

# IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE

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Roman Catholic Church,



Eastern Orthodox Church,



Oriental Orthodox Church



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And  
BIBLICAL TEACHING

Moreland Christian Church  
[www.morelandchristianchurch.org.au](http://www.morelandchristianchurch.org.au)

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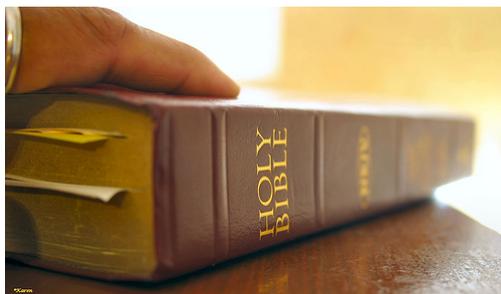
# 1. INTRODUCTION

How are my sins forgiven? How do I receive eternal life? How do I spiritually grow? How do I get to heaven? These are the crucial questions of life. This booklet explains what the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Church believe about these spiritual life and death issues and compares them with what the Bible teaches.

Many beliefs held by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Church) are identical to one another, but there are a few differences which are dealt with in this booklet. Generally speaking, however, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are closer in theology to one another than to any other Christian denomination or church. (This booklet does not deal with beliefs held by other Orthodox churches which are not part of the Eastern Orthodox Church or Oriental Orthodox Church.)

In each chapter, the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are briefly explained first, and then the Biblical teaching is presented. Each chapter is concise. It is highly recommended that you verify each of the Biblical responses by reading the Scripture references listed.

Since the Bible comes from God and is his message to us (Exod 34:27-28; Jer 30:1-2; Hab 2:2; Acts 1:16; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21; Rev 1:1-3), it must be used to measure anything we believe about spiritual issues. The Bible is not simply a book, but it is the very words of God. So take the time to read the Bible passages listed, and this will help confirm what God's will is.



## 2. A BRIEF CHURCH HISTORY

From the time of Pentecost in 30 A.D. (Acts 2), when God's Spirit came into all believers of Jesus Christ to empower them for ministry, the Kingdom of God began to expand from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8). The good news of Jesus Christ quickly spread through Africa, Asia and Europe.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., bishops began to be appointed to some of the major cities of the Roman Empire to oversee the Christian church in their local and regional areas. During this time the Roman Empire occupied many countries, including those around the Mediterranean Sea. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. there were 5 cities where a bishop was appointed:

1. Alexandria (in Egypt).
2. Jerusalem (in present day Israel).
3. Antioch (was in ancient Syria, but now located in Turkey).
4. Constantinople (now called Istanbul, in Turkey).
5. Rome (in Italy).

These 5 senior bishops eventually came to be known by several different titles: archbishops, patriarchs or popes.

It was not a Biblical requirement to have these 5 bishops appointed, but many local churches in and around these major cities submitted themselves to their authority. However some churches and Christians only submitted themselves to God and his Word, not to this hierarchy of bishops.



Looking at the map of some of the major cities of the Roman Empire shows that Rome is in the west of the Roman Empire, while all the other cities where the bishops were appointed are in the east of the Empire. This is why, when you read church history, the Roman Catholic Church (which came out of Rome) is commonly called the “western church”, while the churches that are in the east of the Empire are commonly called the “eastern church”.

In 451 A.D. the Council of Chalcedon was held (a Council is a conference usually organised by the church leaders to give guidance to the church). The churches led by the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch broke away from the rest of the Christian church because they disagreed with a decision made about the nature of Jesus Christ at this Council. These churches that broke away are now commonly known as the **Oriental Orthodox Church** and are made up of the Armenian, Egyptian (Coptic), Eritrean, Ethiopian, Indian (Malankara) and Syrian Orthodox Churches. Each of these churches has its own patriarch/pope.

Over many centuries the bishop of Rome became more and more powerful, both religiously and politically. He wanted supreme authority over all the other bishops and over the entire Christian church. Leo I (also known as Leo the Great), who was bishop of Rome from 440-461 A.D., is considered by many to be the first Roman bishop who vigorously pushed forward the supremacy of the Roman bishop over the entire Christian church. Several Roman bishops before him pushed this idea but to a lesser degree.

This obviously created a lot of problems between the western and eastern churches. When this issue of the primacy of the bishop of Rome was coupled with other theological disagreements and political rivalry (mainly between Rome and Constantinople), the relationship between the western and eastern churches fell further apart in 1054 A.D., when leaders of the churches of Rome and Constantinople excommunicated each other! The patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch sided with the patriarch of Constantinople. The relationship between the patriarch of Rome and the other patriarchs continued to disintegrate for hundreds of years after this.

The western church is now commonly known as the **Catholic Church** or the **Roman Catholic Church**, and has only 1 patriarch who is commonly called the “Pope” (meaning “father”). The word “catholic” means “universal” and reflects the Roman Catholic Church’s belief that it is the one, true, worldwide church.

The eastern church is now commonly known as the **Eastern Orthodox Church** and is made up of churches that are in agreement with the *Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*. These churches include the Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, Russian, Serbian and other Orthodox churches. Each of these churches has its own patriarch/pope. The word “orthodox” means “correct, true, right”, and reflects the Orthodox Church’s belief (Eastern and Oriental) that it holds the true Christian faith.

It is important to remember that throughout the history of the church, not all Christians or Christian churches submitted themselves to the authority of this hierarchy of bishops, because it was not a Biblical requirement. Many simply submitted themselves to God and his Word.

It is also important to note that many beliefs held today by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (Eastern and Oriental) were accepted by them gradually over a long period of time - they are not things Christians have always believed. This booklet will primarily cover the important differences between these churches and what God has revealed in the Bible.

In this booklet the following abbreviations apply:

- **RCC** = Roman Catholic Church.
- **EOC** = Eastern Orthodox Church.
- **OOC** = Oriental Orthodox Church.
- **Orthodox Church** = EOC and OOC.



### 3. THE BIBLE

#### THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

“Canon” comes from a Greek word meaning a “rule” or “standard”. With respect to the Bible, it refers to those books that are considered to be inspired by God and therefore worthy of being included in the Bible. The standard Bible canon is 66 books, consisting of 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. Any extra Old Testament or New Testament books are commonly called the “Apocrypha” (meaning “hidden”). The RCC and the Orthodox Church have made several additions to the Bible:



The **RCC** has made the following additions to the Old Testament:

- (a) An extra 7 books: Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom (Wisdom of Solomon), Sirach (Ecclesiasticus; Wisdom of Ben Sira) and Baruch.
- (b) Extra chapters have also been added to the Old Testament books of Esther and Daniel.

The **EOC** accepts all the additions made by the RCC, plus a few more:

- (a) An extra 3 Old Testament books: 1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh and 3 Maccabees. (The Slavonic churches of the EOC also add the book of 2 Esdras to the Old Testament.)
- (b) An extra chapter has been added to the Old Testament book of Psalm – Psalm 151.

Generally speaking, the **OOC** accepts all the additions made by the RCC, but there are differences between some churches of the **OOC** in the Bibles they use:

- (a) All the churches of the OOC recognise Psalm 151 as canonical.
- (b) The **Armenian Orthodox Church** has a slightly larger Bible, using the same Bible canon as the Slavonic churches of the EOC.
- (c) The **Ethiopian Orthodox Church** has the largest Bible. Not only do they accept many of the extra books used by the RCC and the EOC, but they add several other Old Testament books such as Jubilee and Enoch. Depending on how they number their Old Testament Books, the Ethiopian Church has between 46-53 Old Testament books!

