Eastern Orthodoxy: A Fourth Point of Comparison

Paper 10 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Long before anyone spoke of Protestants, there was one church spread across the Roman world, East and West, governed by bishops in communion with one another. In the eleventh century it broke in two. The Western half, Latin-speaking and centered on Rome, became the Roman Catholic Church, and out of it, five hundred years later, came the Reformation and everything Protestant. The Eastern half, Greek-speaking and centered on Constantinople (today's Istanbul, in Turkey), is still here. It's called Eastern Orthodoxy, and the capital O matters: "Orthodox" is this communion's name, the way "Catholic" is Rome's, rather than the everyday word for right belief that any church might claim for itself. It's the second-largest Christian communion on earth, and most Western Protestants know very little of what it teaches.

The papers in this series that take up doctrine — salvation, the Judgment Seat, the kingdom, the vocabulary of the afterlife — set Word of the Kingdom theology beside three traditions: Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic. Orthodoxy entered the series once, in the introductory paper, where the question was who has the final word on what Scripture means; on that question it answers differently from Rome and was heard on its own. On doctrine it was held back for this paper, and the reason says a good deal about Orthodoxy itself. Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic theology quarrel hard with one another, but they quarrel inside a frame they share, and that frame was largely built by one man, Augustine of Hippo, a bishop in North Africa in the late fourth and early fifth centuries who read and wrote in Latin and belonged to the Western half. Orthodoxy never took up that frame. Its answers to the first questions start from a different place. Set it as a fourth column beside the other three and it either gets flattened into a variant of Catholicism, which it isn't, or every paper fills up with exceptions.

So it gets its own paper, and the question this series puts to every tradition is put to it directly: what are we saved from, and when? Orthodoxy's answer is that man is saved from death and corruption, the sickness that came into human nature through Adam, and that the cure is a lifelong healing whose goal is union with God Himself. Word of the Kingdom theology's answer starts from death too, but it reads death differently, and that difference runs through everything else. In some places the two answers stand closer together than either stands to the Western traditions. In others they part company further than any tradition this series has compared.

"He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13). Orthodoxy is heard out first, on its own terms and from its own sources, before anything is set against it.

Eastern Orthodoxy on Its Own Terms

What follows describes Orthodoxy as its own teachers describe it. Every comparison waits for later.

Where it came from

For its first thousand years the church had no single earthly head that all Christians acknowledged. It was a communion of bishops in the great cities — Rome in the West; Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem in the East — who recognized one another as holding the same faith and who settled disputes together in council. Orthodoxy accepts seven of those councils as ecumenical, binding on the whole church, running from Nicaea in 325 to the second council of Nicaea in 787. It understands itself as the unbroken continuation of that church, with nothing added.

The break with the West came slowly. The two halves of the old empire spoke different languages — Latin in the West, Greek in the East — and over the centuries they stopped reading each other's theologians. Two disputes hardened the drift into a quarrel. The first was the *filioque*, Latin for "and the Son." The West added the phrase to the Nicene Creed's statement that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, so that the Western creed has the Spirit proceeding from the Father *and the Son*. The East held that no one church had the right to alter a creed the councils had fixed, and it rejected the doctrine as well as the procedure. The second dispute was the claim of the bishop of Rome, the West's leading bishop, to authority over all other bishops, Eastern ones included. The East had always honored Rome as first among equals; it never accepted Rome as ruler over the rest.

In 1054 Cardinal Humbert, sent from Rome as the pope's representative, laid a sentence of excommunication against Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople on the altar of Hagia Sophia, the great church of the Eastern capital, and the patriarch answered in kind. Historians date the Great Schism from that year, though ordinary Christians on both sides felt little change at the time. What made the breach real in the East was 1204, when Western crusaders bound for the Holy Land turned aside and sacked Constantinople itself, the capital of the Christian East. Two later councils, both held in the West, at Lyon in France in 1274 and at Florence in Italy in 1439, signed reunion agreements. The Orthodox rejected both, holding that the bishops who signed had no authority to give the faith away, and a synod at Constantinople in 1484 formally repudiated Florence. In 1965 Pope Paul VI in Rome and Patriarch Athenagoras in Constantinople lifted the excommunications of 1054. The two churches remain out of communion today.

How widely held

The Pew Research Center counted about 260 million members of the Orthodox churches worldwide in its 2017 study, roughly one Christian in eight. That figure includes the Oriental Orthodox churches — Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, and others — which parted from the rest over the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and form a separate communion, so Eastern Orthodoxy on its own is somewhat smaller. Russia alone holds about 101 million, nearly four in ten of the world's Orthodox. Orthodoxy is the majority faith in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Cyprus, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, and old Orthodox communities in Syria, Lebanon, and the Holy Land trace their line to the first Christians there. Twentieth-century immigration planted Orthodox parishes across North America and Western Europe, and men and women from Protestant and Catholic churches have joined them, many drawn by the church's age and the depth of its worship.

