Review of
“The Orthodox Church”

book written by a leader in the Orthodox religion

The book was written by an eminent hierarch and theologian in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Bishop Timothy Ware, who was made Metropolitan under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

As noted on its cover, the book was written to provide “a clear, detailed introduction to the Orthodox Church”.

Book's Introduction

The Orthodox Church regards "their Church as the Church which guards and teaches the true belief about God" yet the book shows many changes and inconsistencies. (p 8)

The Church has changed from the Bible's teaching that Christ shed His blood to pay the penalty for our sins. This teaching is only mentioned in one sentence in the book's 327 pages. "While Orthodoxy interprets the Crucifixion as an act of triumphant victory over the powers of evil, the west… has tended rather to think of the Cross in penal and juridical terms, as an act of satisfaction or substitution designed to propitiate the wrath of an angry Father." (p 229) This is the only sentence on the Biblical gospel and it states that Orthodoxy does not accept it. Orthodoxy does not view Christ's death as a payment for sins to address our legal problem before a righteous God as told in the gospels, taught in the letters like Romans 1 to 5, preached in Acts, foreshadowed and prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures like Isaiah 53, and celebrated in Revelation.

Rejecting God's gospel was already happening during the apostles' time (see Colossians 2). So, it is unsound to go back to church fathers and claim tradition as a basis, rather than returning all the way back to the Scriptures themselves. See Appendices 1 and 2 for more.

The book shows the Orthodox Church has been inconsistent, though they claim to be the true church based on apostolic succession. For example, **Orthodoxy as it exists in North America is "certainly contrary to the Orthodox understanding of the Church."** The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) formed as an "autonomous group" in 1926 and to this day is not recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. (p 174-178)

Despite claiming the Church cannot err, it has changed often. For example, St John Chrysostom "is perhaps the best loved in the Orthodox Church" yet was deposed and exiled by the Church. (p 24) Should confidence be placed in this organization?

Part One: History

Chapter 1: As explained in Chapter 1**, the beginnings of the church are not based on Scripture but rather on Ignatius and Cyprian (2nd and 3rd centuries).** The chapter also emphasizes ways of viewing the church that contradict the Scripture. For example, there is "the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons," whereas the New Testament makes it clear that all who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ are priests (1 Peter 2:5; Rev 5:9-10) and never is there an office of priest anticipated in the New Testament. Further, the New Testament always refers to multiple elders (also called overseers) in a local church, not one "Bishop" presiding in a local church (Phil 1:1; Acts 20:17, 28). **Thoughts of Christian leaders in the 1st and 2nd century should be checked against the Scriptures because false ideas were already being promoted in the time of Paul** (see for example Colossians 2:4; 2 Tim 3). The local church should not be "gathered round its bishop" (p 13) but rather should gather around the Lord Jesus, taking only Christ's name. (1 Corin. 1-3)

Chapter 2: **The book identifies the Orthodox Church as "The Church of the Seven Councils" (chapter 2 title) yet provides some honesty in showing that the councils were strivings of men and full of contradictions**. Why would one want to put their confidence in these councils as the basis for who they are and what they do? The Orthodox Church as an organization is rooted in an earthly emperor not God (p 19) and the "third Canon" resulting from Constantinople in 381 was "resented alike by Rome and by Alexandria" due to their desire for power (p 23). That council also "altered the provisions of the Sixth Canon of Nicaea." (p 23) **The Church even deposed and exiled St John Chrysostom who is revered by the Orthodox Church and wrote the Liturgy commonly followed** (p 24) The Councils were "troublesome" (p 35) as people were arguing and fighting with one another. "Nestorius bribed the Court heavily and terrorized the city of Ephesus with a private army of monks" to get his way (p 36). These are just a few of the examples seen in this and following chapters that show that the councils are not something reliable.

This chapter also introduces the worship of icons and monasticism as playing a key role in the Orthodox Church. But God said not to make images (Ex 20:4) and ascetism is warned against in Colossians 2:19-23 because of

the complete work for Christ. Believers have died with Christ so should not be occupied with eating earthly foods based on men's commandments, which strictness cannot address fleshly desires. Freedom to live righteously is only found by living in the reality of having died and risen with Christ to newness of life. (Romans 6-8, Colossians 2:20-3:4; Gal 2:20) See appendix 1.

Chapter 3: **The Great Schism is full of politics of striving men which does not at all support the idea that we should have confidence in traditions passed done through this church organization.** For example, as men from the west and east were striving for dominance in Bulgaria, **the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople Photius was deposed and his decisions reversed in 867. But later he was reinstated and held a council that condemned the council that had condemned him** (p 55-56). The Patriarch at the time of the 1054 "Great Schism" between Rome and Constantinople is described as a man "of stiff and intransigent temper" (p 58). The Roman Catholics sacked Constantinople in 1204, but the Orthodox themselves had "massacred" the Latin residents at Constantinople in 1182. While the author is seeking to support the Orthodox Church, the chapter leads the reader to have little confidence in such a church organization.

Chapter 4: Chapters 4 to 9 continue to tell the disturbing story of an organization led by self-willed men striving for power. The leader of the Russians in Kiev in 988 "converted to Christianity and married Anna, the sister of the Byzantine Emperor" in a political marriage to strengthen the Russians through association with the Byzantine Empire and its state religion. (p 78)

Chapter 5: When the Muslims conquered, **the Muslim Sultan "installed [a monk] on the Patriarchal throne", which is obviously inconsistent with imagining that apostolic succession has governed the development of the Orthodox Church.** (p 88) Not only that, but **"the Church's higher administration became caught up in a degrading system of corruption and simony**... everything was for sale." (p 89-90) The Ecumenical Patriarch in the early 1600s named Cyril Lukaris "devoted his full energies to combating Roman

Catholic influence…[so became] deeply involved in politics… [resulting in] one long series of stormy intrigues." (p 96) Over time, nations were freed from the Turks and "found it impracticable to remain subject ecclesiastically to a Patriarch resident in the Turkish capital and closely involved in the Turkish political system… A series of national Churches were carved out of the Patriarchate" which is inconsistent with the Church's doctrine that hierarchy maintains purity of the faith (p 91). **Latin baptism was declared invalid by three Patriarchs in 1755 and remained so until the end of the nineteenth century, but "did not extend to the Church of Russia", demonstrating inconsistency over time as well as by region.** (p 98)

Chapter 6: The inconsistencies and fighting of fleshly men are abundant in the history of the Russian Orthodox church. Until a dispute in 1441 "the Patriarch of Constantinople had appointed the head of the Russian Church, the Metropolitan", yet because the Russian church didn't like a decree from the Metropolitan they imprisoned and exiled him, and did not ask the Patriarch for a new Metropolitan because he held to the decree himself. "Eventually **in 1448 a council of Russian bishops in Moscow proceeded to elect a Metropolitan without further reference to Constantinople.**" (p 102-103) Thus **the hierarchical structure that claims to preserve the Church has consistently been subject to people deciding not to follow the hierarchy.** Is organization divine in nature?

The Orthodox Church believes that gestures in worship are very significant, yet the gestures are inconsistent. The Patriarch in the Russian Church in 1652 insisted the Russians use three fingers in the sign of the cross, but the Russians refused and kept using two fingers. "This divergence over the sign of the Cross served to crystallize in a specific way the whole issue of Muscovite versus Greek Orthodoxy." (p 111) Those who would not comply "were severely persecuted, suffering exile, imprisonment and in some cases death." (p 111) Fleshly men led a Church governed by men**. This earthly nature of the Church is seen again when Tsar Peter decided the Russian Orthodox Church would be governed by a Synod rather than a Patriarch in 1721**. (p 114) This was not merely an action by Peter, but was approved in 1723 by the "four ancient Patriarchates" (p 114).

In the midst of the broad inconsistency, the Orthodox doctrine of deification grew despite its contrast with Scripture. **St Seraphim of Sarov was a promoter of ascetism that Colossians directly warns against (Colossians 2:20-23)** and also advanced mysticism speaking "of the need to acquire the Holy Spirit" showing the "extraordinary importance for understanding the Orthodox doctrine of deification and union with God." Others also were "all devoted to the [repeated] Jesus Prayer" (p 119-120)

Chapter 7: The "Jesus Prayer" has been advanced by monks in Greece (p 130, 132) These practices are explained further in chapter 15.