Also, the **Ethiopian Orthodox Church** is the only church to have made additions to the New Testament – an extra 8 books (making a total of 35 New Testament books). Some of these are Gitsew, Abtilis and Didascalía. So the Ethiopian Church has between 81 and 88 books of the Bible!

The majority of the rest of the Christian church only accepts the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament as canonical, and do not accept the apocryphal books as inspired by God for the following reasons:

1. The Old Testament apocryphal books are not found in the Hebrew Old Testament. The Jews do not consider them to be God-inspired.
2. Jesus and his followers never quote from the apocryphal books or suggest that they're inspired, but they do quote other books of the Bible.
3. None of the apocryphal books claim to be inspired by God. They lack spiritual power and evidence of divine inspiration. In fact the author of 2 Maccabees was not even confident about what he wrote (2 Maccabees 15:38)!
4. They contain some teaching that contradicts the Bible. For example, praying for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:44-45), and an angel of God who lies, claiming to be a human called Azarius son of Ananias (Tobit 5:4-14).
5. Several books contain historical and geographical mistakes (e.g. Judith 1:1 says that King Nebuchadnezzar ruled in Nineveh. However, history and the Bible show that he ruled from Babylon – 2 Chronicles 36:6).
6. Some books are believed to be Jewish novels (e.g. Tobit and Judith).
7. The Syriac church only accepted its apocryphal books in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. A 2<sup>nd</sup> century Syriac Bible does not contain them.
8. The RCC only officially accepted its apocryphal books at the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

† What is the danger in reading a book that you believe is inspired by God, when it actually isn't?

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### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE**

Whilst the **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** do believe that the Bible is God's Word that has authority over our lives (Exod 34:27-28; Jer 30:1-2; Hab 2:2; Acts 1:16; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21; Rev 1:1-3), they also believe that God speaks to us through tradition. In their understanding, tradition includes rules and laws made by bishops and popes, decisions made at ecumenical councils, the writings of the early Church Fathers, the lives of the saints etc. This information is passed down through the centuries via the bishops and popes. They teach that this tradition should not contradict what is in the Bible. So the theological belief system of these churches is not just determined by the Bible, but by tradition also.

Unfortunately, the use of tradition to determine doctrine has resulted in a lot of false teaching by the RCC and the Orthodox Church - as can be seen throughout this booklet. The use of tradition has also resulted in a lot of unnecessary rules and regulations which burden people. Whilst it is true that God can still reveal his will through visions and the spiritual gifts of knowledge, prophecy etc. (Acts 21:7-14; 1 Cor 12:4-11; 2 Cor 12:1-4), no extra revelations of God should ever contradict his revelations in the Bible. God cannot contradict himself; he is not a liar (Num. 23:19; Tit 1:2). Therefore, any tradition that is passed down to us must always be tested against the Bible, which we know is God inspired (Mark 7:1-13).

# 4. FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND SALVATION

## HOW AM I FORGIVEN AND SAVED?

This is the most important question to be asked, since the answer to this question determines where we will spend eternity – heaven or hell.

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that we receive forgiveness of sins and salvation by our faith in Jesus Christ **and** through good works – primarily the 7 sacraments provided by the church. They do not believe that faith in Jesus Christ alone is enough to forgive sin, but that we must do our part by doing good works (particularly the sacraments) for the rest of our lives in order to be forgiven and saved. Sacraments are signs (words or actions) that make God's grace available to us – they forgive our sins, make us holy etc. The 7 sacraments they practice are:

1. The sacrament of baptism.
2. The sacrament of confirmation (also known as *holy unction* or *chrismation*).
3. The sacrament of the Eucharist (also known as *holy communion*).
4. The sacrament of penance (also known as *repentance* or *confession*).
5. The sacrament of holy orders (deacons, priests, bishops etc.).
6. The sacrament of anointing of the sick.
7. The sacrament of marriage.

## **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

Firstly, the Bible teaches that forgiveness of sins and salvation is received by **repenting** of our sins and having **faith/belief** in the Lord Jesus Christ. **Repentance** occurs when a person decides to turn away from sin and turn to God to obey him, placing their **faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. believing in who Jesus is, and that his death on the cross and resurrection forgives sin). Repentance and faith are linked to each other and occur together when a person wants to be forgiven and saved (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 5:31-32; 24:45-47; John 3:16-18,36; 5:24; 6:35-40,47; 8:24; 11:25-27; 17:1-3; 20:30-31; Acts 2:37-41; 3:19; 10:43; 17:30-31; 20:17-21; Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 5:1; 6:23; 10:9-13; 2 Cor 7:10; 1 John 4:15; 5:1-13).

Secondly, the Bible shows us that we simply ask God directly to forgive our sins. We do not need to perform any sacraments (Psa 32:5; 51:1-2; Mat 6:9-13; Acts 8:14-22; 1 John 1:9).

Finally, the Bible teaches that forgiveness of sins and salvation is **not** received through any good works of our own (such as the sacraments), but through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ based on God's grace (Rom 3:20-31; 4; 5:1-2; 11:6; 1 Cor 1:20-21; Gal 2:15-21; 3; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:4-8). Good works **prove** that we are followers of God (John 15:1-11; Acts 26:19-20; Rom 7:4; Eph 2:8-10; 5:8-9; Tit 3:4-8; Jam 2:14-26; 1 John 2:1-6; 3:4-10; 5:18) and that we **love** him (John 14:15,21; 15:10; 1 John 5:3). So we do good works because we are saved, not to be saved. Good works prove that we follow God and love him. Good works don't make us Christian.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross paid for all our sins (Isa 53:6; 2 Cor 5:16-21; Col 2:13-14; Heb 9:26-28; 10:11-18; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 1:7-2:2; Rev 1:5), so there is nothing else we need to do, or can do, to be forgiven; we simply need to believe that what he did

for us was enough. Not only do works such as the sacraments not save us, but **if we believe that works save us God will actually condemn us** since we believe in a false gospel (Luke 18:9-14; Rom 4:5; Gal 1:6-9; 3:10; 5:4). This means that we're not forgiven and saved because we rely on our own works for forgiveness instead of trusting completely in Jesus Christ's work.



### **ASSURANCE OF SALVATION**

Since the **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** believe that forgiveness of sins and salvation depends on good works (particularly the sacraments), they teach that your salvation can't be guaranteed, i.e. you cannot be 100% sure that you're going to heaven. In other words, they do not believe in **assurance of salvation**. Since a person must regularly perform good works to be forgiven and saved, he/she will never know at what point they are completely right before God. They have no guarantee they have done enough good works to please God!

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

The Bible teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit when we have faith in Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39; Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18; Eph 1:13-14), and that the Holy Spirit in us **guarantees** our salvation (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:1-5; Eph 1:13-14). Also, Jesus said that when we have faith in him we **have** eternal life (John 3:16,36; 5:24; 6:47). The Apostle John confirms this and says that we **can know now** that we have eternal life (1 John 5:11-13). So since we have the Holy Spirit in us, and our salvation depends on faith and not good works, the Bible teaches that we have assurance of salvation. We can know now that we are going to heaven.