There's no Orthodox pope. The church is a family of self-governing churches — Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and others — each under its own patriarch or archbishop, all in communion with one another. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holds a primacy of honor but no power to rule the rest.

Ancestral sin: what Adam passed on

This is where Orthodoxy first parts from all three Western traditions, and it parts over a single verse.

> "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—" (Rom. 5:12)

Around the turn of the fifth century Augustine read this verse in Latin, and his Latin Bible rendered the last clause *in quo omnes peccaverunt*, "in whom all sinned." On that reading every human being sinned *in* Adam, was present in him when he fell, and so shares his guilt. That's the doctrine of original sin as the West has known it ever since. Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic theology differ over its consequences, but all three inherit its structure from Augustine.

The Greek doesn't say "in whom." The phrase is *eph' ho*, and most modern scholars of every confession render it "because," as the NKJV does. The Orthodox historian John Meyendorff points out that most of the Greek Fathers took it another way: as pointing back to *thanatos*, death, the nearest noun, so that the clause reads "because of which [death] all sinned." On that reading death is what Adam passed on, and men sin because they are mortal; the fear of death keeps them in bondage all their lives (Heb. 2:14-15), and out of that fear they grasp and take. Meyendorff sums up the Greek patristic consensus as seeing the fall as "an inheritance of essentially mortality rather than sinfulness" (*Byzantine Theology*, 143-145).

Orthodoxy calls this *ancestral* sin rather than *original* sin, and the change of name carries a change of meaning. Adam's descendants inherit a wounded nature: mortal, subject to corruption, bent toward sin. They don't inherit Adam's guilt. A man is guilty for his own sins and no one else's (Ezek. 18:20). The Greek word for sin, *hamartia*, means missing the mark, and Orthodox teachers commonly describe sin less as a crime on a record than as a sickness in a patient.

Salvation as healing

If the disease is death, the cure is life, and Orthodoxy reads the whole work of Christ through that lens. In becoming man, the Son of God joined divine life to human nature in His own person; in dying and rising, He entered death and broke it from the inside (1 Cor. 15:54-55). The hymn sung again and again at Pascha, the Orthodox Easter, carries the whole faith in one line: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death." Applied to the individual, salvation is the slow healing of a sick nature by that life, until the person is restored to what God made man to be.

None of this means Orthodoxy denies the cross or Paul's courtroom language. It takes up the legal images, but it doesn't make them the center. The picture it stresses most is Christ the victor over death, and what it lacks is the Western habit of treating a legal verdict as the heart of what salvation is.

Theosis: by grace what God is by nature

The goal of that healing is the doctrine Orthodoxy is best known for and most often misunderstood about. Athanasius of Alexandria, the fourth-century defender of Nicaea, put it in one sentence: the Word "was made man that we might be made God" (*On the Incarnation* 54). The Greek word for it is *theosis*, deification. Its central text is Peter's:

> "as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:3-4)

Orthodoxy takes "partakers of the divine nature" at full strength: the end of salvation is real participation in the life of God. Its teachers are careful about what that doesn't mean. A man never becomes God in God's own being, never stops being a creature, never dissolves into God. The distinction that holds the line was sharpened in the fourteenth century by Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessalonica. God's *essence*, what He is in Himself, stays forever beyond any creature; His *energies*, His uncreated life and activity reaching out toward creation, can be shared. Councils at Constantinople in the 1340s and in 1351 endorsed Palamas's teaching. The picture the Fathers often used is iron in a fire: the iron glows and burns with the fire's heat and light, and it's still iron.

The model of theosis is the Transfiguration. On the mountain Jesus "was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). For Orthodoxy that light was not created light but the uncreated glory of God shining through a human body, and it shows what human nature becomes when it is filled with God. The same Greek verb, *metamorphoo*, describes the Christian's own transformation in Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Orthodoxy reads both verses as theosis under way. Many Orthodox writers also find the doctrine at creation, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26): the image is given to every man, and the likeness is the goal he grows toward. Psalm 82:6, "You are gods," which Jesus quotes in John 10:34, is often cited as well.

Cooperation: grace and the human will

Orthodoxy holds that God saves no one against his will and no one without His grace. Grace goes first and does the work, and the human will freely answers and works along with it. The Orthodox name for this is *synergy*, from *synergos*, "fellow worker," the word Paul uses when he writes "we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9). Paul's command to the Philippians holds both sides in one sentence, and Orthodoxy treats it as the whole doctrine in miniature: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).

The clearest Orthodox statement of this against Reformed theology is the Confession of Dositheus, adopted at a synod in Jerusalem in 1672 under Patriarch Dositheus. It was written to repudiate a Calvinist confession published in 1629 under the name of a patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Lucaris, and it answers that document point by point in eighteen decrees. Decree 3 rejects unconditional election: God predestines to glory those He foreknew would use their free will well.

