

Denominationalism, Religious Cults and World Religions

Lesson 3

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church

Introduction:

The basic structure of the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches was clearly established as early as 606 AD. Little has changed since that time. Rome became head of the Latin/Western Church and Constantinople became head of the Greek/Eastern Church. However, the way they governed was quite different. Since Rome was the seat of the only Western Patriarch, the Bishop of Rome assumed total control of Western Church. Constantinople, however, continued to govern the Eastern Church in the tradition of the period of the Five Patriarchs (451-588 AD). While the Bishop of Rome proclaimed himself sole monarch with absolute power throughout the Western Church, Constantinople continued to call itself "the first among equals" and does so to the present time.

However, relations between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches had been tense for centuries. Finally, in 1054 the "Great Schism" occurred between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches which solidified these churches into two separate entities, both claiming to be the true church. Prominent among the issues that divided these churches were issues concerning the nature of Jesus Christ (whether He was fully God and fully man at the same time while on earth), whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in the "Eucharist" (the Lord's supper), and the Pope's claim to universal jurisdiction over the church.

Since that time there have been only two dominant players who rule over what they claim is the one true church – Rome in the West and Constantinople (Istanbul) in the East – and it remains so to the present day. However, while the organizational structure of these churches are similar, there are marked differences in doctrinal beliefs and practices.

I. **Fundamental differences between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Catholicism.**

A. For centuries the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches have accused the other of false doctrines which both claim are based on traditions:

1. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches differ on the

accepted canon of the Old Testament.

- a. The Eastern Orthodox Church accepts 51 books in the canon of the Old Testament while the Roman Catholic Church accepts 46. Following the Protestant Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, the Protestant Old Testament contains only 39 books.
 - b. As for the canon of the New Testament, the Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church and almost all Eastern Orthodox Churches accept the current 27 books.
2. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox disagree on the dates of Christmas and Easter based on their acceptance of different calendars (Julian verses Gregorian).
- a. December 25th was first celebrated as the birth date of Jesus Christ in the latter part of the fourth century AD because of its "cosmic symbolism" as being near the pagan celebration of the winter solstice.
 - b. Roman Catholics who use the Gregorian calendar (Pope Gregory XIII c. 1582) still celebrate Christmas on that day. The Eastern Orthodox Church which uses the older Julian calendar (Julius Caesar c. 45 AD) claims December 25th actually corresponds to January 7th. The use of two different calendars also accounts for the occasional differences when each church celebrates Easter (however, occasionally those dates match).
 - c. There is no Biblical record of first century Christians observing, or being told through apostolic teaching to observe, the birth date of Jesus Christ.
 - d. While Christians honor the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the Bible teaches this is done in the weekly observance of the Lord's supper (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Acts 20:7).
3. The Roman Catholics teach purgatory, while the Eastern Orthodox

Church rejects it.

- a. Purgatory (meaning "cleansing" or "purifying") is said to be the temporary place where those who were not permitted to go to Heaven at death are sent to be purged (cleansed) of their sins. Once purged of sins, they are eventually able to enter heaven.
 - b. The Bible teaches ones eternal destiny is not only sealed at death, it also teaches there is no hope of changing or improving ones eternal state after death (Heb 9:27; Luke 16:19-31).
4. Although the Eastern Orthodox Church rejected the Roman Catholic belief of Papal infallibility, the decisions of the Orthodox synods are considered infallible.
- a. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:15-18; Matt 28:18).
 - b. Furthermore Peter, who is claimed by both Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholics to have been the first Pope, was not infallible (Matt 26:31-35; 69-75; Gal 2:11-14).
5. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is utterly rejected by the Eastern Orthodox.
- a. Immaculate Conception is the belief that the "Blessed Virgin Mary," as she is called, was kept "free of original sin from her moment of conception" – meaning she was born without "original sin."
 - b. The Roman Catholic dogma of "original sin" is based on the assumption that all mankind have inherited the sin of Adam.
 - c. This is why Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches believe in the necessity of infant baptism despite the fact that the Bible says otherwise (Matt 18:1-5; Eccl 7:29; Ezek 28:15; 18:20).
6. The Eastern Orthodox baptizes by full immersion only (three times – once in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), while the Roman Catholic Church practices sprinkling, but in some places

will immerse on request.