Chapter 8: Similar to past corruption in the Church, the Communist years of the 1900s again demonstrate that hierarchy religion is unreliable, for it gets corrupted. **During the time of Metropolitan Sergius in Moscow in the 1920s, other Orthodox groups broke from connection to him despite the Orthodox Church claim of the need for hierarchy and its authorizations.** (p 153) "The hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate" connived with the atheist state for the killing of Ukrainian Catholic bishops because they wanted power over Ukraine. (p 164-165) The author notes very gently that the hierarchy's "moral authority is somewhat tarnished." (p 163)

Chapter 9: There is great inconsistency with supposed beliefs of the Orthodox Church when one looks at Orthodoxy in North America. **Whole church organizations like the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) have created themselves, which is inconsistent with Orthodox thinking about hierarchy due to apostolic succession that gives authority.** (p 175-178) There are Orthodox churches in the same area with "several Orthodox bishops side by side in every major city." The author expresses that **the situation in North America "is certainly contrary to the Orthodox understanding of the Church."** "Instead of a single diocese in each place, under one bishop, almost everywhere in the west there has grown up a multiplicity of parallel jurisdictions, with several Orthodox bishops side by side in every major city." (p174) "The present multiplicity of 'jurisdictions' [is] bewildering." (p 182) Thus, the Orthodox Church contradicts itself in far-reaching ways.

Part Two: Faith and Worship

Chapter 10: The first Part of the book detailed many strivings of self-seeking men in the Orthodox Church, yet here we see that the "Holy Tradition" is the "The Source of the Orthodox Faith" (chapter title; p 195). **Despite the obvious variations over time and across regions seen in the historical record, still the posture is that the Orthodox Church has "inward continuity" and "apparent changelessness."** (p 195) This is simply not true. The claim is that they preserve true doctrine and maintain things "as in the primitive Church," but the Church has very much changed from the record of the early church as seen in the New Testament. Though high-sounding talk prevails, the Church obviously does not know what really is truth. **The claim to "changelessness" and remaining "loyal to the past" rings hollow to an honest reader.** In these chapters on the "Faith and Worship" of the Orthodox Church, the author shows many examples of inconsistencies across time and region. **They claim to "preserve the Doctrine of the Lord uncorrupted… neither adding any thing, nor taking any thing from it."** (p 196) **Yet the examples abound demonstrating the opposite to be true.**

The Orthodox Church boldly requires a convert to promise, "I will accept and understand Holy Scripture in accordance with the interpretation which was and is held by the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, our Mother" (p 200) yet **the reader of this book finds that the Church does not know what their interpretation of the Scripture is**. The author defends that the Church gives importance to the Bible by pointing out that "the Gospel Book has a place of honour on the altar" and is "carried in procession at the Liturgy." (p 201). But this is just outward form, not actual submission to the Scriptures.

The claim is that the seven ecumenical councils are the source, yet statements of faith from 17th century local councils "have in part been received by the whole Orthodox Church, but in part set aside or corrected." (p 203) How could this have been done if an ecumenical council has not happened since 787?

The wobbliness of the foundation is addressed in vague words, saying that "inner Tradition" was "handed down to us in a mystery" and "preserved above all in the Church's worship." (p 205) The "inner" and "mystery" are vague uncertainties that are somehow mystically perceived through sacramental experiences. How different from Paul's exhortation to Timothy. In a time of

impostors growing worse and worse, Timothy is urged to "continue in the things you have learned" knowing that "all Scripture is inspired by God." (2 Tim 3:13-17) Thus, the Scripture is firm in the whirlwind of men's thoughts that are promoted as from God or other spiritual beings. **From the time of the apostles, there already were false teachings being promoted.** The exhortation is to hold fast to what God has spoken. How unsound then to try to make our foundation what the "Fathers" said (p 204) or to appeal to vague feelings experienced in sacraments.

Chapter 11: The Orthodox Church doctrines regarding "God and Humankind" are quite surprising. **The most prominent doctrine as presented in this chapter is that humans are "to be deified" that is "to become a second god"** (p 219). **This sounds like what Satan offered to Eve in the garden, "you will become like God"** (Gen 3:5) like Satan himself desired. The book makes it emphatically clear that "we can find God by looking within our own heart" (p 220) and quotes Orthodox theologians as saying, "He who know himself, knows God" and "heaven is within you" and "in the purity of his heart he saw the invisible God as in a mirror" and "after God, we must count everyone as God Himself." (p 221) What Jesus did was "set that likeness once again within our reach." (p 225)

The author explains that "Orthodoxy interprets the Crucifixion primarily as an act of triumphant victory" rather than thinking of "the Cross in penal and juridical terms, as an act of satisfaction or substitution designed to propitiate the wrath of an angry Father." (p 229) Thus, **the Orthodox Church rejects God's gospel as taught throughout the Scriptures.** The book of Romans teaches God's gospel in an orderly way, starting by showing all have sinned and thus are in danger of God's wrath for their unrighteousness. But God has provided Jesus as a "propitiation by His blood" such that God remains righteous in declaring righteous the one who believes in Jesus who died for them. (Romans 1:16-18, 3:23-26)

Rather than accepting God's gospel of salvation through faith in Christ's paying the penalty for our sins, the Orthodox Church promotes the thoughts of men that "God became human that we humans might become god." (p 231) **According to teaching of the Orthodox Church the "goal at which every**

Christians must aim" is "to become god, to attain theosis, 'deification' or 'divinization'. For Orthodoxy our salvation and redemption mean our deification." (p 231) Thus, **Orthodoxy rejects Christ as Savior of sinners as revealed by God, and turns Christ into a promoter of idolatry whereby a person becomes god.**

How does one arrive at "deification"? Every adherent to the Orthodox Church needs to continuously return to what this religion offers. The **"fasts, vigils, prayer, and almsgiving, and other good works done in the name of Christ" are "the means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God."** (p 230). This is the opposite of what God says in the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit was given as a gift to those who have been justified by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1-5). Having believed on Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). **How sad to see souls trying to get the Holy Spirit "in every sacramental action of the Church."** (p 230) **How dishonoring to God to say that "God uses these relics as a channel of divine power"** (p 234) as if God needed them. How opposite to the gospel of life in Christ to say "deification presupposes life in the Church, life in the sacraments" (p 237) and "Church and sacraments are the means appointed by God whereby we may acquire the sanctifying Spirit and be transformed into the divine likeness" (p 238) as further emphasized in chapter 12.

How sad to see people enslaved to a religious system of men that presses them to "a continued act of repentance." Even "Orthodox saints" who are "well advanced in the way of holiness" have no certainty, so they fear hell and "have repeated the words 'All will be saved, and I alone will be condemned.'" (p 236) How opposite this is to the Lord Jesus' words that one who has received God's testimony regarding Christ "will not come in judgment." (John 5:24) How unlike the confidence, peace and joy overflowing from one who knows they have been "justified by faith" as seen in Romans 5 and 8.

Chapter 12: The view of "The Church of God" presented in chapter 12 builds on the need people have for means of acquiring the Holy Spirit as taught in Chapter 11. **The value of this church organization springs from teaching that Christ is not enough and is not the Savior of sinners who dying in our place. Instead, the Church as an organization with all of its sacramental activities**

is promoted as the way for people to become god, to acquire the Spirit, to get virtue. This view of the church is not at all supported by Scripture, but instead it contradicts the Scripture. God teaches that in Christ we "have been made complete" (Col 2:10) because of Christ's complete work. Thus we should not look for something more such as through "festivals" or "worship of the angels" or submitting to "decrees" of men that promote self-made religion through ascetism (Col 2:16, 18, 20, 23). Rather we should "hold firmly to the head" not to the body (the church) and should set our minds "on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col 2:19, 3:2-3) Manmade religion is based on philosophy "in accordance with human tradition… rather than in accordance with Christ." (Col 2:8)

In contrast to God's revelation in the Scriptures, the Orthodox Church boldly asserts "no one is saved alone. He is saved in the Church…" (p 239) The only way to be saved is to be "in union with" the Church. They insist that "the Church… is 'the centre and organ of Christ's redeeming work.'" (p 241)

This leads then to the enslavement of adherents to "sacraments" that are the only source of salvation and which only the Orthodox Church can administer. "The Church must be thought of primarily in sacramental terms." (p 242) Orthodoxy offered "a life realized by participation in the sacraments." (p 245) **In this we see a development of the slavery that was being imposed on the Galatian believers and against which Paul so fervently warned.** "For freedom Christ has set us free!" (Gal 5:1) The rejection of God's gospel that Christ died as a substitute to pay for our sins leads to slavery to religion.

