

4. God and salvation

(a) Doctrine of God... and knowability of God

EO = God is essentially un-knowable... distinction between God's essence and energies

Bible = God is holy... yet knowable through Christ

(b) *** Theosis: deification***

EO = participating in God's divine "energies" ... maybe transfiguring the body... or through denial of the body asceticism

Bible = union with Christ... rooted in God's *covenant* fellowship

(c) Sin, salvation and justification

EO = sin?... "Lord have mercy" ... but no original sin... "diseased but not dead" = semi-Pelagianism ... synergism = us and God together

Bible = dead in transgressions and sins Ephesians 2:1

... monergism = it is GOD's work.

EO: atonement not nearly as significant as the incarnation

... little/no place for justification by faith

... it's all about the journey towards *theosis*

Bible = progress and works do matter... but it is ALL grounded on justification by faith and the legal imputation of Christ's righteousness

Finally: watch out for dissatisfaction... enjoy being Reformed

Resources

- *TableTalk* (Dec 2025 issue) = see PDF
- *Understanding Eastern Orthodoxy* – three 40 minute videos by Camden Busey – OPC minister = see YouTube
- *Review of "Through Western Eyes"* – by Daniel Chew – reviewing Robert Letham's book on EO

Understanding Eastern Orthodoxy

1. What is EO?

Technically = churches that...

- acknowledge the 7 ecumenical councils:
- in communion with patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch and Constantinople.
- split from the western catholic church in 1054

Geographically

What does it sound, look, and smell like?

= multi-sensory experience

Q: Why is this attractive?

To a Protestant evangelical? To a non-believer?



Responding to the central claim:

2. "EO is the original New Testament church"

"The Orthodox church has been around for 2,000 years." Fr Theophan Mackey

"To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant." Henry Newman Roman Catholic

(a) Some EO distinctives clearly contradict the Apostles = first "Fathers" of the church

Ephesians 2:20, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"

Later writings are not "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16)

*** EO rejects sola scriptura ***

- Scripture is one part of an unbroken, living, and dynamic stream that includes the liturgy, the seven ecumenical councils, the writings of leading church fathers, icons

Whereas the Reformed say:

- The Bible is God's authoritative word,
- WCF 31.4, "All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both."

(b) Some EO distinctives are contradicted by the post-Apostolic Fathers

e.g. Icons – not used before 500AD,
and condemned by Tertullian, Irenaeus and Origen

e.g. the heresy of Pelagianism – condemned by Council of Ephesus 431AD

(c) The logical implications of Scripture are *NOT* new revelations of the Spirit

YES:

2 Timothy 1:13, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus"

WCF 1.6, "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."

NO:

"new revelations of the Spirit"

3. Worship

(a) sacraments

EO = 7+ sacraments – at least.

Bible = 2: baptism and Lord's Supper

EO: communion or "eucharist" = *epiclesis*... transformed

Bible = once and finished work of Christ (Hebrews 10:12)

(b) priesthood

EO = a human priest... enters the holy place... modelled on OT

Bible = Christ the High Priest has come! We are ALL priests (1 Peter 2:9)

WCF 7.6, "Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy..."

(c) icons and prayer to saints

EO = "not idols, but windows" "venerate, not worship"

"materials laden with Divine energy and gracious power..."

from them we draw the grace of salvation" John of Damascus, 7th century Syrian

argued on basis of Christ's incarnation (but actually neo-platonism)

Bible = images are FORBIDDEN in worship. See Exodus 20:4-6

Bible = we have ONE mediator, Christ (1 Tim. 2:5)

(d) Who decides what is acceptable worship?

Warning – "will-worship" ... is a constant danger:

Colossians 2:23, "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."

WCF 21.1, "... But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture"

= the Regulative principle of worship