- a. Baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit does not imply immersing a person three separate times but simply immersing them once by the combined authority of the Godhead.
 - b. The mode of Bible baptism was always immersion (or a burial) in water (Mark 1:9-11; John 3:23; Rom 6:1-4; Col 2:12) and of those older enough to be personally responsible for their own actions and conduct (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-39; 8:12).
7. In the Eastern Orthodox Church married men may become priests. In the Roman Catholic Church priests are forbidden to marry.
- a. The Bible makes no distinction between the "clergy" and the "laity" but calls all Christians priests (1 Pet 2:5-9; Rev 1:5-6).
 - b. The apostle Peter was married (Matt 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38; 1 Cor 9:5), and so was the evangelist Philip (Acts 21:8-9).
 - c. The apostle Paul called the doctrine of "forbidding to marry" as "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1-3).
8. The Roman Catholic Church introduced instrumental music no earlier than the 7th century. However, the Eastern Orthodox Church has never used instrumental music and continues to use "a cappella" music in worship to this day.
- a. The New Testament church of the first century also used "a cappella" music in worship – "singing and making melody in the heart" (Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16-17).
9. In Roman Catholic communion, the cup is withheld from the members, while the Eastern Orthodox float bread cubes in the wine.
- a. The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, made it clear that every Christian was to "eat this bread" (unleavened bread) and "drink this cup" (fruit of the vine) (1 Cor 11:23-29).
10. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Catholic churches both

accept the belief that the bread and wine become the literal body of Christ (the doctrine of "Transubstantiation").

- a. The difference between the two is over when this change occurs. For Roman Catholics, they maintain the change occurs when the priest says, "this is my body."
 - b. For Eastern Orthodox Catholics the change occurs when the priest offers the prayer of thanks.
 - c. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of transubstantiation. Jesus employed the figure of speech known as metonymy when He said of the bread "this is my body" and of the fruit of the vine "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor 11:23-26).
 - d. This figure of speech simply means the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are representative of, or are symbols of, His body and blood.
11. Roman Catholics use unleavened bread, while Eastern Orthodox use leavened bread.
- a. When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper it was during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7).
 - b. Therefore the "bread" Jesus would have used when instituting the Lord's supper would have been unleavened bread.
12. Eastern Orthodox must keep a ridged schedule of fasts in order to have communion every week, but the most common practice is observing communion a minimum of four times a year during the four Orthodox fasts – "The Nativity Fast" (Christmas); "Great Lent" (Easter); "The Apostle's Feast" [Peter and Paul] (Early Summer); "Dormition Fast" [The Virgin Mary] (August). Roman Catholics, on the other hand, must not eat the hour before, to have communion (Mass) every day. In the end, Orthodox offer communion weekly and Catholics daily.
- a. But in actual practice most Orthodox laity have communion four

- times year and while Roman Catholics receive communion during weekly mass.
- b. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Catholics differ on the frequency of communion, the fasting requirements and the actual method of partaking.
 - c. New Testament Christians of the first century observed the Lord's supper on the first day of the week – implying the first day of every week (Acts 20:7).
13. Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics venerate icons and images or symbols of a religious nature. Although they deny this is idolatry and claim they attach no divine powers to the icon or image, those icons and images are still worshipped – which is idolatry. The Bible condemns such practices (Exod 20:4-5; Lev 26:1; Josh 23:7; 2 Chron 33:6-7, 15; Isa 44:17; 45:20; Ezek 14:3; Hosea 13:2; 1 Cor 12:2; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 John 5:21).

II. Roman Catholicism today and the errors they teach.

- A. Catholics believe they are the one and only true apostolic church.
 - 1. Pope Boniface VIII, in the bull "Unam Sanctum" issued in 1302, stated that outside the Catholic Church, "there is neither salvation nor remission of sins." He further said: ". . .it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff." (*Eternal Kingdom*, p. 196.)
- B. The government of the Roman Catholic Church is an absolute hierarchy (a ruling body of clergy organized into orders or ranks each subordinate to the one above it).
 - 1. The Pope (the Bishop of Rome).
 - a. The Pope stands at the top of the hierarchy as the "Vicar of Christ " (the sole representative of Christ on earth), and the "visible" Head of the Church.
 - b. His authority is supreme in all matters of faith.