### **SHOULD I CONFESS MY SINS TO A PRIEST?**

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that each person should confess their sins to a priest so that God will forgive their sins (this is an example of how the sacrament of penance and the sacrament of holy orders are applied for a person's forgiveness and salvation).

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

As shown on the previous page, we ask God directly to forgive our sins (we don't need to go through anybody else). Also, Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and his role as our high priest in heaven interceding for us, allow us to **directly** approach God (Rom 8:34; Heb 2:17-3:1; 4:14-5:10; 6:19-20; 7; 8; 10:19-22; 1 John 2:1). Therefore we don't need to tell a human priest what sins we have committed so that God can forgive us. We simply go straight to God because Jesus' sacrifice and intercessory priestly role allow us to do so.

The RCC and the Orthodox Church use John 20:22-23 to support their belief that confession should be made to a priest. However this passage is best understood in at least two other ways. Firstly, Jesus could be referring to church discipline, i.e. the sin is held against the unrepentant sinner (Mat 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5). Secondly, Jesus may be referring to personal forgiveness of sins committed against one another (Mat 6:14-15; 18:15-17,21-35; Luke 17:3-4; Jam 5:16).

## 5. WATER BAPTISM

### DOES WATER BAPTISM FORGIVE SIN AND SAVE ME?

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that water baptism (like the other sacraments) is necessary for forgiveness of sins and salvation. They believe that water baptism results in the removal of original sin, the forgiveness of sins, spiritual regeneration, incorporation into the Body of Christ (the church), being made “born again” etc.

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

The Bible teaches that forgiveness of sins and salvation is received by repentance and faith/belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, based on God’s grace, and not through any good works of our own (such as water baptism) – see chapter 4, “Forgiveness of Sins and Salvation”.

We are baptised in water as a public demonstration of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The examples of water baptism in the Bible show that people **first** believed in Jesus (therefore receiving forgiveness of sins and salvation) and **then** were baptised (Mat 28:18-20; Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13,26-39; 10:44-48; 16:13-15,25-34; 18:8).

The RCC and the Orthodox Church cite several Biblical passages to support their claim that water baptism is necessary for salvation. Below is a brief refutation of some of these passages (for more detailed information please read Moreland Christian Church’s Bible study titled *Water Baptism*).

- **Mark 16:16.** The second part of this verse says that non-belief condemns us, not a failure to be baptised.
- **John 3:3-5.** “Born of water” does not refer to water baptism but means to be naturally born (cf. verse 6); or it could be describing the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives since the Holy Spirit is commonly described as water in the Bible (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor 12:13); or it could be a way of describing the action of God’s Word on us since God’s Word acts like water to clean us when we believe its message (John 15:3; Eph 5:25-26; 1 Pet 1:22-23).
- **Acts 2:38.** In his speech to the Jews, Peter’s reference to water baptism is not that it would lead to forgiveness of sin but that it is something you naturally do once you are forgiven. Peter is effectively saying that they should be baptised because their sins are forgiven when they repent. He wants them to prove their faith in Jesus Christ by being baptised in water. Also in Peter’s next recorded sermon (Acts 3:17-26) the emphasis is on repentance and turning back to God for the forgiveness of sin – there is no mention of water baptism.
- **Acts 22:16.** Paul’s sins would be washed away by him “calling on his name” (the name of Jesus). “Calling on the name of Jesus” means to believe (have faith) in the Lord Jesus Christ, and this can also be shown by Romans 10:9-13. So Paul’s faith in Jesus Christ forgave his sins, not the water baptism itself.

- **Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 3:27-28; 1 Peter 3:20-21.** These passages are describing spiritual baptism, not water baptism (see 1 Cor 12:12-13,27 for another aspect of spiritual baptism). Spiritual baptism occurs at conversion and involves being baptised (united or identified) into Jesus Christ's body (the Church), and being baptised (united or identified) into Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.
- **Titus 3:5.** "Washing of regeneration" is not a reference to water baptism. It is describing the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives since the Holy Spirit is commonly described as water in the Bible (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor 12:13).



### **DO I RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT AT BAPTISM?**

The **RCC** teaches that a person receives the Holy Spirit when they are baptised in water.

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

When we have faith in Jesus Christ we receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39; Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18; Gal 3:14; Eph 1:13-14). In fact the Acts 10:44-48 example shows that these people received the Holy Spirit **before** being baptised in water! So receiving the Holy Spirit does not depend on water baptism, but on faith in Jesus Christ.



### **PERSONAL FAITH IN CHRIST AND BAPTISM**

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that infants should be baptised in water so they can be forgiven and saved, even though they are unable to express any faith in Jesus Christ. Since the infant cannot express personal faith in Christ, these churches require the parent or godparent to express their own faith in Christ on behalf of the child.

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

We are baptised in water as a public demonstration of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The examples of water baptism in the Bible show that **before** being baptised, the person first believed in Jesus and **then** was baptised (Mat 28:18-20; Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13,26-39; 10:44-48; 16:13-15,25-34; 18:8). Your **own** personal faith in Jesus Christ is required before you are baptised in water. There is nothing in the Bible to show that somebody else can confess their own faith in Christ on your behalf. In fact, it is **personal** faith in Christ that saves you (John 3:16-18,36; 5:24; 6:35-40,47; 20:30-31; Rom 10:9-13), not somebody else's faith on your behalf. Also, in the after-life, God's judgement of us will not be based on somebody else's actions on our behalf, but is based on



what we have **personally** said or done (Mat 12:36-37; 16:27; Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10).

It therefore makes no sense that infants, who can't express personal faith in Jesus, should be baptised since water baptism is a public demonstration of one's faith in Jesus Christ. Also, there isn't a single example in the Bible of an infant being baptised.

Sometimes the RCC and the Orthodox Church use the example of John the Baptist receiving the Holy Spirit before birth to support their claim that infants can receive the Holy Spirit without expressing personal faith in Jesus Christ (Luke 1:12-15). However, John the Baptist was chosen by God to be a prophet who would prepare the people for the coming of Jesus Christ. As a result of this, God filled John with his Holy Spirit even before birth so that this task could be accomplished. This filling of the Spirit is not the same filling of the Spirit that Jesus promised for his followers. Jesus made it quite clear that the Holy Spirit would be sent to fill those who had faith in him **after** he returned to heaven (John 7:37-39; Acts 1:1-9). Since John the Baptist received the Holy Spirit before Jesus Christ was born, it is obvious that John's experience was not what Jesus promised for all who had faith in him, since the promise would be fulfilled only after he returned to heaven. So John's experience cannot be used to support the belief that unbelieving infants receive the Holy Spirit at baptism.

† What's wrong with thinking that your infant child is forgiven and saved by baptising them in water?

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## 6. RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The **RCC** teaches that a person receives the Holy Spirit during the sacrament of baptism, and that during the sacrament of confirmation (usually performed at a later time) the person receives a special strengthening or final seal of the Holy Spirit.



The **Orthodox Church** teaches that an individual receives the Holy Spirit during the sacrament of confirmation, which they perform immediately after the sacrament of baptism.

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

The Bible teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit when we have faith in Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39; Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18; Gal 3:14; Eph 1:13-14), and that the Holy Spirit in us guarantees our salvation (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:1-5; Eph 1:13-14). Receiving the Holy Spirit does not depend on the sacrament of baptism or on the sacrament of confirmation, but on our faith in Jesus Christ.