The Orthodox Church sees each local Church as "the congregation of the faithful, gathered round their bishop and celebrating the Eucharist." (p 246) **"An individual ceases to be a member of the Church if she or he severs communion with her or his bishop."** (p 246) "'If any are not with the bishop' said Cyprian, 'they are not in the Church.'" (p 249) Without the Bishop "neither the Church nor the name Christian could exist or be spoken of at all" (p 248) "The bishop… is 'the fountain of all the sacraments.'" (p 249) So, Orthodoxy is Bishop-centered, not Christ-centered. Yet the Scripture would have us fix our eyes on Christ our life, our head, our salvation. Orthodoxy points eyes to their "Bishop."

Yet, this idea of a church having a prominent "Bishop" opposes the Word of God. Paul urges against such thinking in the early church. Such glorying in a man is opposed to the only Person we are to glory in, the Lord Jesus Christ. "No one is to be boasting in people" (1 Cor 3:21) "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:31) Paul emphasizes that he himself was nothing, and that Christ is everything. "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants on account of Jesus." (2 Cor 4:5)

Not only that, but the Scriptures always speak of multiple "bishops" in a local church. When Paul calls for the "elders" (plural) of the church in Ephesus, they come to him and he exhorts them saying that "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (same word as 'bishops')." (Acts 20:17, 28) Note that there are multiple overseers, not just one. This is consistent through the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders for them in every church." (Acts 14:23) Note that there are multiple elders in each church. Thus the idea of a singular "Bishop" is not in the Scriptures and is opposed to the Scriptural model of multiple men who are overseers ("bishops").

The Scriptures do not present "bishops" as having an elevated, mystical position nor are they seen as a source of truth. In fact they can be a source of lies, for Paul warns that "from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things." (Acts 20:30) While there is value in having godly elders in each local church, they are not viewed as the hub or center. Many letters to churches in the New Testament (Ephesians, Colossians, etc.) do not even mention elders or overseers. If they were such a central part of what a local church is, surely the letter would have been written to them, or they would have been mentioned in a prominent way.

The Orthodox Church "teaches that outside the Church there is no salvation." (p 247) "God's saving power is mediated to humans in His Body, the Church." (p 247) How this contrasts with what God has said in His Word, the Bible! Of Jesus Christ it is proclaimed by Peter that "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Paul boldly charges, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) In teaching God's gospel in an orderly way in Romans, Paul emphasizes "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16) and "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe

in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9) and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (10:13)

The claim is made that "the Church is infallible". "We believe the Catholic Church to be taught by the Holy Spirit... and therefore we both believe and profess as true and undoubtedly certain, that it is impossible for the Catholic Church to err, or to be at all deceived, or ever to choose falsehood instead of truth." (p 248) Yet **the first half of the book chronicled the long history of inconsistencies, strivings of men, rejecting certain councils, and changes to past declarations. The second half of the book also notes many inconsistencies at present across different regions of the world.** To give one example, St John Chrysostom is given a high place by Orthodoxy and "The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom" is "the normal Liturgy on Sundays and weekdays." (p 280) "He is perhaps the best loved in the Orthodox Church" (p 24) Yet this very man was deposed and exiled by the Church. (p 24) So the Church apparently does err.

It is explicitly stated that the "councils of bishops can err and be deceived." (p 251) What follows this is the honest confession that the façade of certainty and being keepers of truth that the Orthodox Church portrays is not reality after all. "Many councils have considered themselves ecumenical and have claimed to speak in the name of the whole Church, and yet the Church has rejected them as heretical: Ephesus in 449, for example, or the Iconoclast Council of Hieria in 754, or Florence in 1438-9. Yet these councils seem in no way different in outward appearance from the Ecumenical Councils. **What, then is the criterion for determining whether a council is ecumenical? This is a more difficult question to answer than might at first appear, and though it has been discussed by Orthodox during the past hundred years, it cannot be said that the solutions suggested are entirely satisfactory." (p 252) So, the whole structure is unstable which supposedly supports the Church being built on Councils.**

"Orthodox are convinced that Christians here on earth have a duty to pray for the departed, and they are confident that the dead are helped by such prayers. But precisely in what way do our prayers help the dead?... Here Orthodox teaching is not entirely clear, and has varied somewhat at different times... Today most if not all Orthodox theologians reject the idea of Purgatory... Another school holds that perhaps they suffer... yet a third group would prefer to leave

the whole question entirely open…" (p 255) Reading this makes one sad that people imagine Orthodoxy to have answers and be keepers of the ancient faith. **Firstly, the idea of praying for the dead is directly opposed to Scripture which tells us that when a believer "departs," they are said to "depart and be with Christ" (Phil 1:23).** We look forward with confidence and prefer to "be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." (2 Cor 5:8) **Secondly, it is obvious that the Orthodox Church does not know what they believe to be true. Why would one put confidence in a Church that does not know what they think?** Why trust the Church's interpretation of Scripture when they do not know what their interpretation is?

"Reverence for the [dead] saints is closely bound up with the veneration of icons… These ever-present icons act as a point of meeting between the living members of the Church and those who have gone before." (p 256) Yet the Scriptures consistently warn not to try to contact the dead. (Deut. 18:10-12)

"Among the saints a special position belongs to the Blessed Virgin Mary." An attempt is made to distinguish that they "venerate or honour the Mother of God" but do not "worship" her. (p 257) Yet she is "often mentioned" in services and "usually given her full title: 'Our All-Holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorified Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.'" These expressions are out of line with the Scriptures.

She is not "all-holy" though "all Orthodox are agreed in believing that Our Lady was free from actual sin." (p 259) As a woman born as a descendant of Adam, a sin nature passed to her, like it has passed to everyone who came from Adam's race. (Romans 5:12) In fact, she herself acknowledged that she was a sinner who need a Savior. (Luke 1:47) Nor is she glorified in any way different from any other believer in the Lord Jesus. She is not the mother of God, just a vessel used by God for the Lord Jesus to be born into the world as a man. Nor did Mary continue as a virgin, for she had other children: "His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him." (Matthew 12:46) Though Ecumenical Councils may have said these things (p 258), they disagree with the Scriptures.

Orthodoxy's view of the Church leads up to the following chapter on the sacraments, for the Orthodox Church pushes people to focus on man and seen things, rather than on Christ the Head, who is our Life. Because a worshipper thinks he needs to "acquire" the Holy Spirit through "the means

appointed by God" (p 238), they must look to the Church, thus being enslaved to manmade wells that can never satisfy, unlike the fountain of eternal life that the Lord Jesus offers to any who will believe in Him. (John 4)

Chapter 13: **Orthodox Worship is purported to be "the earthly heaven"** (title of chapter 13) and "the multitudinous icons express visibly the sense of 'heaven on earth.'" (p 272) **This directly disagrees with the teaching of Hebrews, that Christ has gone into the true tabernacle in God's very presence and through His perfect work we draw near to God there, not here on earth. Orthodox worship reestablishes Old Testament worship. It involves distance, calls for earthly priests as intermediaries, and leaves the worshipper unsettled regarding their relationship with God.** They claim that "as the faithful gather to perform the Eucharist," that "God dwells there among humans." People have "a sense of God's presence among humans" (p 265) Yet, God's Word teaches us that we do not need seen things and ceremonies to bring us to God. Christ is enough and He has brought us to God as emphasized in Colossians and Hebrews.

This worship is wholly given over to the senses to stimulate so-called worship for "the Orthodox approach to religion is fundamentally a liturgical approach." (p 266) The emphasis is on what "the faithful can feel." (p 271) Yet the Lord Jesus said that "the hour is coming and now is that the true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth" in contrast with going to a special place that invokes worship. (John 4)

Orthodoxy has an elaborate "Liturgy" enacted with special things, special people, and special services. It is claimed that these things are "as in the early Church," yet they not only are absent from the New Testament, and also contradict the New Testament. **Acts records the first few decades of the church, but no church practices a liturgy.** Nowhere do we find special objects, activities or people. **Rather, we are taught that all are priests, and we can enter the holiest in heaven at any time with full assurance of faith.** (Hebrews 10:19-23) Further, **we are warned not to turn to special days** like feast days, since we have Christ Himself. (Col 2:16-17)

The author presents this "Liturgy" as having been done since the early church, yet inconsistencies continue to be seen. "As in the early Church, singing is

unaccompanied… except among certain Orthodox in America." (p 268) So which is right? Which is "Orthodox"? The author celebrates not having chairs but then expresses "sadly in recent years there has been an increasing tendency… to clutter the entire church with rows of seats." Further "Canon XX of the first Ecumenical Council forbids all kneeling on Sundays… but today this rule is unfortunately not always strictly observed." (p 269) So Orthodox are inconsistent even with Ecumenical Councils.