Grace is offered to all, and to those who obey it further grace is given, grace which in the decree's own words "co-operates with us, and enables us" to persevere. Decree 13 rejects justification by faith alone: works done without faith can't contribute to salvation, but the works of the regenerate, done under grace, make a man worthy of it. Decree 2 places the interpretation of Scripture with the Church. The confession was received across the Orthodox churches and confirmed again at Constantinople in 1723. Some modern Orthodox theologians handle it with reserve, judging that in answering the West it borrowed too much Western vocabulary, but it remains the most direct answer Orthodoxy has given to Reformed theology.

Grace comes to the Orthodox Christian through the Church's sacraments, which it calls *mysteries*: baptism, in which a person dies and rises with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4); chrismation, the anointing that seals the gift of the Spirit; the Eucharist; confession; and the rest. The Christian life is lived inside that sacramental life, and fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and repentance are the ordinary ways a person works along with grace.

When a baptized Christian lives in disobedience

Since salvation in Orthodoxy is a road walked rather than a verdict given once, the Christian who turns aside gets a direct answer. A baptized Orthodox Christian who sins is called to repentance, and the Church receives him back through confession as often as he returns. A man who turns away from Christ and doesn't come back can lose what he had. Orthodoxy doesn't reclassify such a man after the fact as one who was never truly saved; it holds that he was truly joined to Christ and walked away. For the same reason no Orthodox Christian speaks of his own salvation as settled. Kallistos Ware, the best-known Orthodox teacher in the English-speaking world, tells of being asked by a stranger whether he was saved. He wouldn't answer "I am saved." His answer was "I trust that by God's mercy and grace I am being saved" (*How Are We Saved?*), and he describes the Christian as standing between hope and fear until death, since it's the one who endures to the end who will be saved (Matt. 24:13).

What becomes of each person is settled at the Last Judgment, when Christ returns. Orthodoxy prays for the departed and believes those prayers help them, but it has never accepted the Western doctrine of purgatory, which was one of the sticking points at Florence.

The last things, and how the East reached them

Orthodoxy expects one return of Christ, one general resurrection of the dead, and one Last Judgment, followed by the renewal of all creation. It teaches no thousand-year reign between Christ's return and the end; the age to come begins when He comes. The creed recited at every Orthodox liturgy says of Christ that His kingdom shall have no end, words drawn from the angel's promise to Mary (Luke 1:33). Orthodox teaching on the last things lives more in hymns and in the commentaries of the Fathers than in confessional articles, but on this point it is settled: Orthodoxy is amillennial.

It didn't get there through Augustine. The road ran through Alexandria, in Egypt, the great Greek-speaking city of learning in the East. Origen, the great Alexandrian teacher of the third century, read the promises of an earthly kingdom allegorically and criticized those who took them literally. His student Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria from 248 to 264, met the question in his own diocese.

An Egyptian bishop named Nepos had written a book called *Refutation of the Allegorists*, defending a literal thousand-year reign from the book of Revelation, and whole villages around Arsinoe had taken it up. Dionysius went there himself, spent three days in discussion with the book's readers, and afterward wrote *On the Promises* against it (Eusebius, *Church History* 7.24). In the same work he took up Revelation itself. He didn't reject the book; many brethren valued it, he said, and its meaning was beyond him. But he reasoned from its style that the apostle John hadn't written it (Eusebius, *Church History* 7.25).

Eusebius, who preserved that argument, was himself unsure where the book belonged (*Church History* 3.25), and in the Greek-speaking East Revelation's standing stayed unsettled for generations. Cyril of Jerusalem, around 350, left it off his list of the books to be read; Gregory of Nazianzus left it off his; Athanasius included it in his Easter letter of 367. In the end the Orthodox churches received it as Scripture. They never added it to their public reading. To this day Revelation is the one book of the New Testament never read in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy.

Augustine, meanwhile, reached the same conclusion in the West by his own route. The Orthodox honor him: he's commemorated as a saint on June 15, alongside his mother, Monica. Orthodox writers who criticize him do so over the *filioque*, over inherited guilt, and over his teaching on grace — the points where he differs from them. On the kingdom, where East and West agree, they have no quarrel with him.

Who interprets

The introductory paper in this series heard Orthodoxy on the question of authority, and that answer governs everything above, so it needs a paragraph here. Orthodoxy has no pope, but it does have a court of appeal outside the individual reader: the mind of the Church, its *phronema*, carried through the councils, the Fathers, the liturgy, and the settled faith of the whole body across time. Scripture is the Church's book, rightly read from inside the Church's tradition, and the Confession of Dositheus assigns its interpretation to the Church (Decree 2). Orthodox Bibles also carry a longer Old Testament than either Protestant or Catholic ones, including books such as 3 Maccabees and Psalm 151.

The Word of the Kingdom Position

Word of the Kingdom theology answers the same questions in the same order, and its answers turn on one move that none of the traditions in this series makes: it ties salvation to the three parts of man. God formed man of the dust, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being (Gen. 2:7); Paul prays that the Thessalonians' "whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Death touched each of those three parts, and so salvation comes to each in its own time — to the spirit in the past, the moment a man believes; to the soul in the present, along the walk, settled at the Judgment Seat of Christ; to the body in the future, at that same Judgment Seat. It's one salvation in three tenses. Paper 1 of this series works it out at length. Here it's set out under Orthodoxy's own headings, so the two can be laid side by side.