Also, we do not receive the Holy Spirit in a step-by-step process as taught by the RCC. When we have faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit who then empowers us to live a holy, obedient and pleasing life for God – we are fully equipped for God’s service at that moment. The Bible mentions nothing of a step-by-step process. However, the Bible does talk about being “filled with the Holy Spirit”. To be “filled with the Spirit” is to allow God’s Spirit to take control of our life and is shown by our obedience to God and the work that God does through us. We are commanded to be continually filled with the Spirit, i.e. we must continually surrender our lives to the control of the Spirit within us (Luke 1:67; 4:1-2; Acts 2:1-4; 4:8,31; 6:3-5; 7:55; 13:9-10; Eph 5:18-21).

† Why is it important to know when you have received the Holy Spirit?

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## 7. THE LORD'S SUPPER

### DOES THE LORD'S SUPPER FORGIVE SIN AND SAVE ME?

The Lord's Supper is commonly called the "sacrament of the Eucharist" by the **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** ("Eucharist" comes from a Greek word meaning "grateful, thankful"). These churches teach that the Lord's Supper should be taken regularly for the forgiveness of sins and salvation, primarily using John 6:48-58 to support this claim.

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

The Bible teaches that forgiveness of sins and salvation is received by repentance and faith/belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, based on God's grace, and not through any good works of our own (such as the Lord's Supper) – see chapter 4, "Forgiveness of Sins and Salvation".

In regards to John 6:48-58, several points can be made to show that it is not referring to the Lord's Supper:

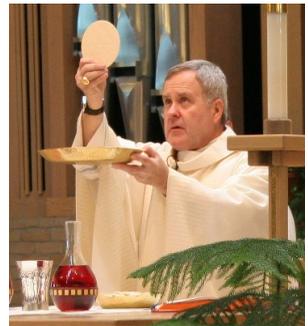
- (a) Jesus had just miraculously fed at least 5000 people with only 5 loaves and 2 fish the day before (John 6:1-14). The next day the crowds tracked Jesus down, not because they wanted spiritual blessings but because they wanted to get more food from him! Jesus told them not to be pre-occupied with getting food that spoils or rots away, but to get food that lasts forever (John 6:25-27). So Jesus moves the conversation from physical food (loaves and fish) to spiritual food. He then explains that the spiritual food is himself – "the bread of God" and "the bread of life" (v.32-35,48).
- (b) Jesus says that whoever believes in him (i.e. a Christian) will never go hungry or be thirsty (v.35). He is obviously talking about spiritual hunger and thirst, not physical hunger and thirst, since all Christians still get physically hungry and thirsty! Jesus is saying that when we believe in him, our spiritual hunger and thirst will be satisfied. He also talks about this satisfaction of spiritual hunger and thirst in other areas – Mat 5:6; John 4:7-15; 7:37-39.
- (c) Jesus makes it clear that to have eternal life you must believe in him (John 6:40,47). So when Jesus says in John 6:48-58 that we must "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood" to have eternal life, he is simply saying that when we believe in him it is like we are eating his body and drinking his blood. We are not physically eating and drinking him, we are spiritually doing it. What saves us is our belief in Jesus Christ – and Jesus calls this "eating his flesh" and "drinking his blood". So he is not referring to the bread and drink of the Lord's Supper at all, but to belief and faith in him.
- (d) Also, Jesus makes it clear in John 6:63 that he's talking *spiritually* and **not** about physically eating and drinking him (as in the Lord's Supper).
- (e) So we can see that:
  - Eating *physical* bread and drinking real water give us physical life. We are physically satisfied.
    - If we don't eat and drink we will physically die.

- Eating *spiritual* bread and drinking *spiritual* blood (i.e. believing in Jesus) give us spiritual life (eternal life). We are spiritually satisfied.
    - If we don't spiritually eat and drink Jesus (i.e. we don't believe in him) we will spiritually die (separated from God now and forever in hell).
- (f) So in John 6 Jesus is not talking about eating physical food (as in the Lord's Supper), but about eating spiritual food (believing in him). He is not referring to the Lord's Supper at all, but to having our spiritual hunger and thirst satisfied when we have faith in him. Eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood are **metaphors** for coming to Jesus and believing in him.



### **IS THE LORD'S SUPPER A REAL SACRIFICE?**

Since Jesus, at the Last Supper, said that the bread "is my body" and the drink "is my blood" (Mat 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25), the **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** believe that during the Lord's Supper the bread and drink change into Jesus Christ's real body and blood (this is called "transubstantiation"). The belief in transubstantiation means that Jesus Christ is sacrificed over and over again at every Lord's Supper! Also, since it is believed that the bread is Jesus' real body, followers are told to worship the bread!



### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

Transubstantiation is clearly false for the following reasons:

- (a) The bread and the drink in the Lord's Supper are not Jesus' real body and blood, but only **symbols** of his body and blood. Jesus commonly used physical objects as symbols to describe himself or what he did (e.g. John 8:12; 10:9; 15:1).
- (b) We also know that Jesus is talking symbolically because the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross was so complete and perfect that he only had to be sacrificed **once** for all sins (Rom 6:9-10; Heb 7:26-28; 9:25-28; 1 Pet 3:18). Jesus will never be sacrificed again! Therefore Jesus can't be sacrificed over and over again at every Lord's Supper! If he were, we would be taken back to the Law of Moses in Old Testament times when animals had to be sacrificed every day, because animal sacrifices couldn't forgive sins (Heb 10:1-4,11). Jesus' sacrifice **can** forgive sins so he only had to be sacrificed once. So the Lord's Supper cannot be a sacrifice. Since it is not a sacrifice then the bread and drink are not Jesus' real body and blood but only **symbols** of his body and blood.

Since transubstantiation is not true (i.e. the bread does not turn into Jesus' real body), there is therefore no need to worship it.

The Bible teaches that the Lord's Supper is a:

**1. Memorial Observance**

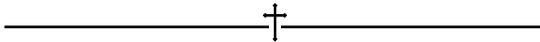
- We are to observe the Lord's Supper so that we don't forget what Jesus Christ did for us and will do for us (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26).
- By regularly observing this ceremony, we ensure that the message of Jesus Christ is passed on from one generation to the next until he comes again (1 Cor 11:23-26).

**2. Symbolic Observance**

- The bread and drink symbolise his body and blood and help us picture what he did for us on the cross. It is a symbol of his sacrifice for us.

**3. Symbol of Unity**

- The Lord's Supper reminds us that the church (the body of Christ) is one body (1 Cor 10:16-17).



**TAKING THE BREAD AND THE DRINK**

Finally, the **RCC** believes that it's acceptable to only take the bread during the Lord's Supper and not worry about the drink.

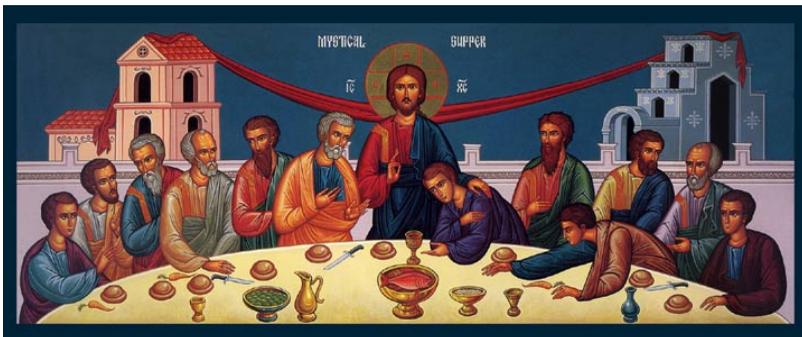
**THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

The RCC is clearly wrong on this issue. Jesus Christ commanded that we take **both** the bread and the drink (Mat 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-29).