"In every Orthodox Church the sanctuary is divided from the rest of the interior by the iconostasis, a solid screen… Lay people are not allowed to go behind the iconostasis, except for a special reason such as serving at the Liturgy." (p 270-271) Thus, **Orthodoxy keeps people distant from God, except for special people who have been elevated by man. This is the opposite of what God accomplished in Christ who brought us to God** (1 Peter 3:18) and is worshipped as worthy because He has made us a kingdom of priests (Rev 1:6, 5:10). Such distance is foundational to manmade religion for it puts the religious organization in a position to perpetually offer people help in getting closer to God. In contrast Christ has done everything to bring us to God, and we are complete in Him. So, no one has anything to offer us! (Colossians 2:8-15)

Orthodoxy emphasizes "constant repetition of Litanies" (p 272). **Yet the Lord Jesus said, "When you pray, do not use vain repetitions** as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." (Matthew 6:7)

Chapter 14: **The Orthodox Church claims to be the source of salvation because it alone can offer the vital sacraments which provide access to God.** Yet the New Testament says Christ has brought us to God, and there is no sense in Acts or the epistles that the church held liturgies or promoted sacraments claimed by the Orthodox Church to be so critical.

Inconsistency continues to be seen throughout this chapter, such as not having clarity about how many sacraments exist (p 275).

Sacraments are said to be the means of getting God's grace, as if grace can be obtained by a physical activity. "They are the means whereby God's grace is appropriated to every Christian individually." (p 276) But grace is receiving something undeserved. It is a gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8-9) **In Scripture, grace**

is the opposite of something that is worked to get. Yet in the Orthodox religion, grace is something a worshipper puts effort into getting through sacraments. "To the one who works, the wages are not credited as a favor (grace), but as what is due." (Romans 4:4)

The Orthodox Church claims that there are three sacraments of initiation "as in the Church of the early centuries." (p 277) Note the expression "of the early centuries." It may be that they are seen after the New Testament, but they are certainly not in the Scriptures. Instead they contradict the Scriptures. The Orthodox Church claims that "through Baptism we receive a full forgiveness of all sin" (p 278) but a person has to keep coming back to the sacrament of "Repentance" for forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism (p. 288) What a sad way to think of forgiveness of "all sin." How unlike the gospel preached by Paul! "Let it be known to you brothers, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses." (Acts 13:38-39) Likewise Peter proclaimed that "all the prophets testify of Him, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:43) And Paul taught those who had believed that Christ died for their sins that "He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings." (Colossians 2:13) Believers have a settled position, because "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) **Nowhere do the Scriptures teach forgiveness of sins by an infant being baptized. Rather God teaches in His Word that when one believes on Christ as Savior he receives forgiveness of all his sins forever.**

Similarly, Ephesians says that "having believed, you were sealed in [Christ] with the Holy Spirit." But in contrast the Orthodox Church teaches that when a child is given a special ointment after baptism he receives the Holy Spirit. "The child… receives in Chrismation that gift of the Holy Spirit." (p 278) But an infant has not believed, so he has not received the Holy Spirit according to Scripture. Thus the Orthodox Church contradicts Scripture.

The Liturgy is a repeated activity enacted by a special group of people, yet there is no Scriptural basis for such a central activity of the Orthodox Church. It is highly developed as seen in this chapter, including "Litanies" (repeated statements) and "calling down of the Spirit", commemoration of "the Mother of God" and many other activities that get the attention of the senses (p 281). **The**

Liturgy with its appeal to the senses contrasts with the Lord Jesus words that true worshippers of the Father will worship "in spirit and truth" not by going to a special place where special people do special activities. (John 4)

In all the apparent sacredness of "holy orders", inconsistency continues to be seen. "Since the sixth or seventh century the bishop has been required to be celibate, and from at least the fourteenth century onwards he has had to be in monastic vows." (p 291) Thus, for the first six centuries a married man could be a bishop, but that was changed. Yet Orthodoxy claims to not have added or subtracted from the ancient faith. Similarly "for the full celebration of the Divine Liturgy a deacon is required… but in practice deacons have now become a rarity in some areas." (p 292) Why then is the Liturgy celebrated in this changed way? Yet this church organization claims "unvarying practice of the Church." (p 293)

Chapter 15: **"In the Orthodox Church, such is the complexity of the services that a small library of some nineteen or twenty substantial tomes will be needed" in order to know what to do.** (p 298) **There are many feasts throughout the year**, with Easter being preeminent followed by "Twelve Great Feasts", seven which are "feasts of the Lord, and five are feasts of the Mother of God" along with "a large number of other festivals". (p 298-299)

This focus on feasts was already being promoted in Paul's days, and he wrote to the Colossians and Galatians to warn not to pursue this external religion. "How is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again? You meticulously observe days and months and seasons and years." (Gal 4:9-10) In light of Christ's complete work, "no one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink, or in respect to a festival…" (Col. 2:16)

Such false teachings about the need for feasts continued to be promoted over the years after Paul and were formulated into such an extensive amount of religious practices that it takes 20 volumes to give all the details. Thus, it is not legitimate for the Orthodox Church to point to old records from the early days of the church if the practices contradict the Scriptures. We should point to the Scriptures as the earliest record of church practices, but the Scriptures actually tell us not to practice feasts.

“But besides feasts there are fasts.” (p 300) **So one feels he is not pleasing God in the Orthodox Church if he eats certain foods on certain days. Yet Paul said, “no one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink”** because these manmade religious fasts were already being promoted among the church life in Colosse.

In these many fasts, the prophetic words of Paul to Timothy have been fulfilled in the Orthodox Church**: “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith… and advocate abstaining from foods** which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim. 4:1-3) These “commandments and teachings of man… have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.” (Col 2:22-23) Instead God provided a way for victory over the flesh, by having the flesh put to death with Christ, so that we can walk in newness of life by the Spirit. (Col 2:20, Rom 8:1-4, Gal 5:16-24) Praise God!

Thus, **by Orthodox Church’s imposing fasts on its adherents as prophesied in 1 Timothy 4, it is not preserving the ancient faith, but it has in fact fallen away from the faith.** Yet it glories that its fasting rules are “of a rigor which will astonish and appall many western Christians.” (p 300) They glory in what they should be ashamed of.

Orthodox worship appeals to the senses. “Naturally it is during Holy Week that the most moving and impressive moments in Orthodox worship occur, as day by day and hour by hour the Church enters into the Passion of the Lord… None can be present at this midnight [Easter] service without being caught up in the sense of universal joy.” (p 301) This all contrasts to the Scriptures.

The Lord Jesus said in John 4 that the hour had come for the removal of external supports to make people feel worshipful. Now genuine spiritual worship would only come from those who are true worshippers from a genuine relationship in the nearness of knowing God the Father. Those who are stimulated to feel worshipful through stirring of their senses will not be found to be genuine worshippers who worship from the inside.

Going to Jerusalem to worship was no longer going to happen. The Lord Jesus said, "But a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be

His worshipers." (John 4:23) Because of the perfect work of Christ, the church in contrast to Israel was going to be in fellowship with the Father by the Spirit within. **Through the work of Christ, worship is in spirit and truth, not through external stimulation of the senses.** (John 4:24) The church was not to go to a holy place to feel special. Nowhere in Acts do they do so. Rather, **in Hebrews we are fervently taught not to go back to Judaism with its earthly services.**

In discussing the church calendar, the author again notes inconsistency including the "change to the New Style… introduced in Constantinople and Greece in March 1924, but it proved highly controversial and was not adopted everywhere." (p 301-302) Again we see notable inconsistency in a church organization that claims to be unchanging.

Sadly, **personal prayer is not truly personal in the Orthodox Church for "the daily prayers [are] recited morning and evening before the icons" based on "Manuals."** (p 303) How unlike the fellowship with God in Christ that is taught in Scripture. The Lord Jesus urges us to speak with God as our loving Father who knows and cares. (Matthew 6) The epistles are full of nearness to God seen in how Paul talks and prays. In fact this nearness was very much God's goal in Christ. "Through Him we both [Jew and Gentile] have our access in one Spirit to the Father." (Ephesians 2:18)

This distance from God even in prayer is seen in a pronounced way in how Orthodoxy promoted repeated prayers, notably the "Jesus Prayer." "There is another type of personal prayer which has for many centuries played an extraordinarily important part in the life of Orthodoxy – the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." (p 304) "As a help in reciting this prayer many Orthodox use a chaplet or prayer-rope… For some there comes a time when the Jesus Prayer… recites itself spontaneously… Orthodox believe that… the invocation of this Divine Name as an effective sign of God's action, endowed with sacramental grace. 'The Name of Jesus, present in the human heart, communicates to it the power of deification.'" (p 304-305) Thus, Orthodoxy promotes mystical experience through this repeated prayer and believe that by it one is acquiring more of the Holy Spirit and becoming god.

