

Thoughts for someone interested in

The Orthodox Church

1. Does the Orthodox Church preserve the ancient Christian faith?

The Scriptures teach that God's gospel is that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). By faith in Christ, we can be declared righteous and not come under the wrath of God (Romans 1:16-18). "The Orthodox Church" book was written by an Eastern Orthodox Bishop to "give a clear, detailed introduction to the Orthodox Church" but it only has one sentence on this teaching. "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). An Orthodox Priest recently presented that, "Sin is not you broke the rule, and you need to be punished. This idea of Him taking punishment... is very foreign or alien from our understanding... 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... That would be something that we would just reject wholesale." Thus, the Church teaching is a change from the Scriptural gospel that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corin 5:21). The Orthodox Church

disagrees with the prophecy of Isaiah 53:6 that “the LORD has caused the wrongdoing of us all to fall on Him.”

2. Have you considered Scriptures that warn against teachings Orthodoxy promotes? In Colossians 2, believers are urged to not turn to feasts, fasts, mystical practices or monasticism. The Galatian churches were corrected because they “meticulously observe days and months and seasons and years”, yet these are “worthless elementary principles to which you want to be enslaved” (Gal 4:9-10). It was prophesied during the early church that “in later times some will fall away from the faith... and advocate abstaining from foods” (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Orthodoxy continues urging feasts, fasts and other religious activities the apostles taught against. Sacraments are said to be the way to get virtue with God, with twenty volumes recording what a person is to do (p 298). Repeated prayers (litanies) and the repeated “Jesus Prayer” are valued (p 304-305), but Jesus said God is a personal Father so He does not want this (Matthew 6:7). The Liturgy and church building structure show distance from God. “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” (p 270-271). This distance is the opposite of what God accomplished in Christ. All believers are priests, and the Lord Jesus is worshipped for this (1 Peter 2:4-10; Rev 5:10).

3. If wrong teachings were developing during the apostles’ time, should we base beliefs on what early church fathers said? The Orthodox Church says it draws their faith from what was done in the early church. However, the book’s earliest source is Ignatius in the 2nd century and Cyprian in the 3rd century (chp 1). If wrong teachings were being promoted in churches during the time of the apostles, it is not safe to appeal to fathers in the 2nd century who may be promoting wrong teachings that developed decades before them.

4. Does the Orthodox Church exist through apostolic succession? The book gives many examples of leadership being politically controlled, such as when the revered Saint John Chrysostom was exiled by the

Church (p 24). The Patriarch of Constantinople was deposed in 867, yet later held a council that condemned the council that had condemned him (p 55-56). A Muslim Sultan decided who would be “on the Patriarchal throne” (p 88). In 1448 leaders in Moscow elected “a Metropolitan without further reference to Constantinople” (p 102-103). Tsar Peter decided the Church would be governed by a Synod rather than a Patriarch (p 114). Due to communism’s control in Moscow, Orthodox groups broke from the Metropolitan there (p 153).

5. Have you considered that Orthodoxy as it exists 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.” Whole church organizations like the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) created themselves, rather than being authorized by a patriarch. They formed as an “autonomous group” in 1926 and are still not recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate (p 174-178).

6. Is the Orthodox Church changeless? Orthodoxy claims to “preserve the Doctrine of the Lord uncorrupted... neither adding any thing, nor taking any thing from it” (p 196). However, “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... Yet these councils seem in no way different in outward appearance from the Ecumenical Councils” (p 252). “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). In 1652 the Russian Patriarch insisted the Russians use three fingers in the sign of the cross, but many kept using two fingers (p 111). Church teachings and practices have in fact changed. Regarding praying for the dead “Orthodox teaching is not entirely clear, and has varied somewhat at different times” (p 255).

7. Do the Scriptures say we become gods by “deification” (theosis)?

“God became human that we humans might become god.” The “goal at which every Christians must aim” is “to become god, to attain theosis, ‘deification’” (p 231). The sacraments are the way to “acquire the Holy Spirit” and thereby be deified further (p 230, 245). “God uses... relics as a channel of divine power” (p 234). This philosophical idea seems wise but it robs Christ of what He won for believers. It urges always trying to arrive at some further deification, rather than resting in being complete in Christ as the Scriptures teach (Colossians 2:8-3:4). 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). However Jesus said that the one who received God’s testimony regarding Himself “will not come into judgment” (John 5:24) for Christ paid for all our sins. “Having been justified by faith we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). 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). God wants us to rest in the complete, finished work of Christ (Col. 2:10-15; Romans 5:1-11).

The referenced book is Ware, Timothy, The Orthodox Church, Penguin Books, 1993

Comments on the atonement were by Very Reverend Father Timothy Hojnicky, Rector of Holy Apostles Orthodox Church, Mechanicsburg PA at “Three Views of the Atonement” Panel, Messiah University, March 19, 2026



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