† What things can you remember Jesus for as you take the Lord's Supper?

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## 8. THE BISHOP OF ROME

### WHO IS THE LEADER OF THE CHURCH?

The **RCC** teaches that Jesus Christ made the apostle Peter the supreme head of the Christian church, and that he was the first bishop of Rome. They believe that Peter's authority over all other bishops and the entire Christian church is passed down to each successive bishop of Rome, now called the "Pope" (they quote Mat 16:13-20). However, the **Orthodox Church** believes that the bishop of Rome is *equal* in authority with its own bishops (e.g. the bishop of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Moscow etc.).



### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

Several points can be made about Jesus Christ's discussion with Peter in Mat 16:13-20:

- (a) Since the definition of "Peter" is "stone" or "rock", the RCC believes that Jesus said he would build the church on Peter, giving Peter authority over the entire church. However, Jesus did not say to Peter that he would build his church "on Peter", but that he would build it on "this rock" (Mat 16:18). Jesus was referring to himself, not to Peter, since the Bible shows us that Jesus Christ is called the rock, cornerstone and foundation of the church (Acts 4:11; 1 Cor 3:10-11; 10:4; Eph 2:19-20; 1 Pet 2:4-8). The apostles and prophets laid that foundation (Jesus Christ) and built on it (1 Cor 3:10-11; Eph 2:19-20).
- (b) Some Christians believe that the "rock" that Jesus would build the church on was Peter's confession of faith, i.e. that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Mat 16:16). In some ways this is similar to (a) above.
- (c) Even if Jesus did mean that Peter was the rock (which he didn't), Jesus never told him to pass down his authority to any other person. So the RCC can't keep claiming that the Roman bishop continues to have supreme authority over the entire Christian church.
- (d) There is no Biblical or historical evidence that Peter ever claimed to be the leader of the Christian church. In fact Peter claimed to be a "fellow elder", never the chief elder (1 Pet 5:1-4). Peter also declared Jesus to be the stone/foundation of the church (Acts 4:8-11; 1 Pet 2:4-8).
- (e) There is no evidence that the apostles ever recognised Peter as "Pope". In fact the apostle Paul maintained his own independence and even publicly rebuked Peter at Antioch for sinning (Gal 2:11-14).
- (f) Keys allow access to places previously closed. So the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" that Jesus gave to Peter (Mat 16:19) was the ability to open the way into the kingdom of heaven through the preaching of the gospel. This can be seen in the fact that Peter was the first to preach the gospel to both the Jews and Gentiles and those who believed the message entered the kingdom of heaven (Acts 2; 10:1-11:18). The keys are not to be understood as giving Peter authority over the church.

(g) The authority to “bind and loose” in Matthew 16:19 was not just given to Peter, but to all Christians (Mat 18:15-18) and in at least one sense is related to church discipline. So this cannot be used to suggest that Peter had any special privileges over other Christians, since all Christians have been given this authority.

There is no Biblical teaching that a single bishop ruling in a city has authority over the churches in his country or region. In fact the Biblical teaching is that each local church is autonomous (self-governing) and is led by a mutually submissive group of male elders (also known as pastors, shepherds or overseers). Their main responsibilities are to govern, lead, shepherd, oversee all affairs of, and care for, the church. They are the church’s primary teachers and preachers (Acts 11:29-30; 14:23; 15:1-35; 16:4-5; 20:17-35; Eph 4:11-16; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17; Tit 1:5-9; Jam 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-5).

The Head, or Leader, over the church and its pastor-elders is Jesus Christ (Eph 1:20-23; 4:11-16; 5:23-24; Col 1:15-18), not an archbishop, pope, patriarch etc.



### **ARE BISHOPS INFALLIBLE?**

The **RCC** believes that the bishop of Rome (the Pope) is always infallible when making decisions on spiritual and moral issues, and that the rest of their bishops have the same gift of infallibility when making decisions at ecumenical councils. The **Orthodox Church** believes that its own bishops are not infallible, but when meeting together as an ecumenical council the decisions they make are infallible.

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

There is no Biblical teaching that a bishop is infallible when it comes to making decisions on matters of faith or morals. As humans we are all sinners (Rom 3:10-12,23; 5:12), and are therefore all capable of making mistakes – even bishops. If anything, church history has shown many times that bishops have made mistakes on theological issues. For example:

- (a) Pope Pius IX (bishop of Rome) proclaimed in 1854 that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was conceived without sin. This contradicts what the Bible teaches (see chapter 11, “Mary (Mother of Jesus)”).
- (b) At the 7th Ecumenical Council in 787 A.D. in Nicea, the bishops and other church leaders ruled that prayer to the angels, saints, Mary etc. through the use of their images was allowed and encouraged. This contradicts Biblical teaching about prayer (see chapter 10, “Prayer”). So even when the bishops are together in a council they still make errors.

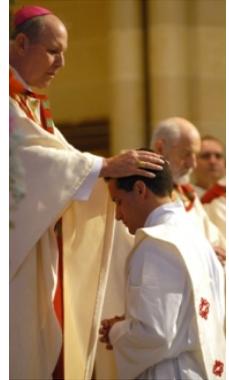
† What’s the danger in thinking that your bishop never makes mistakes on theological issues?

## 9. THE PRIESTHOOD

### PRIESTS OR PASTOR-ELDERS?

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that the leaders of each local church are *priests*, who represent us before God. These priests have some similar characteristics, or functions, to the Old Testament priests such as:

- (a) In the Old Testament, only a select few could become priests to represent the people of Israel before God. These new priests (also a select few) represent Catholics and Orthodox before God.
- (b) The Old Testament priests sacrificed animals on the altar for the sins of the people. These new priests sacrifice Jesus Christ during the sacrament of the Eucharist so that people's sins can be forgiven. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have altars in them where the unbloody sacrifice of the sacrament of the Eucharist takes place.



### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

The priesthood of the Old Testament is found in the law that God gave Moses for the people of Israel and can be found described throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (e.g. Exod 28; 29; 39; 40; Lev 1-9). As a result of Jesus Christ's coming, sacrificial death and resurrection he fulfilled the Law of Moses, so that God's people are no longer under the authority of the Law of Moses (Mat 5:17; 27:50-51; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 15:1-29; Rom 3:21-31; 6:14-15; 7:1-6; 8:1-4; 10:4; 1 Cor 9:20; 2 Cor 3:4-18; Gal 2:11-21; 3; 4:1-11,21-31; 5; 6:11-16; Eph 2:11-18; Col 2:11-17; Heb 7:11-28; 8; 9; 10:1-18; 12:24). So it was not God's intention that this Old Testament priesthood should last forever – it finished with the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, the RCC and the Orthodox Church should not make parallels between the Old Testament priesthood and leaders of the church today.

