Eastern Orthodoxy: A Fourth Point of Comparison — The Short Version

Paper 10 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

A plain-language companion to Paper 10. Everything here is worked out at length there, with the Greek, the objections, and the sources.

A church most of us have never heard from

For its first thousand years the church was one body, spread across the Roman world. The West spoke Latin and looked to Rome. The East spoke Greek and looked to Constantinople, today's Istanbul. In 1054 the two broke apart. The Western half became the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestants came out of it later. The Eastern half is still here, and it's called **Eastern Orthodoxy**. The capital O matters: "Orthodox" is that church's name, the way "Catholic" is Rome's.

Most of this series compares Word of the Kingdom teaching with Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic churches. Those three argue with each other a lot, but they argue inside the same house, one built mostly by a single Western teacher, Augustine, around the year 400. Orthodoxy never moved into that house. So it gets a paper of its own.

What Orthodoxy teaches

Adam passed on death, not guilt. Paul wrote that "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The West read that as everyone sinning *in* Adam and sharing his guilt. Orthodoxy never did. You inherit Adam's death, it says, but not his guilt. Your guilt is your own.

Salvation is healing. If the problem is a sickness, the cure is a long recovery. Orthodoxy pictures the Christian as a patient being healed by Christ's life, a little at a time, for as long as he lives.

The goal is union with God. Peter wrote that Christians may become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Orthodoxy calls this *theosis*. It doesn't mean a man becomes God. The picture its teachers use is iron in a fire: the iron glows with the fire's heat and light, and it's still iron.

Grace and the will work together. God goes first, and the man works along with Him the whole way. So no Orthodox Christian calls his salvation settled. One of their best-known teachers, asked by a stranger whether he was saved, answered that he trusted he was "being saved."

No thousand-year reign. Orthodoxy expects one return of Christ, one resurrection, and one judgment, and then the end. That view came down from Alexandria, where teachers read the kingdom promises as symbols. To this day Revelation, the book that names the thousand years, is never read aloud in an Orthodox service.

What Word of the Kingdom teaches

Man is spirit, soul, and body, and death touched all three. Adam's sin came first, and death came in through it. Then Adam's children were born in *his* likeness: "Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. 5:3). Read on in that chapter, and nearly every life ends the same way: "and he died." Every man is born dead in all three parts. Like Orthodoxy, though, Word of the Kingdom teaching holds that none of Adam's guilt passes down. Each man's guilt is for his own sins (Ezek. 18:20).

The spirit is made alive at a moment. A sick man can be nursed back slowly. A dead man can't; he has to be raised.

> "even when we were dead in trespasses, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:5)

That happens the moment a man believes. It's all God's doing, and it's never undone.

The soul is saved along the walk. Here Word of the Kingdom teaching speaks of real cooperation, much as Orthodoxy does. Jesus put it to men who were already following Him:

> "whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25)

The word for life there is also the word soul. A Christian spends his life/soul now, in obedience, and finds it again when Jesus returns to reward each man for what he's done (Matt. 16:27).

The body receives glory at His coming. Those found faithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ are clothed with glory and reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12).

The kingdom is an age. That reign lasts a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6). This present age comes before it. After it come the ages Revelation calls "forever and ever," literally the ages of the ages (Rev. 22:5), and Scripture says little about them.

Same verses, read to the end

Orthodoxy's favorite verses share something you only see when you keep reading.

Peter's "divine nature" verse opens a paragraph. Seven verses later the paragraph ends here:

> "for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting [age-lasting] kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11)

An entrance that can be abundant can also be thin. Five verses after that, Peter calls what he saw on the mountain of the Transfiguration "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:16). The whole chapter points at the coming kingdom.

Paul's "fellow workers" verse, where Orthodoxy gets its word for cooperation, opens his teaching on the Judgment Seat (1 Cor. 3:9-15). A man's work is tested by fire, and if it burns:

> "he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15)

That man is saved, but he's lost something. Orthodoxy has room for only two endings, saved or lost. Paul gives a third.

It's like reading the first line of a letter and stopping there. The words are right. You just haven't found out what they're for.

Where we agree

- **Adam's guilt stays with Adam.** Here Orthodoxy and Word of the Kingdom teaching stand together against all three Western traditions.
- **Salvation is for something.** Neither one stops at escaping judgment.
- **The walk is real work.** Both take the Christian's effort seriously, and neither says a struggling Christian was never saved.

Where we part

What death is. Orthodoxy hears *death* as a sickness, healed slowly over a lifetime. Word of the Kingdom teaching hears it as separation from God, ended at a moment when the dead spirit is made alive.

Whether anything is settled. Because Orthodoxy's healing never finishes in this life, nothing is settled until the end. Here the beginning is settled the day a man believes, and what's still open is the soul and the body.

What's at stake. For Orthodoxy, salvation itself. For Word of the Kingdom teaching, the reward: the soul's salvation, the glory, and a share in the reign.

The goal. Orthodoxy says union with God. Word of the Kingdom teaching says ruling with Christ, the purpose man was made for: "let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26).

The kingdom. Orthodoxy has nothing between Christ's coming and the end. Word of the Kingdom teaching has the Judgment Seat, then a thousand-year reign.

What this is not

This is not a lighter view of the walk. Word of the Kingdom teaching takes obedience every bit as seriously as Orthodoxy does. A Christian works out his own salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

This is not saying a careless Christian loses his salvation. His standing before God was settled when he believed. What he can lose is the reward, and that loss belongs to the kingdom age. It doesn't reach past it.

This is not a courtroom that leaves a man unchanged. The judgment at the start isn't just a cleaner record. It's the moment a dead spirit comes alive.

Why this matters

Some Christians head East because their own churches felt thin: a prayer said once, and nothing asked of them afterward. Orthodoxy is right that the walk matters, right that no one is guilty for Adam, and right that salvation is for something.

But going East costs something. A man trades a settled beginning for a road with no settled point on it. He gives up the coming kingdom and the reign it was all for. And the meaning of Scripture stops being his to read and becomes the Church's to tell him.

Word of the Kingdom teaching keeps what draws people East without that price. The walk is serious, and the beginning is secure. And at the end of the walk, for the one who overcomes, there's a throne (Rev. 3:21).

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.