What Adam passed on

Adam's sin was Adam's, and he bore the guilt of it. The moment he ate, the eyes of both of them "were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7), and the first thing they did was hide from God among the trees (Gen. 3:8). God had said, "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17), and Adam lived on for 930 years (Gen. 5:5). What died that day was his fellowship with God. Death in Scripture is separation from God. Adam tried to answer it himself, sewing fig leaves into coverings (Gen. 3:7), and they didn't answer; "the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21), a covering that cost a life that wasn't theirs. Even covered, Adam faced a consequence: he was driven out of the garden and barred from the tree of life (Gen. 3:23-24).

Genesis marks what came down from him. The genealogy of Adam opens by restating creation: "In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God" (Gen. 5:1). Two verses later the same words come back with Adam as the father: he "begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (Gen. 5:3). Seth still bore God's image, as every man does (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9), but he was born after Adam's likeness, the likeness of a man already under death. The chapter then shows what that meant. Of Adam, of Seth, and of nearly every man after them, it closes each life the same way: "and he died" (Gen. 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). Adam's sin came first, death entered the world through it (Rom. 5:12), and every child born afterward was born into that death.

What passed to Adam's children was the death, not the guilt. The condition came down to every one of them: each man is born dead in all three parts. His spirit is separated from God, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) until God makes it alive, and it can't receive the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14); his soul and body are under death as well, for "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). But no man stands guilty for Adam's act. "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father" (Ezek. 18:20). Each man's guilt is his own, and every man incurs it, because every man sins: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). That's how the last clause of Romans 5:12 reads here. Death spread to all men *because all sinned*, each one acting out the nature he was born with. From then on death reigned (Rom. 5:14, 17), and it reigns wherever men are slaves to sin, since a man is the slave of whatever he obeys, "whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16).

The spirit's judgment: settled when a man believes

To justify is to render a judgment in someone's favor. Because death touched spirit, soul, and body each in its own way, the man isn't judged all at once: the spirit's verdict comes the moment he believes, and the soul's at the Judgment Seat, carrying the body with it. The first is the spirit's, and it's rendered the moment a man believes. The jailer at Philippi asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and the answer came back, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). At that moment God makes the dead spirit alive: "even when we were dead in trespasses, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:5). The man who was cut off is now "one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17).

Nothing the man does contributes to it. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). The judgment isn't waived; it's applied to a substitute, as it was on the night of the Passover, when God said, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13), and as it was on the One those lambs pointed to, Christ, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," who "was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19-20). And it isn't reopened, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). This first judgment is the past tense of salvation, and it is eternally secure.

The soul: the walk, worked out together with God

The second tense is the soul's, and it's where Word of the Kingdom theology speaks of real cooperation. A man whose spirit has been made alive still has a soul to be saved, and Scripture names that salvation as something ahead of him: "receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9); "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21); "we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39). The soul is saved along the walk, as the Christian walks in the Spirit rather than fulfilling the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16), presents his body a living sacrifice, and is "transformed by the renewing of [his] mind" (Rom. 12:1-2). God works, and the man works with Him.

Faith and works stand in a definite order here. Works have no place in initial salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). But Paul's next sentence turns straight to them: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). A man is saved without works and saved for them, and from that day on he walks. What the walk asks of him is his life. 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 *psuche*, soul. A man spends his soul-life now, in obedience, and finds it when the Son of Man comes "in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

So the order runs this way. Works of the Law done without faith aren't accepted, since "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:26). But faith with works that come out of faith is righteousness, and it leads to the salvation of the soul; James says of Abraham that "faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect" (Jas. 2:22).

The walk isn't sinless, and the provision for that is a priest. At initial salvation a man's past sins are forgiven; the sins he commits along the walk need forgiving as they come, which is why Jesus serves now as High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The word for confess is *homologeo*, to say the same thing: to agree with God about what was done.

The body: glory, at His coming

The third tense is the body's, and it waits for the Judgment Seat of Christ. Every man is raised into a body, and it's in that body that the Christian stands before Christ: "For we must all appear before

the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). For the one who receives the salvation of his soul there, the verdict has a bodily side. He's clothed with glory, and that one event goes by four names in Scripture: the adoption, which is son-placement; the covering of glory; glorification; and the redemption of the body. "We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).

Glory is the Christian's hope, not yet his possession: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). And it's conditional. Paul writes that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). Soul and body travel together here, because "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11), and the word for life there is *nephesh*, soul. The man whose soul is saved is the man whose body is glorified; one verdict has two effects. Paul's own goal was "if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:11), and the word there is *exanastasis*, an out-resurrection, a rising out from among the raised.