- (a) The Bible teaches that the leaders of the church today are no longer called priests but elders (also known as pastors, shepherds or overseers) – see chapter 8, “The Bishop of Rome”. This is an important difference, because a priest is a mediator between people and God through his prayers, the sacrifices he offers etc. (Lev 1-7; Heb 5:1), but a pastor-elder looks after the people like a shepherd looks after his flock of sheep. A priest and a pastor-elder are two different concepts. In fact the only priest we have representing us before God is Jesus Christ (Heb 2:17-3:2; 4:14-5:10; 6:19-20; 7; 8; 9; 10:19-22) – Jesus is our **only** mediator (1 Tim 2:5; 1 John 2:1). Jesus Christ's sacrifice has given each Christian the right to come to God personally, without the need to go through somebody else like a human priest (Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-23).

In fact, every Christian is now considered to be a priest (1 Pet 2:4-9; Rev 1:5-6; 5:9-10), whose body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), offering spiritual sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1; Phil 4:14-18; Heb 13:15-16; 1 Pet 2:4-5). Therefore all Christians are now priests, not just a select few as in Old Testament times. Wherever there is a Christian, there is a priest and a temple in which spiritual sacrifices can be offered to God. This is the true priesthood that Christ gave the church.

(b) We do not need altars in church buildings because the Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice – see chapter 7, “The Lord’s Supper”.



### **CHURCH LEADERS AND MARRIAGE**

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** place marital restrictions on their priests. In the RCC the majority of priests are not allowed to be married. In the Orthodox Church the majority of priests are allowed to be married.

### **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

God allows church leaders to marry (1 Cor 9:1-5; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9), and some of the apostles (including Peter) were married (Mat 8:14; Luke 4:38; 1 Cor 9:5). Since God allows church leaders to marry, and many of the apostles were married, the RCC and the Orthodox Church should not place so many marital restrictions on their priests, bishops and popes.



Another interesting point to consider is that the Old Testament priests were expected to marry and have children, since God only assigned the priesthood to Aaron and his sons (Exod 28:1; 30:30; Lev 21:1-15).

So God does allow church leaders to marry, but being single for the kingdom of God is a choice you are allowed to make (Mat 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:32-35).

† What’s wrong with thinking that the priest is the main link between you and God?

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# 10. PRAYER

## WHO SHOULD I PRAY TO?

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that we should pray **to** angels and dead believers such as “saints”, Mary etc. so that these angels and dead believers will then intercede to God on our behalf.



## **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

Firstly, all prayer in the Bible is directed to God (1 Kings 8:22-54; Jer 33:1-3; Mat 6:9-13; 7:7-11; John 15:16; Acts 1:24-25; Phil 4:6-7; Col 3:17). We are **never** commanded to pray to angels, dead people, anybody or anything else.

Secondly, there's no need to ask angels or dead believers to intercede for us since the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27), and Jesus Christ (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:23-25; 9:24) as our high priest in heaven (Heb 2:17-3:2; 4:14-5:10; 6:19-20; 7; 8; 9; 10:19-22) already intercede for us. Since God the Son and God the Holy Spirit intercede for us, why would we bother asking dead believers or angels to intercede for us?

Thirdly, we are told that Jesus Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and intercessory priesthood has made it possible for us to **directly** approach God in heaven (Eph 2:18; 3:11-12; Heb 4:14-16; 7:23-25; 10:19-22). There is therefore no need to pray to anybody else in the spiritual world since God has opened up the way for us to approach him personally, because of the work of Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, angels and dead people are not omnipresent (present everywhere), omnipotent (all-powerful), or omniscient (all-knowing) like God is, so how can they hear the prayers of millions of people at the same time? It is an impossible task for them.

Finally, contacting dead people was specifically prohibited by God in the Law of Moses (Lev 19:31; Deut 18:9-14; 1 Sam 28 cf. 1 Chr 10:13-14).



## SHOULD I PRAY FOR DEAD PEOPLE?

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that we should pray **for** dead people – but for different reasons:

- (a) The **RCC** teaches that we should pray for our departed loved ones who may be in purgatory so that they can be cleansed from their sin and freed from their punishment. This way they can leave purgatory as soon as possible to enter heaven.
- (b) The **Orthodox Church** teaches that we should pray for our departed loved ones (who are waiting for Judgement Day) so that God may have mercy on

them and forgive their sins. When Judgement Day arrives, these people will have a better chance of entering heaven.

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

We are only encouraged to pray for one another while here on Earth (Mat 5:44; Rom 15:30-32; 1 Tim 2:1-3), **never** for people who have died.

- (a) In the Roman Catholic case of praying for dead people in purgatory, the simple objection to this is that purgatory does not exist (see chapter 14, "Purgatory").
- (b) In the Orthodox case of praying for dead people to improve their chances on Judgement Day, the Bible makes it clear that once you die there's no second chance. You will be judged for what you believed or did while on Earth. It's too late to try and change things after you've died (Mat 12:33-37; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 9:27; Rev 20:11-15).

† What's the danger in praying to angels or dead people instead of to God?

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# 11. MARY (MOTHER OF JESUS)

## WAS MARY SINLESS?

The **RCC** teaches that Mary was conceived and born without original sin (this is called the “Immaculate Conception”), and she therefore never sinned. The **Orthodox Church** also teaches that Mary never sinned but for reasons that differ from the RCC.

## **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

Even though Mary was favoured and blessed by God (Luke 1:26-30,39-42), she was still a sinner because she was a human being – the Bible says that all humans are sinners (Rom 3:10-12,23; 5:12; 1 John 1:8-10). Mary herself even admitted she needed a saviour (Luke 1:46-47). Also, the Law of Moses commanded a woman to offer a burnt and sin offering after giving birth to a child, to make herself clean (Lev 12). This is exactly what Mary did (Luke 2:22-24), and so she identified herself as a sinner.



## DID MARY ALWAYS REMAIN A VIRGIN?

The **RCC** and the **Orthodox Church** teach that Mary never had sex – they claim she was a virgin for her entire life.

## **THE BIBLICAL TEACHING**

When Mary became pregnant with Jesus, it was not by a man but by a miraculous act of God (Isa 7:14; Mat 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). When pregnant with Jesus, Mary was a virgin and was only engaged to Joseph. Joseph considered breaking the engagement, thinking that Mary had sinned, but he was told in a dream that Mary’s pregnancy was from God and that he should remain committed to marrying her. So Joseph remained committed to Mary and consummated the marriage after Jesus was born (Mat 1:18-25). Joseph was recognised as Jesus’ father and continued to be with Mary and Jesus (Mat 13:53-55; Luke 2:41-51; 4:22; John 6:42). Also, Joseph and Mary had other children (Mat 13:53-56; Mark 3:31-32; 6:3; Luke 8:19-20; John 2:12; Gal 1:19). All of this shows that after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had a normal sexual relationship within marriage.



## MARY’S BODY

The **RCC** teaches that Mary did not experience physical death but that her whole being was taken up to heaven and she was given a glorified body. The **Orthodox Church** teaches that Mary did experience physical death but her body

was taken up to heaven and she received a glorified body in heaven. Both churches call this event the “Assumption”.

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

We are never told in the Bible that Mary’s body was taken up to heaven. We can only assume that because she was a sinner she physically died like all other humans (Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12). Even if God did decide that she wouldn’t experience physical death on Earth (as in the case of Elijah – 2 Kings 2:9-13), her body would still have been separated from her soul and spirit, since all humans must experience physical death one way or another before entering heaven (Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:50). This is what would have happened to Elijah.