A promoter of this Prayer wrote "this is how I go about now, and ceaselessly repeat the Jesus Prayer… At times I do as much as forty-three or forty-four miles a day, and do not feel that I am walking at all." (p 306) **Yet the Lord Jesus**

Himself said not to pray repetitious prayers. (Matthew 6:7) Thus, this prayer is to a manmade god given the name of Jesus, for it is in direct disobedience to the real Lord Jesus. It is idolatry.

Chapter 16: The inconsistency of Orthodoxy continues to be seen in its changing ways. Though it "believes itself to be the 'one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'" (p 307), it is continuously varying from the church as seen in the Scriptures and even from the Orthodox Church of the past. **In 1965 "the anathemas of 1054 were solemnly revoked" in Constantinople. (p 315) Yet these anathemas were supposed to be divinely proclaimed by a Church which cannot err.** How can one have confidence in such an organization?

Summary of Concerns with the Orthodox Church

1. **They reject God's gospel** as taught in Scripture that Christ died as a substitute for our sins. Galatians 1 warns that there is no other gospel.
2. **They reject Christ's sufficiency, replacing Him and His work with religious sacraments**. Colossians 2 teaches against this deception that was already starting in the early church and developed further in the centuries that followed which serve as the basis for Orthodoxy.
3. **They teach that Christ's incarnation is God becoming man so that man can become God, which is their main goal called "theosis" (deification).** Satan offered this in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3, and it is consistent with the elementary principles of the world warned against in Colossians 2:8 and seen in religions of men around the world.
4. **They claim to be the "orthodox" church that preserves the ancient faith without adding to it or taking away from it,** yet they have added deification and many other religious codes and practices not found in Scripture and have subtracted the very gospel of Christ.
5. **They claim apostolic succession,** but history shows the hierarchical leaders have been often corrupt and politically appointed (even by a Muslim leader). Also, whole branches of the Orthodox religion (such as the OCA) are not authorized by the hierarchy.
6. **They claim to be based on the ecumenical councils**, but they are not even clear how to decide if a council is "ecumenical." Many councils claimed to be ecumenical but are rejected. The history of the Orthodox Church organization shows much inconsistency that contradicts itself, including changes over time and inconsistency across geography.
7. **They emphasize that a church gathers around its Bishop**, even though Orthodoxy in North America is not practiced this way. Also, the Bishop-centered church contradicts the Scriptural teaching of multiple elders ("bishops") in each local church. 1 Corinthians 1-3 warns against this glorying in man that was already starting to happen in the 50s AD.
8. **They set up distance from God, limiting access to God to special people in special places through special ceremonies**, even having a dividing wall (iconostatis) which most people cannot pass by. But Christ has brought us to God, and all believers are priests and are exhorted to draw near to God as urged in 1 Peter 2 and Hebrews 10.

9. **They teach that salvation is by the church through the sacraments which it alone can offer to allow people to progressively acquire the Holy Spirit through religious activities.** Colossians 2 urges believers to know they are complete in Christ who has addressed their sins and their sin nature. Romans 5-8 and Galatians 3-5 teach that we have received the Holy Spirit as a gift, and we need simply to decide to walk in the Spirit as a way to live righteously. Acts 4:12 emphasizes that salvation is through Christ alone. The church is never seen as a source of salvation in Scripture. Orthodoxy has added and taken away from Scripture.
10. **They emphasize images, monasticism and praying to dead people**, all of which God said not to do. God expressly forbade images in the ten commandments in Exodus 20. Colossians 2:20-23 tell believers to turn away from ascetism, because it is trying to fix the flesh which God condemned in Christ. Praying to the dead is forbidden in Scripture and is just another practice that takes minds off Christ (Col. 3:1-4).
11. **They venerate Mary**, though the Scriptures give her no such place. This teaching has deep roots in the teaching of "theosis" and synergy, holding up Mary as the highest example of deification. 1 Corinthians 1-3 warns against exalting humans.
12. **They emphasize repeated praying of the Jesus Prayer to get into a higher state.** Jesus specifically said in Matthew 6 to not practice repeated prayer because God is a loving Father with whom we have a real relationship. Would a loving father be glad for his child to talk with him this way? Such mysticism is warned against in Colossians 2.
13. **A review of Acts and the epistles** shows
    a. **a marked absence of what Orthodoxy emphasizes**: liturgy, sacraments, hierarchy, deification, prayer to the dead, veneration of Mary, Bishop-centered church
    b. **notable rejection of Scriptures by Orthodoxy** such as the gospel of Christ dying for our sins, certainty of salvation, multiple elders in each church, all believers are priests, Christ brought us to God
    c. **direct warning against what is seen in Orthodoxy**: turning from Christ's sufficiency to fasts, feasts and ascetism (Col 2); glorying in men (1 Cor 1-3); promoting a false gospel that salvation is earned by religious activities (Galatians)

Closing Comments

Paul urges believers in Christ to not be deceived by persuasive arguments of men who draw them away from Christ and His completeness (Colossians 2:4, 8). The teachings and practices of the Orthodox Church that started to develop early in church history were already being warned against in seed form during Paul's time. We should not be swayed to think that because church fathers are quoted, that this is a sound basis since people in Christianity were already turning away from the sufficiency of Christ a couple decades after Christ's resurrection. Like Paul urged Timothy, hold fast to the Scriptures alone.

The Orthodox Church does not believe the gospel of God as taught in the Scriptures, instead promoting external religion that is manmade and appeals to the senses. God's gospel proclaims that all have sinned and fall short of God's righteous standard and are therefore under God's wrath. But Christ took our place, dying as a substitute for our sins, such that whoever accepts Him as their Savior by faith will be declared righteous by God, forgiven of all their sins. This gospel is taught clearly in Romans 1 to 3.

Why turn to manmade religion that can never give you peace and confidence before God? In the Scriptures, God urges you to not turn to religious activities like sacraments, feasts, and fasts, or to mystical experiences invoked by the Jesus Prayer, or to ascetism that tries to subdue the flesh by manmade commands. (Col. 2:16-23) Rest in the complete, finished work of Christ! (Col. 2:10-15; Romans 5:1-11) Christ is enough. His work of dying for your sins satisfied God. God is satisfied; He raised Christ from the dead! Decide to trust in Christ and Christ alone.

Notes are on the book: Ware, Timothy, The Orthodox Church, Penguin Books, 1993

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APPENDIX 1

You are Complete in Christ: Enjoy it!

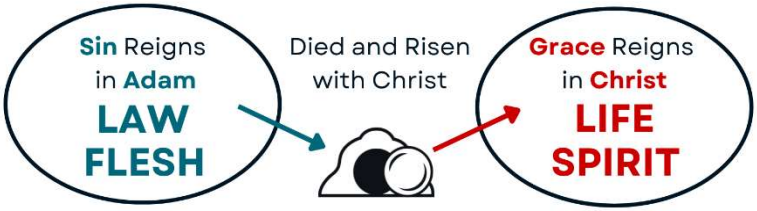
Colossians 2:8-3:4

Paul labored to see believers rest in their completeness in Christ (1:28-2:2). He urges them to not be deceived by persuasive arguments that draw them away from Christ (2:4). What joy to see saints stable, overflowing with thanksgiving, finding all in Christ (2:5-7)! There is danger of being taken captive by men's ideas that are not centered in Christ (2:8). Deception is deceptive!

All must be "according to Christ" (2:8-15)

Christ is complete and if you have believed in Christ, you are complete in Him! Paul teaches this in Colossians 2:9 to 15. First, all the fulness of Deity dwells in Christ in bodily form. There is no being like Him (2:9). Second, you are complete in Christ. You have everything in Him with nothing missing (2:10a). Third, He is above every being in authority. All are below Him (2:10b). Do not look anywhere else!

Fourth, Christ did all needed for a complete work of salvation having comprehensively addressed what we are and what we've done (2:11-15). "When you were dead in your wrongdoings [what you've done] and the uncircumcision of your flesh [who you are], He made you alive together with Him [who we are], having forgiven us all our wrongdoings [what we've done]" (2:13). Manmade religion rejects the sufficiency of Christ's saving work. Do not fall for its philosophy. If you have believed in Christ, you are complete in Christ regarding who you are (v 11-13a) and what you've done wrong (v 13b-15).