The Transfiguration showed that glory in its finished form, ahead of time. The transformation going on now is in the soul, through the renewed and renewing mind (Rom. 12:2); what Peter, James, and John saw on the mountain was where that road ends, our own hope of glory shown in Christ. The glory itself is revealed when He comes: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

The purpose: rule in the coming kingdom

Salvation in all three tenses is for something. Man was made to rule: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). That purpose was never withdrawn, and Scripture brings it to fulfillment in a specific, future, heavenly and earthly reign of Christ lasting a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6). Those found faithful at the Judgment Seat reign with Him: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12); "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21). Christ sits now at the Father's right hand as High Priest, "waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13); His own throne is still ahead. The kingdom has two portions, an earthly one belonging to Israel and a heavenly one now extended to the Church, and Paper 6 of this series traces how that came to be. That reign is what Scripture calls "the age to come," set beside "this age" (Matt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21). It's an age with borders: this present age comes before it, and after it come the ages Scripture names but says little about, when the throne becomes "the throne of God and of the Lamb" and "they shall reign forever and ever" [unto the ages of the ages] (Rev. 22:1, 3, 5).

When a Christian lives in disobedience

Nothing in the second or third tense reaches back and undoes the first. A Christian who lives in ongoing disobedience doesn't lose the spirit's judgment; it was rendered once and it stands. He isn't reclassified as someone who never believed, either. What he puts at risk is what lies ahead: the salvation of his soul, the glory, and his share in the reign. Paul tells Christians, "if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13), and he warns brethren walking after the flesh that "those who practice such

things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21). At the Judgment Seat such a man's work is burned: "he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). The wage of a walk left unaddressed is death in its own sense, the loss of the life of the age to come, and it's a real loss. It's also a loss bounded by that age. Death itself is done away when the thousand years are finished (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 21:4), and the spirit's standing, settled when he believed, carries on through the ages that follow. As long as he lives, the remedy is the High Priest: agreeing with God about the sin, and being cleansed (1 John 1:9).

Same Texts, Different Destination

The passages Orthodoxy leans on most for theosis and for cooperation share something that shows only when they're read to the end. Each one runs on, within a few verses, into a day, a test, a reward, or a kingdom. Orthodoxy reads the participation in them rightly as real. Read through, they also say what the participation is for.

Partakers of the divine nature

Peter's sentence about becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) is the opening of a paragraph, not the whole of it. Here is the whole paragraph:

> "as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 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. 1:3-11)

The promises come first, and then Peter puts a man to work: "giving all diligence, add to your faith." The list is built on faith already there. Then he sets two men side by side. One has these things and they abound; he's fruitful. The other lacks them, and Peter describes him with care: he "has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." The man who lacks is still a man who was cleansed. His standing isn't the question.

What's in question comes in the last verse: an entrance "supplied to you abundantly" into the kingdom. An entrance that can be supplied abundantly is one that can be supplied sparingly too, or not at all, and Peter ties the difference to diligence. Then, five verses later, he goes straight to the mountain:

> "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Pet. 1:16)

Peter was on the mountain of the Transfiguration, and he calls what he saw there "the power and coming" of Christ. In the very chapter Orthodoxy takes its doctrine of theosis from, the man who

wrote it reads the divine nature, the diligence, the abundant entrance, and the Transfiguration as one subject, and that subject is the coming kingdom.

Fellow workers

The word *synergos*, from which Orthodoxy takes its name for cooperation, stands at the head of Paul's teaching about the Judgment Seat:

> "For we are God's fellow workers [synergos]; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (1 Cor. 3:9-15)

The cooperation is real; Paul's whole image is men working with God. But look at what they work *on*. The foundation is laid already, and "no other foundation can anyone lay." What the fellow worker adds is the building, and the building is tested on a day, by fire. Then come two outcomes, and the second is the one that matters here. A man's work burns, he suffers loss, "but he himself will be saved."

That man is saved but has lost something, and Orthodoxy has no place for him. In its teaching the one thing at stake along the road is salvation itself, so a man ends one of two ways: he endures and is saved, or he turns away and loses what he had. Paul describes a third outcome — a man who loses what he built and is himself saved — and that's exactly what the three tenses describe. The fire tests his work, not his standing before God; the work burns, and he comes out "as through fire."

Work out your own salvation

Orthodoxy's favorite statement of cooperation runs on the same way:

> "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." (Phil. 2:12-16)

Paul is writing to "my beloved," men he calls saints at the start of the letter (Phil. 1:1), who have "always obeyed." The salvation he tells them to work out is one they don't yet have in full, and that's the soul's. God works in; they work out. And the sentence doesn't end until it reaches "the day of Christ," with the possibility, on that day, of labor that was "in vain." A chapter later Paul says the same of himself: he presses "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). A prize is won or missed. The race is run by men already in it.