After physical death our bodies decay. The spirits and souls of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into his presence, but the spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain conscious of condemnation and in misery (2 Kings 2:11-12; Mat 22:32; Luke 16:19-31; 23:39-43; Acts 7:54-60; 2 Cor 5:6-9; Phil 1:19-24; Jam 5:19-20; 1 Pet 1:8-9). At the end of the age (beginning with the second coming of Jesus Christ) we will all be reunited with new bodies, and this is called the resurrection (Mat 10:26-28; John 5:22-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:20-23,35-57; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thes 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2). Therefore Mary could not have a new, glorified body in heaven now, since the resurrection will only occur in the future when Jesus returns.

† Is it really necessary that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life?

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## 12. THE NATURE OF JESUS CHRIST

The **RCC** and the **EOC** believe that Jesus Christ is 1 person who has 2 natures (the nature of God and the nature of man) and therefore 2 wills (the will of God and the will of man).

The **OOC** believes that Jesus Christ is 1 person whose 2 natures (the nature of God and the nature of man) came together to form 1 new nature (this belief is called “monophysitism”). Their belief in monophysitism is what caused the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch to break away from the other patriarchs at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. Since they believe Jesus Christ only has 1 nature, they therefore believe he only has 1 will (this belief is called “monothelitism”). The OOC still believes that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man but within a single composite nature.

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

Jesus Christ is God (Isa 9:6; Mat 1:22-23; John 1:1-14; 8:48-59; 20:27-29; Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:8-9; Heb 1:1-8; Rev 1:8 cf. 22:12-16) who came to Earth in the form of a man (John 1:1-18; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 2:5-18; 10:5-7). God the Son (Jesus Christ) united himself not with a human person but with a human nature. We call this event the “incarnation”.

Jesus Christ was therefore 1 person who had 2 perfect natures – the nature of God and the nature of man. He was not partly God or partly man, he was fully God and fully man (but without the sin of man – Heb 4:14-15; 1 Pet 2:21-22). He therefore had 2 natures. Since Jesus Christ had 2 natures he also had 2 wills – a divine will and a human will.

Since Jesus Christ was **fully God** (in nature and will), he could offer the only acceptable sacrifice that was of infinite value to pay for the sin of humanity (*Heb 7:26-28; 9:11-28; 1 Pet 2:22-24*).

Since Jesus Christ was **fully man** (in nature and will) he:

- Became the sacrifice for the sin of humanity (Rom 5:12-21; 8:3-4; Heb 2:14-17).
- Experienced trials and temptations and is therefore able to relate to us and help us (Heb 2:18; 4:14-16).
- Had a human body with which he was able to show that he had power over physical death by raising it from the dead – showing us that our bodies will be raised in the future (John 2:18-22; 1 Cor 15:1-23,42-49; 1 Pet 1:3-4).

***Jesus Christ had to be truly God and truly man  
to be able to earn our salvation.***

The Bible shows us examples of Jesus Christ’s human nature (Mat 8:23-24; 21:18; 27:32-61), human will (Mat 26:36-42; Luke 2:51-52), divine nature (Mat

8:23-27; 12:8; Mark 2:1-12; John 2:18-22; 8:58) and divine will (Luke 10:22; John 5:21). Jesus Christ always submitted himself to God the Father's will (John 5:30-36; 6:38-40). So we can see that both natures and both wills existed together in the one person of Jesus Christ.

The problem with the single composite nature (as taught by the OOC) can be shown with the following example: with only 1 nature, God himself would have been crucified. But God cannot die! On the other hand, if Jesus Christ had 2 natures, then we would say his human nature died, not his divine nature. Therefore, belief in 2 natures existing together is important. The single composite nature taught by the OOC confuses the identity and experiences of Jesus Christ.

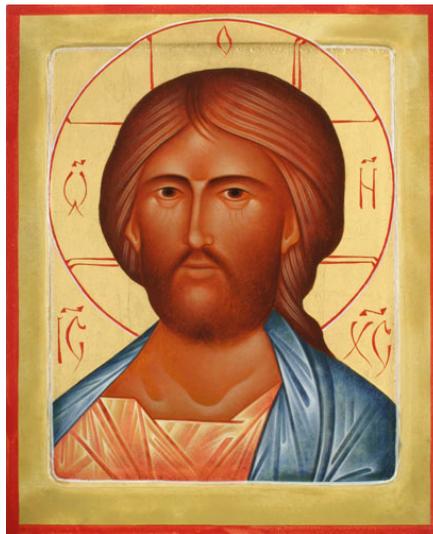
Therefore, the Biblical teaching agrees with the RCC and the EOC.

† What are some other examples of Jesus' divine nature and will, and human nature and will?

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# 13. THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The **RCC** teaches that the Holy Spirit is sent by, and proceeds from, both the Father and the Son into the world to do their will. The **Orthodox Church** teaches that the Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son into the world, but only proceeds from the Father.

Throughout much of the Christian church's history, this has been a major point of disagreement between the RCC and the Orthodox Church, and they are still divided over this issue today.

## THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

Even though the Bible only mentions the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father (John 15:26), it could be argued that since both the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7) then the Holy Spirit must proceed from both.

Another point to consider is that the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of Christ" (Acts 16:6-7; Rom 8:9-11; Phil 1:19). Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, this can also imply that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son.

Even though this doctrine is a major point of disagreement between the RCC and the Orthodox Church, it is of little practical value to the Christian.

† Does it really matter if you believe the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father only or from both the Father and the Son?

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# 14. PURGATORY

The **RCC** teaches that purgatory is a place for people who die in “God’s grace and friendship” but still have punishment to pay for their sins or have unforgiven *venial* sins at death. (The RCC teaches that *venial* sins are less serious sins that if unforgiven don’t condemn you to hell, while *mortal* sins are more serious sins that if unforgiven will condemn you to hell.) Purgatory is a place of purification and cleansing – to “purge”. People in purgatory need to be cleansed of any venial sin or any punishment owed for their sin which is present at death. Once they have been cleansed, then they will enter heaven. Their time in purgatory could last minutes or thousands of years!



By performing good works (e.g. prayer, taking the Eucharist, works of penance, works of charity, paying money etc.) Catholics can decrease the time they or the deceased spend in purgatory. These good works apparently help remove the sins, and the punishment of sins, of those in purgatory. As a result of this, the existence of purgatory has made the RCC very wealthy. Since it is not always known when a person gets out of purgatory, the dead person’s living relative(s) will continue to pay money to the church!

Gregory I (bishop of Rome from 590-604 A.D.) is believed to be chiefly responsible for the doctrine of purgatory. It was formally accepted and developed further at the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1563).

The **Orthodox Church** does not believe in the existence of purgatory.

## THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

The most popular text used by the RCC to support the teaching of purgatory comes from 2 Maccabees 12:44-45. However, as mentioned in chapter 3, “The Bible”, 2 Maccabees is an apocryphal book which should not be considered part of the Bible. 2 Maccabees is not inspired by God.

According to the Bible, when believers die they pass immediately into the presence of Jesus, but non-believers remain conscious of condemnation and in misery (2 Kings 2:11-12; Mat 22:32; Luke 16:19-31; 23:39-43; Acts 7:54-60; 2 Cor 5:6-9; Phil 1:19-24). There is no mention or suggestion of purgatory.