God fully dealt with <u>who we were</u> (our sinful nature) through our dying and rising with Christ (v 11-13a). You were dead "in the uncircumcision of your flesh" but God "made you alive together with" Christ. (2:13) As taught in detail

in Romans 5 to 8 (see Overview chart), our nature received from Adam has been taken over by sin. God condemned sin in the flesh through our dying with Christ and rising to newness of life with Christ. (2:11-12) Because we have Christ living in us now, we should not look to our flesh to try to live righteously. God cut off the flesh (circumcision) by our dying and being buried with Christ. We are free from ourselves. We no longer look to the sinful flesh to try to live rightly (Rom 8:1-6). God "made you alive together with Him" (2:13). Christ is our life (3:4). The risen Christ is inside us by God's Spirit.



God also completely dealt with <u>what we've done</u>, through Christ taking away our guilt by His dying for our sins (v 13b-15). "You were dead in your wrongdoings", but God has "forgiven us all our wrongdoings" (2:13). How many? All of them! How many are left to be addressed by my following rules and rituals? None! They all have been fully dealt with by Christ's dying as a substitute for us! God "canceled the certificate of debt" that called for us to be punished eternally for our sins, because Christ "has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (2:14). God is the one who accomplished this victory over our guilt and deserved punishment. By Christ's blood as a propitiation, God's justice is righteously satisfied as taught in Romans 1 to 5 (see Summary Chart). We rest in God's rest. God is satisfied with what Christ did! So, no charge can be brought up against us in Christ! Even Satan Himself cannot accuse (2:15).

Results of completeness in Christ (2:16-3:4)

"No one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath day" (2:16). Old Testament practices pointed forward to Christ. Now that Christ has come and done a complete work, no one is to impose on a believer that they need to follow <u>rituals</u> to try to accomplish anything before God. Feasts, fasts, repeated prayers, special ceremonies or other things thought to be sacraments to obtain virtue have no place in Christ. Christ, the True, has arrived (2:16-17)!

No one should rob you of what you gained in Christ by saying they have something higher than what you already have in Christ (2:18). There is no one higher than Christ, and there is no place higher than your place in Christ. They may claim to have something from a spiritual being through mystical practices, so they present their idea as an upgrade. But it is a downgrade, because it draws you away from Christ. Religious people want you to think you are distant from God, and they can help you get closer. But they are pulling you away from the real living connection you have with Christ who is the Head of the body, the church (2:19).

Live in the truth that you died with Christ (2:20), so do not go along with people imposing rules that try to subdue your flesh: "do no handle, do not taste, do not touch." God is not trying to fix the flesh. He condemned it and gave us new life by Christ in us! "Self-made religion and severe treatment of the body" (asceticism such as in monasteries) has no place for us in Christ. Man-imposed limitations such as dietary restrictions or not marrying do not actually succeed in subduing fleshly indulgences (2:23; 1 Timothy 4:1-5). Religion tries but cannot improve people's natural self. The flesh is sinful and always will be, and so God condemned it and gave us the Spirit (Rom 7:18-8:8).

Fix your mind on Christ, not on external rules and rituals that do not apply to a person who has risen with Christ to new life (3:1-4). Christ is our life! Manmade religious ordinances draw our eyes away from Christ. "Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:2-3). Fill your mind with Christ. Man's religion fills no need, because there is no need. You have everything in Christ, so no one has anything to offer you.

You have everything in Christ

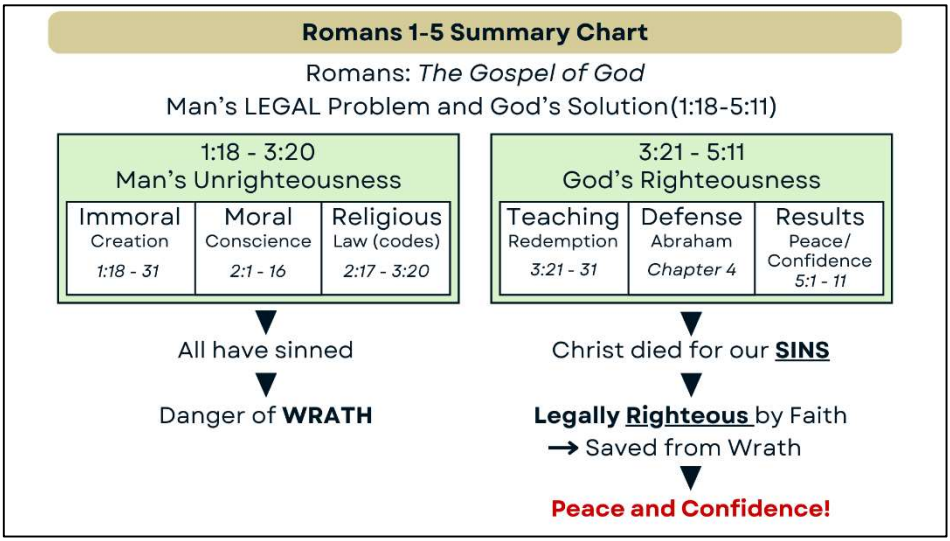
If a religious person or system implies there is something more than just Christ, turn away from them. Live in the good of the completeness of Christ's comprehensive victory, knowing there is no value to man-made ordinances or spiritual experiences to try to reach God.

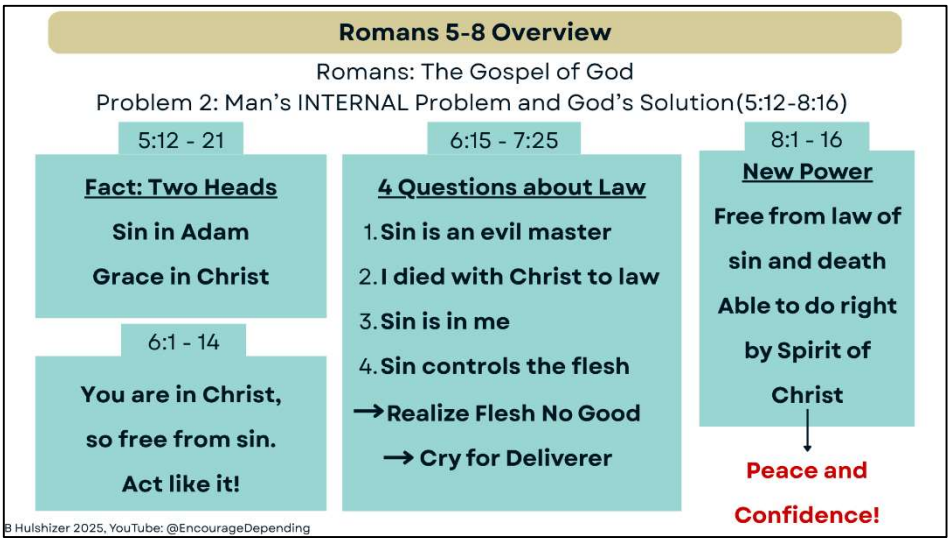
Teachings that point away from Christ had started in the first century church, so do not accept a teaching just because an early church father taught it. Do not turn back to physical practices God fulfilled in Christ. Do not get occupied with self-abasement, spiritual beings, spiritual intermediaries,

special people, and religious ceremonies. Do not let people urge you to improve your natural state rather than see yourself having died and risen with Christ. Do not let them impose "do nots" that were made by mere people.

Men's thoughts with their mystical experiences, earthly rituals and religious disciplines do not consider the Lord Jesus Christ to be everything, and so they turn to empty things. But Christ is enough. Rest in His sufficiency.

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APPENDIX 2

An Orthodox Priest's view of whether Christ died as substitute for our sins

An orthodox priest's comments on the atonement
at a panel held March 2026, Mechanicsburg PA.
Superscript numbers are used to connect response with numbered paragraphs

Comments by Orthodox Priest:

[1] We don't talk in these terms. **What category do we fall into? Penal Substitution? No.** Our understanding of sin is that sin is seen as sickness, and we need to be healed. **Sin is not you broke the rule, and you need to be punished.** So, for Christ to come into the world, he comes to save mankind from sickness. So, **this idea of Him taking punishment or that kind of thing is very foreign or alien from our understanding**.

[2] The Scripture we use is the prodigal son. The father does not go to the pig pen but waits for his return. When the kid gives his halfhearted confession, the father cuts him off and doesn't let him finish it because he doesn't want hired servants; he wants sons. **The fatted calf is killed not to appease anyone but in celebration. No one has to suffer.** The father just forgives him. The Father forgives period because He is God.

[3] Atonement is an English creation. We see it as "at one ment." To be in communion with God. **So, the purpose of Christ coming into the world is not to appease anything, but to restore and heal humanity.** The Lord God takes upon all of our humanness but sin and saves us from the inside out. So the incarnate God is a child, a baby, a teenager… even goes to death itself and blazes a trail through that. Christ comes into the world for its healing.