The mountain, and the transformed mind

The Transfiguration is where Orthodoxy sees theosis most clearly, and Matthew sets it in a frame. Jesus has just told His disciples:

> "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matt. 16:25-28)

"Life" and "soul" in those verses are one Greek word, *psuche*. Jesus speaks of the soul saved or lost, then of His coming in glory to reward each man according to his works, then of some standing there who would see Him coming in His kingdom before they died. "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them" (Matt. 17:1-2). Matthew puts the promise and the mountain back to back. Those three saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom, ahead of time. Jesus Himself called it a vision (Matt. 17:9), and it's held here as exactly that: the coming kingdom seen ahead of its time. Peter, as already seen, called it His "power and coming."

So the light on the mountain is the glory of the King in His kingdom, and it's the glory the faithful are promised to share, "if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

Orthodoxy rightly links the mountain to the Christian's present change through the verb *metamorphoo*. Paul uses it twice of Christians:

> "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom. 12:2)
>
> "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18)

Both describe something going on now, and both locate it inwardly: in the renewing of the mind, in the beholding of the Lord's glory. That's the soul being saved along the walk, and the change is real. What Peter, James, and John saw on the mountain was where that road ends, shown in Christ ahead of time. The glory itself waits for His appearing (Col. 3:4).

In every one of these passages the participation, the cooperation, and the transformation are real, and Orthodoxy is right to insist on them. And every one runs on to the same place: His coming, a test of what was done, and an outcome that can be abundant or lost while the man himself stands. That's the destination, and it's where the two readings part.

Where They Align

Set the two positions side by side and the common ground runs wider than the disagreements suggest, and in places wider than either shares with the Western traditions. Four points:

- **Adam's guilt stays with Adam.** Neither holds that Adam's descendants are guilty of his act. Both set aside the Latin "in whom all sinned" and read Romans 5:12 so that each man's guilt

is his own (Ezek. 18:20). Death is what came down from Adam. On this point the two stand together, apart from Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic theology alike.

- **Salvation is for something.** Neither lets salvation stop at escaping judgment. Both read man's creation "in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26) as a purpose God still means to fulfill, and both read Peter's "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) as pointing past rescue toward what man was made to become.
- **The walk is real cooperation.** Both hold that grace goes first and that a man truly works along with it, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Neither treats the Christian's effort as decoration. And neither reclassifies a Christian who fails as a man who was never saved: Orthodoxy holds he was truly joined to Christ, and Word of the Kingdom theology holds that the spirit's judgment stands.
- **The mountain shows the end of the road.** Both read the Transfiguration as the finished form of what's happening in the Christian now, and both tie the two together through the verb Paul uses of the renewed mind (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Those are real points of contact, and three of them run against every Western tradition this series has compared. Each one, followed a step further, also leads to a parting.

Where They Diverge, and Why

The two part company at five points. The first is the root, and most of the others grow out of it.

What death is

Both say death came from Adam, and they mean different things by the word. Orthodoxy describes death chiefly as mortality and corruption, a sickness in human nature. The remedy for a sickness is healing, and healing takes a lifetime. In Word of the Kingdom theology death is separation from God, and every man is born dead in all three parts. His spirit is separated from God, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), and his soul and body are under death as well, since death "spread to all men" (Rom. 5:12) and "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). Each part is rescued in its own time, and the first rescue shows what kind of death this is. Something dead isn't healed by degrees. The spirit is made alive, and that happens at a moment: "even when we were dead in trespasses, [He] made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5).

The two readings of Romans 5:12 agree on the order: Adam's sin came first, death entered through it, and every child since is born under that death before he ever sins. Where they part is the last clause. The Greek Fathers read "because of which [death] all sinned," so that each man's sinning grows out of his mortality. Here it reads as the NKJV renders it, "because all sinned": each man's sinning is his own (Rom. 3:23), the acting out of the nature he was born with, and death reigns over it (Rom. 5:14, 21).

Whether anything is settled

If salvation is a lifelong healing, then nothing in it is settled until the end, and Orthodoxy says so. Its best-known teacher answers "I am being saved," and stands between hope and fear until death. Word of the Kingdom theology also has a salvation that's still being worked out, but only in part. The spirit's judgment was rendered when the man believed, and "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). What's open is the soul and the body.

Both take the walk seriously. The difference is whether the walk can reach back and undo the beginning. In Orthodoxy it can, since the beginning and the end are one road. Here it can't, because the first judgment was rendered on a substitute's blood and on nothing the man did (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The Confession of Dositheus says the works of the regenerate make a man worthy of salvation; here those works matter greatly, but they bear on the soul and the reward, never on the spirit's standing.

What is at stake along the walk

For Orthodoxy the one thing finally at stake is salvation itself. At the Last Judgment a man is saved or lost. For Word of the Kingdom theology the standing isn't on the table at all; what's at stake is the salvation of the soul, the glory, the inheritance, and a share in the reign. That's why the man of 1 Corinthians 3:15, who "will suffer loss" while "he himself will be saved," fits Word of the Kingdom theology and has no place in Orthodoxy's. It's why Peter can speak of an entrance into the kingdom "supplied to you abundantly" (2 Pet. 1:11), which implies one that isn't. And it's why Jesus warns servants already entrusted with their master's goods about what they'll receive when He returns (Matt. 25:14-30).

