# Eastern Orthodoxy

All material taken from Fritz Ridenour's  
What's the Difference?

So

# Miscellaneous

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- ▶ Stats: Worldwide members = 200+ million; US = upwards of 6 million
- ▶ For evangelicals, probably the least known branch of Christendom
- ▶ What they are *not*:
  - ▶ RC's w/o a pope
  - ▶ One big church that split from Rome in 1054 A.D., with its headquarters in Constantinople (Istanbul) vs. the Vatican
- ▶ What they *are*:
  - ▶ At least 13 autocephalous (independent & self-governing) churches, including the four ancient patriarchates still in existence: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, & Jerusalem
  - ▶ Heads of churches : patriarchs, archbishops, or metropolitans
  - ▶ Church & patriarch @ Constantinople have “primacy of honor” but not power to interfere w/other Orthodox churches (unlike pope)



# “Correct Belief & Correct Worship”

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- ▶ Dispute Rome’s claim to be the one true Church
- ▶ Timothy Ware (Orthodox bishop & theologian):  
“Orthodoxy, believing that the Church on Earth has remained and must remain visibly one, naturally also believes itself to be that one visible church.”
- ▶ Ware: OC guards & teaches true belief about God, glorifying Him w/right worship as it preserves original apostolic faith



# “Correct Belief & Correct Worship”

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- ▶ Split w/Rome in 1054 A.D. & subsequent worship & practices:
  - ▶ RC added and changed along the way
  - ▶ OC sought to preserve the faith as they had understood it for 1,000 yrs., sticking closely to the first seven General Councils of the Church, held between 325 & 787 A.D.
- ▶ OC claims RC strayed into heresy via papacy & claims to absolute primacy/supremacy over all churches
- ▶ OC also believes Rome’s *filioque* doctrine, put into Nicene Creed arbitrarily w/o decision of a General Council, is heretical



# Apostolic Succession

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- ▶ **Bishops continued in apostolic succession**
    - ▶ Peter (and today's pope) given a certain primacy, but not supremacy
    - ▶ Instead, all bishops “share equally in the apostolic succession”
  - ▶ **Evangelicals do not agree w/apostolic succession**
    - ▶ We also hold to Eph. 2:20, *but* we see the work of the apostles as being unique and supernatural powers as incommunicable because the “apostolic age” ended w/the death of John towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D.
    - ▶ We believe the NT itself is what “succeeded” the apostles (cf. Acts 6:7; Titus 1:1-4; 2 Pt. 1:19; Jude 3)
    - ▶ Apostles appointed pastors (bishops), Elders, & deacons (none of whom were or would be apostles) to lead local churches, and they only held authority inasmuch as they held to the true proclamation of the Gospel as given by the original apostles (same is true today)
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# Scripture Plus Tradition

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- ▶ Church is authoritative, b/c Church is everything (contrast w/sola scriptura)
- ▶ Believers are to listen to & obey Church's interp. of Bible
- ▶ Church over Scripture (again, contrast sola scriptura), saying Scripture is only part of a much larger tradition that makes for a complete organic whole—the “fullness of the Christian faith”
- ▶ No clear objective, formally definable criteria of truth, such as papal authority (RC) or sola scriptura (Protestants)
- ▶ Instead, “internal norm”- the Spirit of God living w/in the Church



# Scripture Plus Tradition

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- ▶ Christian Tradition:
    - ▶ record of Holy Spirit's work in the Church
    - ▶ Includes Bible, Nicene Creed, Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, writings of the Fathers, canons of the Church, service books (liturgy), & holy icons
  - ▶ Ware: "The Bible is not something set up *over* the Church; it is something that lives and is understood *within* the Church."
  - ▶ The Bible gets its authority from the Church, not vice versa
  - ▶ OC: Church existed & flourished before NT written, and Church originally decided which books would be in Holy Scripture [This is a flawed view of history.]; therefore, only Church can interpret Scripture w/authority.
  - ▶ Protestants: Bible authoritative b/c it's inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pt. 1:20, 21)
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- ▶ Calvin: Word of God gave birth to the Church, not vice

# “The Sin of the Reformation”

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- ▶ Reformers’ mistake: separation of Scripture & Tradition
- ▶ OC: putting Scripture above the Church & teaching it speaks directly to the individual’s heart & mind was the “sin of the Reformation,” b/c it allows subjective interp.
- ▶ OC’s (and RC’s) often criticize Protestantism by pointing to the “hopeless mess” caused by plethora of denominations that have sprung up b/c Protestants’ freedom to interpret Bible under what they believe is the Holy Spirit’s guidance
- ▶ Yet, evangelicals never affirmed all interps. as valid; in fact, sola scriptura (when adhered to responsibly) holds heresy in check, as each believer admonishes those (even laity correcting church leaders) in error



# Seven Sacraments

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- ▶ Observe the same seven sacraments as the RC's, but differ at certain points
- ▶ Baptism & the Eucharist (Divine Liturgy) are preeminent
- ▶ Baptism:
  - ▶ administered to infants or adult converts
  - ▶ “bath of regeneration”
  - ▶ Person born again & cleansed from original sin & actual sins



# Seven Sacraments

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## ▶ Eucharist:

- ▶ So central to OC practice & belief that it's called Divine Liturgy
  - ▶ Like RC belief, body & blood of Christ are present in the elements (both of which are served to everyone), but hesitant to use the term “transubstantiation” (contra RC's)
  - ▶ Rather, reality of the change is there, but inexplicable
  - ▶ Considered a propitiatory (covering) sacrifice offered for the living & the dead
  - ▶ Ware: not a new sacrifice or a repetition of Calvary, because the Lamb was sacrificed once and for all time; instead, events of Christ's sacrifice—Last Supper, Crucifixion, & Resurrection—made present even though not repeated
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# Seven Sacraments

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- ▶ **Confession or repentance:**
  - ▶ not done in a closed area (contra RC), but in the open, sometimes in a special room set apart for confession
  - ▶ Both parties stand or sit to emphasize priest not judge; only God is Judge
  - ▶ After hearing confession, priest often gives advice or occasionally assigns penance, but not essential & often omitted
- ▶ **Purgatory & indulgences:**
  - ▶ No belief in purgatory because of emphasis on *theosis* (process of deification to attain salvation), and no indulgences
  - ▶ However, prayers are offered for the deceased, who are believed to be in a state of restful existence; prayers prepare deceased to be confident at the judgment seat of Christ on the Last Day



# Icons

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- ▶ Saints have achieved deification
  - ▶ Not mediators but intercessors, and praying to them is not worship but veneration
  - ▶ Mary:
    - ▶ Venerated as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) according to decision of Third General Council at Ephesus in 431 A.D.
    - ▶ She most completely achieved deification
    - ▶ Agree with RC's re: perpetual virginity, but not immaculate conception
    - ▶ Belief in assumption, but not a dogma equal to beliefs such as the Trinity & the virgin birth
    - ▶ See RC power point presentation for Evangelical refutations
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# Icons

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## ▶ Icons:

- ▶ highly ornate paintings of Christ, apostles, Mary, & others saints
- ▶ Adorn walls & iconostasis (screen dividing sanctuary at front of church from rest of worship area)
- ▶ OC's sometimes prostrate themselves before icons, kiss them, or burn candles in front of them
- ▶ Protestant charge of idol worship
- ▶ OC response: not worship b/c icon only a symbol, and veneration not toward picture but person depicted in picture
- ▶ Insistence on icons b/c not simply pix but important part of church's teaching of the faith; those who lack learning or time to study can enter church & see on its walls all they need to know to understand the faith—icons replace need for doctrinal teaching
- ▶ Icons are a source of revelation equal to the Bible



# Deification above Justification

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- ▶ OC's agree the Fall was disastrous, but don't believe humans are totally depraved w/a sinful nature
- ▶ Humans not created in communion & fellowship w/God; instead, given task of working toward it
- ▶ Fall was a "departure from a path," not a drastic plunge from a state of blessedness; we didn't inherit guilt through Adam, but death, mortality, & corruption. Biblical response: We did inherit guilt through Adam (Rom. 5:12-21)
- ▶ Fall set up impenetrable barrier btwn God & humankind; instead of emphasis on Cross & Jesus' wrath-bearing substitutionary atonement, OC's view Christ's sacrifice as a victory over sin & death



# Deification above Justification

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- ▶ Not sola fide & imputation of Christ's righteousness
  - ▶ Instead, Jesus' death on the cross & God's grace are the means to enable humans to "become god, to obtain *theosis* ('deification' or 'divinization')"
  - ▶ OC's point to 2 Pt. 1:4 and the promise that we "might become partakers of the divine nature"
  - ▶ OC's also find the concept in Ps. 82:6; Eph. 4:24; 1 Jn. 3:2
  - ▶ Theology taught by Church fathers from eastern end of the Catholic (universal) Church as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> c. A.D.
  - ▶ Athanasius, defender of Christ's deity at Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.: "God became man so that men might become gods."
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# Deification above Justification

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- ▶ OC's insist theosis not a variant of pantheism; teach that Christians might become “gods,” while retaining their human nature
- ▶ To become deified is to become a partaker of the divine nature, but you are not changed into a divine being
- ▶ Evangelical responses:
  - ▶ salvation by deification ignores justification by grace alone through faith alone, turning sanctification (growth in Christlikeness) into justification
  - ▶ 2 Pt. 1:4 is w/in context of sanctification; 1:3 talks about salvation, while 1:4-7 talks about growth in our salvation
  - ▶ Salvation by works, not faith
  - ▶ Failure to clearly distinguish between holiness (growth in Christ) & idolatry (we are “gods”)



# Evangelism

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- ▶ Avoid a combative attitude
  - ▶ Emphasize that salvation is a free gift received *solely* by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9)
  - ▶ Pray and trust in the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of those who are lost
  - ▶ Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered
  - ▶ Be sure to distinguish between *justification* (i.e. being declared just or right before God through Christ's righteousness imputed to you when you believe in Him; Rom. 3:24) & *sanctification* (growth in Christlikeness post-justification; Eph. 2:10; 2 Pt. 1:3-11). See RC power point presentation for a detailed discussion of the biblical view of justification.
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# Evangelism

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- ▶ Avoid “rabbit trails,” keeping the discussion on the Essentials of the Faith (see our church’s SOF @ [www.fbcreading.org](http://www.fbcreading.org))
- ▶ Share a testimony of your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior
- ▶ Share the assurance of salvation that God’s grace gives you. Make sure that you communicate that your assurance is derived from trusting Jesus & not from your good works or your ability to remain faithful (1 John 5:13)