[4] There is always some kind of level of atonement discussion. **Paul used a lot of mediatory terms. The problem is it was done as a way to explain something, not that this is the way it is supposed to be**. The problem is that we force this model that this is the way it is. We try to explain something that is unexplainable. Instead, missionaries present the gospel in a way they understand it. They present the gospel in a way the culture will receive it.

[5] So, for us, the ultimate message of the gospel is the Lord out of love comes into the world to save us**. It's not that the Father has to be appeased for anything** because there is nothing deficient in God. He's not waiting for someone to do something or else.

[6] **Some of these models we would see as a blasphemous thing of God who would demand that His Son would suffer to appease His wrath.** I have three boys and a girl. If I'm ticked off about something, I'm not going to make my kids suffer just to appease something. **That would be monstrous! That would be something that we would just reject wholesale.**

[7] Ultimately from the orthodox perspective it is the image of healing. That **we are sick and Christ has come to heal us. We come to the church not as a showpiece for the holy people but as a hostel for the sick.** We all got our stuff.

[8] Christ has redeemed the whole world. We believe the whole world is saved because of what Christ did. How we live our lives as a reflection of that is a whole other story. **That would be the orthodox perspective on this, to try to use the same terms to answer a protestant question in an orthodox answer**.

Question 1: How do you understand the annual atonement sacrifice in Leviticus 16 if it's not penal substitution? He responded… The word itself is "at one ment." To be in communion with. To unify. Language changes over time. **We shy away from sacrifice. Christ said "you've heard it said, now I'm telling you." He's raising it to a higher level.** He becomes the one sacrifice, once and for all. The OT sacrifices led up to the final sacrifice of Christ himself. That sacrifice draws us to that unity with God. And ultimately that's what we would say Christ came to do – to reconcile us to the Father.

Question 2: Explain what God's justice is. I know I've broken God's law so I'm guilty. Exodus says God won't clear the guilty. The wages of sin is death. How can God just forgive me if I deserve death? That would be injustice, wouldn't it? He responded… **We never pray "God be just." If God be just, we're all toast. We pray for mercy.** We don't presume the mercy of God, but we trust in it. All we have is the mercy of God that saves us. We would never say "oh God be just to us."

Question 3: Under your view of atonement, how does that affect how someone knows they're saved? He responded… Am I sure that I'm married? Yes. Assurance of salvation? Salvation happened, happens and will happen all at the same time. **Our understanding is not that we say one prayer and we're done**. I still have to be loving and forgiving. Its an ongoing thing, a daily process. I can have assurance that Christ did this for me, but I'm also working it out right now and I pray that at his judgment seat his mercy is enough that I trust in.

Question 4: If God is just and sin is an offense towards him, how does it make sense for God to forgive and give us everlasting life, if there is no punishment for sins? If an earthly judge had a murderer come before him and the judge said they are compassionate, you may go free, we would say the judge is wicked. Does God just sweep it under the rug? He responded… **Sometimes we try to drag God down into our pettiness.** How dare He do this, He isn't punishing? He's God! He sees so much above these things. **God isn't petty. This idea of an earthly judge – you're right, it wouldn't make sense in this world. That's the point. He's above the world**. Because His mercy endures forever and His righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, He sees things in a different lens. He shames us at times. We say, "we deserve something." He says, "No, I just forgive you."

What does God's Word say about these thoughts?

[1] **The orthodox priest explicitly states that the orthodox religion does not accept the teaching that Christ died as a substitute paying the penalty for our sins ("penal substitution")**. Later he will call this idea of penal substitution "monstrous." However, God's consistent testimony in the Scriptures is that sin is in fact that we "broke the rule" and that as a result we are to be "punished." God said, "the soul who sins shall die." (Eze 18:4) We are under the wrath of God. (John 3:36) **God's gospel as briefly presented in Romans 1:16 to 18 is that God provides righteousness by faith to save us from God's wrath against our unrighteousness.** "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people." (Rom 1:18) This is the reason why we need salvation (Rom 1:16) It is the danger that we face, and from which we need to be rescued. One may say Christ came for a different reason,

but He Himself said that the Son of Man came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). A ransom is a payment to set a person free.

When the Lord Jesus spoke of people realizing they are "sick," He is indicating that they realize they have a problem before God and so they come to Christ and repent of their sins in order to receive salvation. "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners." (Lk 5:31-32) **Note that the issue is righteousness.** The problem is that some people think they are righteous, so do not think they need Christ's work.

The orthodox idea of Christ coming to heal us promotes the idea that we do not have a real problem as sinners. It suggests we need some help, but do not need to be rescued from grave danger. As noted later, he sees "healing" as something accomplished by coming to a church (i.e., through religious practices). But God teaches us that we do not need repair or treatment, but new life. Rather, Christ emphasized to a religious leader that he "must be born again" (John 3:3) receiving a whole new life, becoming a "new creation." (2 Cor 5:17) He did not just need more religious knowledge or experiences.

[2] **To use a parable to dismiss other Scriptures is dishonest. No parable addresses everything.** The prodigal son parable beautifully illustrates God's heart to receive a "sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7, 10), while at the same time showing how a religious person thinks they do not have anything to repent of as seen in the older brother. Praise God that His disposition is one of grace that desires that we be reconciled to Him.

God does indeed desire communion with us, so He provided for us to be reconciled to Himself. **How has God arranged for this reconciliation? "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself… we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, 'be reconciled to God!' He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Cor 5:19-21) How did God provide a way for people to be reconciled to Him? By having Christ become sin for us. He does not "just forgive" us. He does not set aside His righteousness. **God went to great lengths to make a way that we could be righteously forgiven.** Praise the Lord!

[3] When Christ uses sickness imagery, He parallels it with sinners repenting, unlike people who think they are righteous, so they do not see themselves as in need (Luke 5:31-32). He came to save sinners by giving Himself as a ransom for them. **Religious people do not think they need Christ to pay a ransom for them. They think they just need some help.** Like Nicodemus they are just looking for a teacher. (John 3) They do not see their need for a savior to die in their place. But that is who Jesus Christ is. "You shall name Him Jesus for He will save His people from their sins." (Matt 1:21) People need to be rescued, but religious people want to think they just need some assistance.

[4] In using mediatory language, Paul was not just using language Jews could understand. He preached the same message to Gentiles, such as those in Rome to whom he taught Christ paid the penalty for our sins.

The language of sacrifice is God's language. Throughout history God communicated that sin must be addressed through a sacrifice. He taught Israel this need through the sacrifices at the tabernacle. "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, so that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf." (Lev 1:4) God taught the need for a substitutionary sacrifice through the law and prophets. So, it is false to represent that the apostles were just accommodating themselves to speak this way since it is how the people thought. The Lord in His Word never abandons this teaching. In the last book of the New Testament, it is emphasized that Jesus Christ the Lamb was slain to redeem us to God. He is worthy to rule for God because "you were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God with Your blood." (Rev 5:9)

[5] Note that the word "save" was redefined by the priest. Be alert to how people do this. Always go back to a plain reading of the Scriptures to have your thinking aligned with God. **When God speaks of "saving" in the context of the gospel, it is rescuing from judgment, delivering us from wrath. This is seen throughout the Scriptures and clearly taught in Romans 1 to 5. The problem mankind has is the "wrath of God" against their sins (Rom 1:18).** The gospel is "the power of God to salvation" (Rom 1:16) because in it God provides righteousness through Christ as "a propitiation in His blood" whereby God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Rom 3:25-26) As a result, those who have been "justified by His blood" have the confidence regarding future judgment that "we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." (Rom 5:9)

[6] The priest aggressively attacks the gospel as taught in the Scriptures, calling it "monstrous." But the Scriptures stand and are clear. God's wrath is against mankind's unrighteousness because God is righteous. (Rom 1:18) He is the righteous Judge of the world. But His Son in love gave Himself as a sacrifice. (Eph 5:1) This is how we know love. God "loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10) **Christ voluntarily came to earth and went to the cross. He was not sacrificed against His will, but out of love for us. (Eph 5:1)** How monstrous to call God's love monstrous! **Notice the priest dismisses the gospel of Christ dying for our sins and also attacks it. This is very serious. He is attacking God's gospel.**

[7] We are not just suffering from an illness. We are under wrath for our guilt. (John 3:36; Rom 1:18) God's gospel is that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3) Further, the idea is conveyed here that the healing is an ongoing process accomplished by coming to the church. Through this way of thinking, a religious system enslaves adherents. They never know they are saved. Instead, they always need the religion to keep helping them be able to "heal." Paul warns the Colossians about this robbery through manmade religion. **Paul emphasizes that we are complete in Christ, that Christ has done everything and is our life, so we should not be deceived by men who propagate their own religious thoughts and impose them upon people as if they are needed.** If we have everything in Christ, people have nothing to offer us. (Col 2:8-3:4) Thus, we are urged to live in the good of the freedom by which Christ has made us free and not turn back to religious practices. (Gal 5:1-6)

Believers in Christ are "saints" (holy ones) already. Religious systems rob people of this so that they can offer them religion. Yet the reality is that in Christ we are "sanctified." The Scriptures address believers in Christ as saints who are holy in God's sight (1 Cor 1:2, 6:11, Col 1:2).