Union with God, or rule with Christ

Both hold that salvation is for something more than being rescued, but they name different goals. Orthodoxy's goal is theosis: a man filled with the divine life, sharing God's energies without ever touching His essence. Word of the Kingdom theology's goal is rulership. Man was made to "have dominion" (Gen. 1:26-28), and the faithful are restored to that purpose as joint heirs reigning with Christ: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21). Even the psalm Orthodoxy cites for deification leans this way. The "gods" of Psalm 82 are judges, men set over others to judge and rule, and God rebukes them for judging unjustly and tells them they "shall die like men" (Ps. 82:1-2, 6-7). Paper 12 of this series further addresses Psalm 82.

Glory belongs to both pictures, and it plays a different part in each. In Orthodoxy glory is the goal, the uncreated light a man is drawn into ever more deeply. Here glory is the covering a ruler needs, given at the Judgment Seat to those who receive the salvation of the soul, "that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). It's conditional, it's given at a moment, and it's for something.

No kingdom between His coming and the end

Orthodoxy expects one return, one resurrection, and one judgment, with nothing between Christ's coming and the eternal state. Word of the Kingdom theology expects the Judgment Seat first, then a specific, future, heavenly and earthly reign of a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6), then the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1, 3), where "they shall reign forever and ever" [unto the ages of the ages] (Rev. 22:5), ages Scripture tells us very little about. Without that reign there's nowhere for a reward that differs among the saved to be given, and the differences 2 Peter 1 and 1 Corinthians 3 describe have to collapse into saved and lost.

The road by which the East reached its position matters here. It came down from Alexandria, where the promises of the kingdom were read allegorically, and with it came a long doubt about the very book that names the thousand years. Six verses of Revelation 20 say "thousand years" six times

(Rev. 20:2-7), and that book still isn't read aloud in the Orthodox liturgy. A reading of the kingdom that was reached by allegorizing the promises can't be answered by a council or a hymn. It's answered by reading the promises, the way the Bereans read, "to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Who decides

Underneath all five sits the question the introductory paper takes up. Orthodoxy settles the meaning of Scripture by the mind of the Church across time. Word of the Kingdom theology lets Scripture interpret itself, read whole and compared with itself (1 Cor. 2:13), and holds every tradition answerable to the text, its own included. On this question Orthodoxy stands closer to Rome than to anything else in this paper, and the case is made at length there.

Answering the Objections

An Orthodox reader has answers of his own, and they deserve to be heard at their strongest. Five follow.

"You've imported the Western courtroom after all"

The charge. Orthodox teachers have long faulted the West for turning salvation into a courtroom: God the judge, man the accused, and at the heart of it all a verdict of "not guilty," pronounced on account of Christ. A verdict like that, they say, changes a man's record without changing the man. Word of the Kingdom theology says it stands outside the Western frame, yet it calls the first tense of salvation a judgment, rendered once, at a moment, applied to a substitute, and never reopened. That sounds like the same courtroom.

The answer. It is a judgment, but look at what the judgment does. It doesn't leave the man as he was with a cleaner record. At that moment the dead spirit is made alive: "even when we were dead in trespasses, [He] made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5), and the man is joined to the Lord as "one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17). That's life given, and Orthodoxy has no quarrel with the idea that God gives life.

The judgment also answers the kind of death Adam brought. He was told he would die in the day he ate (Gen. 2:17), and he lived 930 years more (Gen. 5:5); what died that day was his fellowship with God. A separation ends when the two parties are reconciled, and that's how Paul describes the cross: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19). So the judgment here isn't a record changed while the man stays dead; it's the moment two parties who were apart are brought together and life begins. Orthodoxy is right that salvation is more than a verdict, and Word of the Kingdom theology agrees. That "more" is the soul's salvation along the walk and the body's glory at His coming, and it all begins with a judgment that gives life.

"Your soul-tense conditionality is synergy under another name"

The charge. Word of the Kingdom theology calls the walk real cooperation, affirms that a man works along with grace, and says the outcome at Christ's coming depends on it. That's synergy. Having conceded Orthodoxy's doctrine for the walk, it has no principled reason to refuse it for the whole.

The answer. The first half of that is right, and it's conceded without reluctance. On the walk, Word of the Kingdom theology and Orthodoxy say much the same thing, and they say it from the same verse: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you" (Phil. 2:12-13).

The principled reason for refusing it in the beginning is that Paul himself refuses it there. The same apostle who told the Philippians to work out their salvation told the Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). "You have been saved" is a perfect tense in Greek, a finished act with a standing result; "work out" is a present command. Paul isn't contradicting himself. He's speaking of two tenses of one salvation, one finished and one in progress, and he keeps works out of the first and puts them squarely in the second. Orthodoxy merges the two and so has to let works into both; the Confession of Dositheus says the works of the regenerate make a man worthy of salvation. Keep the tenses where Paul keeps them and the cooperation stays where he puts it.