At the end of the age there will be a resurrection of all people. All people shall be reunited with their bodies and appear before the throne of God for judgement. Those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be condemned to eternal conscious punishment in hell separated from the presence of God, but believers will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven with God (Dan 12:1-2; Mat 10:26-33;

25:31-46; Mark 9:42-48; John 5:22-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:35-57; 2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thes 4:13-18; 5:23; 2 Thes 1:5-10; Heb 9:27-28; 1 John 3:2; Jude 6-7,14-15; Rev 20:11-15; 21).

There are 2 destinations mentioned in the Bible for all people after death – the presence of Jesus while awaiting heaven, or in misery awaiting hell. Purgatory is never mentioned or implied.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of purgatory once again shows the RCC’s belief in the necessity of good works for salvation. By performing various good works (prayer, penance, payment of money etc.) you can decrease the time you or others spend in purgatory. However, good works cannot forgive your sins or save you – see chapter 4, “Forgiveness of Sins and Salvation”.

The doctrine of purgatory also suggests that Jesus Christ’s sacrifice was not enough to forgive our sins, pay for the punishment of our sins or to purify us. However Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient to do all these things. His sacrifice forgave our sins (2 Cor 5:19; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18), paid the penalty for our sins (Mat 20:28; Rom 3:24-25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:9-10) and purified us (Tit 2:11-14). We receive all these benefits when we have faith in Jesus. Also, when we believe in Jesus Christ we are:

- **Justified** – declared to be just or righteous by God (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-28; 4:5; 8:30-34; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 2:15-21; 3:6-14,24; Phil 3:8-9).
- **Holy** (sanctified) – set apart for God (1 Cor 1:2,30; 3:17; 6:11; Col 1:21-22; 2 Thes 2:13; Heb 3:1; 10:10; 13:12).
- **Regenerated** - made into a new person (Rom 6:3-11; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:9-10; Tit 3:5).

There is therefore no need for us to undergo purification by fire after death – those who have faith in Jesus Christ are already forgiven, just, righteous, holy, regenerated etc. Also, the Bible makes it clear that because of the work of Jesus Christ we will be presented before God as holy, blameless and without sin (1 Cor 1:4-8; Col 1:21-22; Jude 1:24). So purification in a place like purgatory is not necessary.

† If purgatory were true, what negative impact could it have on us today?

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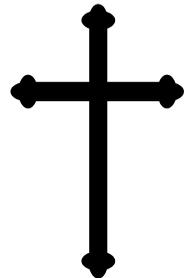
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# 15. AREAS OF AGREEMENT

So far we have seen a large area of *disagreement* between the **RCC**, the **Orthodox Church** and Biblical teaching. Some of these points of disagreement are crucial and are matters of spiritual life and death (e.g. forgiveness of sins and salvation), but some points of disagreement are not so crucial to our salvation (e.g. the procession of the Holy Spirit).

Below is a short list of some of the important points of *agreement* between the **RCC**, the **Orthodox Church** and Biblical teaching:

1. The Old and New Testaments are the Word of God (Exod 34:27-28; Hab 2:2; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21; Rev 1:1-3).
2. God's existence as the Trinity: God is one (Deut 6:4; Isa 43:10; Mark 12:29) who eternally exists in 3 persons:
  - God the Father (Isa 63:16; 64:8; John 6:27; 2 Pet 1:17).
  - God the Son (Isa 9:6; John 1:1-14; 8:48-59; 20:27-29; Phil 2:5-11).
  - God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-4; 2 Cor 3:17-18).
3. God is the creator and sustainer of creation (Gen 1; 2; John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-17).
4. The existence of spiritual beings such as angels (Heb 1:13-14; Rev 5:11) and demons (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 11:14-18).
5. The importance of spiritual disciplines such as prayer (Mat 6:5-13; Phil 4:6-7), Bible reading (Psa 119; 2 Tim 3:16-17), fellowship (Acts 2:41-47; Heb 10:24-25), fasting (Mat 6:16-18; 9:14-15) etc.
6. Humans are sinners who need God's grace for salvation (Rom 3:21-26; Eph 2:8-9).
7. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Mat 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38).
8. Jesus Christ performed miracles (Mat 9:18-34), died on the cross for our sins (Isa 53:4-12; 1 Pet 2:24), rose bodily from the dead (Mat 28:1-9; Luke 24:36-44) and is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Mat 26:64; Acts 2:33-35; Rom 8:34).
9. Jesus Christ will return at the end of the age to judge the living and the dead (Mat 16:27-28; 24; 25; 2 Thes 1:5-12).



## 16. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you are Catholic or Orthodox there is one vital issue you need to think through: ***your personal salvation***. As we have seen, the important message of salvation as taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles is by *repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, by God's grace, and not by any good works of our own*. This is the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ.

*... Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying,  
"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent and believe in the gospel."*

**Mark 1:14-15**

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

**John 3:16**

*For by grace you have been saved through faith.  
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,  
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church teach that salvation depends on a life-time of good works (mainly the sacraments), with no guarantee that you will definitely be with the Lord when you die. This is not the good news of Jesus Christ. Depending on good works such as the sacraments will not save you. Only by repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, making him your personal Lord and Saviour, will you be forgiven and saved. If this is your desire, then confirm it in prayer to God. Below is an example:

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*I admit that I have put my faith in good works and not in you. I have been trying to earn salvation by obeying the good works of my church. But now I see that good works will never forgive my sins or save me. Only by repenting and having faith in who Jesus is and in what he did for me will I be forgiven and receive eternal life.*

*I admit that I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to forgive my sin, and that he died in my place to pay the penalty for my sin. I turn away from my sin and ask you to forgive me of the sins I have committed. I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour and will follow Jesus faithfully.*

*In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your decision to repent and have faith in Jesus Christ means that you now receive God's Holy Spirit who will help you live the new Christian life. You have now crossed over from death to life and are a child of God. God also promises that you are guaranteed of spending eternity with him in heaven.

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*

**Ephesians 1:13**

*Truly, truly, I say to you,  
whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.  
He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

**John 5:24**

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God,  
who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man,  
but of God.*

**John 1:12-13**

*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life,  
and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life;  
whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.  
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God  
that you may know that you have eternal life.*

**1 John 5:11-13**

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?**

Now that your sins are forgiven and your relationship with God restored, you need to continue to show your love for God by obeying his commands (John 14:15,21-24; 1 John 5:3). Below are a few important things that God wants you to do:

- **Church** – be part of a church that teaches the good news of Jesus Christ. At church you'll be encouraged, discipled, make friends and work together with other Christians to build God's kingdom (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:11-16; Heb 10:24-25).
- **Bible reading** – read the Bible daily (Psa 119:9-16; 2 Tim 3:16-17).
- **Prayer** – speak with God daily (Mat 6:7-15; Phil 4:6-7; 1 Thes 5:17).
- **Tell others** – tell someone about the wonderful thing God has done for you. Share the good news with others (Mat 28:18-20; Mark 5:19-20).
- **Baptism** – be baptised in water. Baptism is a public declaration of your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Mat 28:18-20; John 3:22; Acts 8:35-38; 10:43-48).

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit  
and so prove to be my disciples.*

**John 15:8**

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