[8] Note a condescending attitude comes through, as he speaks of the Orthodox having a higher way to think than "protestants". This pride is seen again later when he speaks of Romans logic as "petty." **This high-sounding philosophy is not rooted in God and what God has said. Paul said he would not engage in men's thoughts but would stick with preaching "Christ crucified" even though the cross was seen as foolishness by those who do not see their need (1 Cor 1-2)**. May we follow Paul's example in this.

Regarding response to Question 1: It is not legitimate to force the word "atonement" to be merely an English word. **The Scriptures are clear regarding the meaning of the word "atonement".** Animals were killed as sacrifices to provide "atonement". (Lev 1:4) Regarding the sin offering, "the priest shall make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven." (Lev 4:20) There is the day of atonement in Leviticus 16 when the blood of a substitute was put on the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant (Lev 16:15). This was where God in His holiness said He would meet with them. (Ex 25:22) **In the New Testament the "atonement cover" in the Tabernacle is referred to in Hebrews 9:5, and the same Greek word is used in Romans 3:25 of Christ being a "propitiation" by his blood as God's way for believers in Jesus to be declared righteous.** Thus, this is not merely an English word, and we are not guessing at its meaning.

Christ never refers to the sacrificial system when saying "you have heard it said, now I'm telling you." Those statements are in Matthew 5, and all are emphasizing that a person needs a righteousness greater than the Pharisees. (Matt 5:20-48) Christ never dismisses the sacrificial system. Rather He fulfills it. He is crucified on the day of Passover when a lamb died so that the firstborn did not die – a substitute. He is declared "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) The Scriptures tell us that Christ brought us to God by suffering for sins as "the just for the unjust." (1 Pet 3:18) In the last book of the Bible, Christ is seen as the Lamb slain to redeem us. (Rev 5:6-9) The book of Hebrews uses the sacrificial system to clearly teach that the Lord Jesus is the Sacrifice that needs to be accepted as my way to be right with God. "He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God… for by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb 10:12-14) Have you accepted His sacrifice for your sins?

Regarding response to Question 2: Notice that he did not answer the question. Further, know that the gospel does not dismiss God being just. Rather the Scriptures emphasize God's righteousness. "The Lord is righteous; He loves righteousness." (Ps 11:7) Christ "loved righteousness and hated wickedness." (Ps 45:7; Heb 1:9) **God's righteousness serves as the foundation for presenting the gospel in Romans 1 to 3. The gospel does not ignore or dismiss justice; rather it fully addresses justice.** "Righteousness of God is revealed" (Rom 1:17) Through Christ, God remains just in declaring us righteous, for justice regarding our sins has been completely satisfied because

Christ died for our sins. (Rom 3:24-26) We rest in God's righteousness. Do not go along with this idea that we do not want God to be just, and that His mercy sets aside his justice. Rather His mercy has devised means for His justice to be satisfied while we are delivered.

Regarding response to Question 3: God does not want us to have such uncertainty as is seen here in the words of this religious leader. Instead believe the Lord Jesus. **Christ wants you to have absolute certainty. He says "truly, truly" – this is absolutely true!** One who believes God's testimony concerning Christ already has eternal life, "does not come into judgment" in the future, but already has "passed out of death into life." (John 5:24) What certainty!

The orderly presentation of the gospel in Romans leads to this same wonderful peace, confidence and joy! Since we know we are justified on the basis of faith in the finished work of Christ, we have peace with God and "celebrate in hope of the glory of God." (Rom 5:1-2) The believer is resting in the work of God. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8) So we having settled, joyful confidence in God Himself. (Rom 5:11) The gospel is the work of God through Christ, so my assurance of salvation is rooted in God Himself**. I trust God's word regarding Christ's work, and therein I find perfect rest.** It is not presumptuous to say I am saved; I am justified; I am a saint. Rather it is believing what God has said. To not believe God is the worst disrespect. [for short videos on Romans 1 to 5 see @EncourageDepending on YouTube]

There indeed will be results in my life. As a new creation with the Holy Spirit within, I will act differently. But **I do not act differently to become different. I act differently because I am different. I have new life** (2 Cor 5:17). I've been born again (1 Pet 1:3). I've been sanctified (1 Cor 6:11). I have a real relationship with the Lord Jesus, with His life within me (Col 3:3). As a child of God by faith, we have God's Spirit within so are able to respond to the call to act like Him. (Titus 2:11-14) Having been "justified by His grace" we should "engage in good deeds" (Titus 3:7-8)

Regarding response to Question 4: The priest says God is not petty like us in thinking justice must be satisfied. Is this what God has revealed? **Does God say it is "petty" to think that unrighteous ways should be righteously judged? Certainly not. All Scripture testifies otherwise.** Nor has God told us that He

just forgives because He's God and above us. Rather God systematically educated us in righteousness through the law, so we see that we fall short of His righteous standard and thus see the value of Christ as the Savior of sinners. (Gal 3:24)

This religious leader shows his pride here, saying that using the teaching of Romans is "petty." He presents himself as being above the Scriptures, wiser than God. How is it that he has higher knowledge such that he can not only dismiss the teaching of Romans but also call it petty? Please realize that he as a man is setting himself up above God. And **the priest's teachings result in people remaining in their sins under wrath. How evil!** No wonder Paul speaks so forcefully about one who distorts the gospel! (Gal 1:9)

Dear friend, you do not need a religious system of men to help you in a supposed sickness. By this they enslave you to themselves. Rather, agree with God and confess that you have sinned before a righteous God and are in grave danger of His righteous judgment! Look to Christ on the cross dying for your sins (John 3:14-15). Acknowledge your guilt and believe on Christ for salvation from God's wrath (Rom 1:16-18, 3:23-26; Acts 13:38-39). Receive the free gift of eternal life God offers through Christ. (John 3:16, Rom 6:23) Rest in what God has said regarding Christ (John 5:24; 1 John 5:9-13). Rest in the perfect work of salvation Christ finished (Col 1:21-22; 2:10-15). This is God's way of peace with Himself forever. Believe God. Believe His message of good news!

Some Summary Notes

1. The orthodox priest **dismisses and attacks the Biblical teaching that Christ died as a substitute to pay the penalty for our sins**. Yet, this is God's gospel as taught in the Scriptures. Believe God not man.
2. The priest **attacks the God of the Bible as "monstrous" for punishing His Son.** Yet Christ's dying for us was an act of love. (Rom 5:8; Eph 5:1) How terrible to attack God this way!
3. The priest **uses very little Scripture** to provide answers. His thoughts are men's thoughts. Heed God's Word instead. (Col 2:8)
4. The priest **often does not answer the question asked** (calling it petty to think God would be unjust as a judge if he does not righteously punish evil actions), uses strawman arguments (saying penal substitution represents God as having a bad temper that takes out his anger on his son) or makes ad hominems (attacking God's character of requiring sacrifice, rather than addressing the substance of the argument, that justice requires sin to be punished).
5. **The Scriptures consistently teach that God is just yet provided a means for unrighteous people to be declared righteous through the blood of Christ who died in their place.** (Isa 53; Rom 3:21-26) This is how we can be reconciled to God and have communion with Him. (2 Cor 5:17-21) There is no other gospel. (Acts 4:12; Gal 1:9)
6. The priest attacks God and the gospel that God foretold in the Law (Lev 1-5, 16), prophesied (Isa 53), fulfilled in Christ (John 3:14-17), proclaimed in the world (Acts 8:32-35; 10:43; 13:38-39), and taught through the apostles (Rom 1-5; Col 2; 2 Cor 5:17-21; 1 Pet 3:18). **This attack on the gospel was already starting in the days of the apostles**, resulting in corrective writings like Galatians and Colossians addressing religious people undermining God's gospel**.**
7. **See to it that you are not taken captive through philosophy and empty deception that is not in accordance with Christ in His perfect person and complete work.** (Col 2:8-17)

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at "Three Views of the Atonement" Panel, Messiah University, March 19, 2026
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Scripture quotes are from NASB 2020