"Partakers of the divine nature means theosis"

The charge. Peter says Christians become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Word of the Kingdom theology turns that into rulership and a reward, and in doing so it flattens the boldest statement in the New Testament about what God does to man.

The answer. Nothing here denies that Christians share in God's life now. The man made alive is joined to the Lord; the Spirit dwells in him; he is being transformed (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 3:18). The question is what Peter makes the participation lead to, and Peter answers it in the next seven verses, as the section on these texts showed: diligence added to faith, an entrance into the kingdom "supplied to you abundantly" (2 Pet. 1:11), and then the Transfiguration, which he calls "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:16). Reading the verse with its paragraph isn't flattening it. It's letting Peter finish his sentence.

"The councils condemned a millennium"

The charge. The creed Orthodoxy recites at every liturgy confesses that Christ's kingdom shall have no end. A reign of a thousand years is a kingdom with an end. Orthodox writers often say the creed was framed with chiliasm in view and settled the matter, and the angel's own words stand behind it:

> "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:32-33)

The answer. The clause in the creed was aimed at someone else. Marcellus of Ancyra had taught that at the end the Son would return into the Father and His reign would cease, and the Council of Constantinople in 381 condemned his followers by name. The words chosen to answer him came straight from Luke 1:33. Francis Gumerlock has shown that no early council formally condemned chiliasm, and the creed's clause doesn't do it either.

Nor does a thousand years end Christ's kingdom. The thousand years are the reign on His own throne, the one He promises to share with the overcomer (Rev. 3:21). When they're finished, the

throne becomes "the throne of God and of the Lamb," and "they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:1, 5). A kingdom that passes from one stage to the next hasn't ended. Luke 1:33 and Revelation 20 stand together, and the angel's own words point the same way: he promises the throne of David and a reign over the house of Jacob, a throne and a house that belong to this earth and its history.

"Fifteen centuries of the Church read it otherwise"

The charge. Whatever the merits of a particular verse, the whole Church, East and West, has read the kingdom this way since the fifth century. The mind of the Church is the safest guide to Scripture, and a reading held by almost no one for a thousand years can't be the apostles' reading.

The answer. The argument from antiquity runs in both directions. The earliest Christian writers who speak of the matter at all — Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus — expected a coming reign on the earth. Justin said that he and others who were right-minded Christians on all points held it, while granting that some Christians thought otherwise (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80-81). The East's position, as traced above, came later and came through Alexandria. Paper 9 of this series follows that history in detail.

But the deeper answer doesn't depend on who was first. The Bereans were called more fair-minded for checking an apostle against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), and no later tradition stands higher than an apostle. If the mind of the Church reads the promises rightly, the promises will bear it out when they're read. The introductory paper of this series takes up that question in full; here it's enough that the test Scripture gives is the text itself.

Why It Matters

Orthodoxy isn't a distant church to most readers anymore. Its parishes stand in American towns, and Western Christians keep finding their way into them, often because something in their own churches felt thin. Some of them have heard a salvation that ended at a prayer said once, with nothing asked of the life afterward. Orthodoxy takes the walk seriously, refuses to treat a man as guilty for Adam, and insists that salvation is for something. A reader who has felt that thinness, or who has watched a friend or a son go East because of it, should know that Orthodoxy is right on each of those points, and that Scripture says so (Phil. 2:12; Ezek. 18:20; Gen. 1:26).

He should also know what the move costs. A man who goes East trades a settled beginning for a road with no settled point on it at all: he'll be taught to say "I am being saved" and to stand between hope and fear until he dies. He gives up the coming kingdom, and with it the purpose his salvation was for, since a man made to rule has no throne to rule from if nothing stands between Christ's coming and the end. And he gives up reading the text for himself, because the meaning of Scripture now belongs to the mind of the Church.

Word of the Kingdom theology offers what draws people East without that price. The walk is as serious here as anywhere, and a man works out his own salvation with fear and trembling. But he works it out on a foundation already laid (1 Cor. 3:11), from a standing that was settled the day he believed (Rom. 11:29), toward a reign that's still ahead (2 Tim. 2:12). The seriousness and the security aren't rivals. Scripture gives both, each in its own tense.

Conclusion

Eastern Orthodoxy isn't a fourth variation on a Western theme. It never took up the frame Augustine built, and its first answers start somewhere else: death passed down from Adam without his guilt, salvation as healing, cooperation all the way through, and union with God as the end. On several of those points it stands closer to Word of the Kingdom theology than any Western tradition does.

The parting starts with a single word. Orthodoxy hears *death* as a sickness, and a sickness is healed over a lifetime, so nothing is settled until the end and the one thing at stake is salvation itself. Word of the Kingdom theology hears *death* as separation, and the dead are made alive at a moment, so the beginning is settled and what's at stake along the walk is the soul, the glory, and the reign. The passages Orthodoxy loves best agree with it that the participation is real, and then they run on to His coming, a test of what was done, and a kingdom entered abundantly or not.

Peter, who wrote that Christians are partakers of the divine nature, also stood on the mountain and saw the glory of the King. He called what he saw "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:16).

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