2. The College of Cardinals (founded in 1059 AD).
 - a. The College of Cardinals elect the Pope and serve as his advisors. They hold authority over the Church between the death of a Pope and the election of his successor.
 - b. Most Cardinals reside in Rome.
 - c. The Pope, along with the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (the administrative arm of the Church) governs Catholics world-wide.
 3. Archbishops, Bishops and Priests.
 - a. Archbishops are the spiritual ruler of an archdiocese made up of several dioceses.
 - b. Bishops rule over dioceses in their territorial jurisdiction.
 - c. Parish Priests presides over the parishes (an ecclesiastical unit of area committed to one pastor).
 - d. All members of the hierarchy are ordained priests.
 4. In addition to the regular ranks of the Roman Catholic clergy, there are other priests, monks, deacons, subdeacons, and a whole host of "Orders of Congregations."
 - a. There are two types of orders: monastic orders and the religious congregations of priests, and various brotherhoods and sisterhoods, such as Jesuits, Franciscans, etc.
 5. The only organizational structure of the Lord's church found in the New Testament is bishops (elders), deacons and saints (Phil 1:1), who look to Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the church (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:15-18; Matt 28:18).
 - a. There is no mention in the Bible about Popes, Cardinals, a College of Cardinals, or Archbishops – these positions are the inventions of men.
- C. Catholics teach tradition and the decrees of Popes and church councils are equal in authority with the Bible.
1. Roman Catholic faith and doctrine is founded on "that deposit of faith

given to it by Christ and through the apostles, sustained by the Bible and by tradition." (*A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, p. 44).

- a. "Not all truths revealed for us by God are found in the Bible; some are found only in Divine Tradition. By Divine Tradition is meant the revealed truths taught by Christ and His apostles, which were given to the Church only by word of mouth and not through the Bible, though they were put in writing, principally by the Fathers of the Church. Divine Tradition must be believed as firmly as the Bible because it also contains the word of God." (Ibid.)
2. "Like two sacred rivers flowing from paradise, the Bible and Divine Tradition contain the Word of God. . . of the two, tradition is to us more clear and safe." (*Catholic Belief*, by J. Faa Di Bruno, p. 33)
3. However, the Bible claims it alone gives us all we need to be saved (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3; Jude 3).
 - a. We must not add to, take from, or go beyond the Bible (Deut 4:2; Prov 30:6; 2 John 9-11; Rev 22:18-19; Gal 1:6-9).
 - b. Following the doctrines, commandments, and traditions of men makes void the Word of God (Matt 15:3-14; Mark 7:1-13).
 - c. One can read and understand the Bible for himself (John 5:39; 8:32; Acts 17:11; Eph 3:1-5).
- D. Catholics believe the church was founded upon Peter, "the rock" (Matt 16:13-19).
 1. Jesus used two words in Matthew 16:18 which are sometimes defined as "rock."
 - a. *Petros*, meaning a small stone, which is transliterated as "Peter."
 - b. *Petra*, meaning a ledge or mass of rock (bedrock) upon which the church is built.
 2. The "rock" in Matthew 16:18 upon which the church is built is not Peter, but rather the truth that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16; cf. Acts 4:10-12; 1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:19-22;

1 Pet 2:4-8).

- a. Jesus Christ is the rock upon which the church is built, not Peter (1 Cor 3:11).

E. Catholics teach the doctrine of "Papal Infallibility."

1. This doctrine claims the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) is infallible when speaking "Ex Cathedra" (Latin: "from the chair" or "from the seat").
 - a. It is believed that the Pope has the power to infallibly define any matter of faith and morals for the entire church because he "occupies the chair of Peter."
 - b. When the Pope speaks *Ex Cathedra* his message is as binding as the word of God since he is viewed as the "Vicar of Christ".
2. As stated earlier, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:15-18; Matt 28:18).
 - a. The Bible does not authorize anyone to claim the right of being the "Vicar of Christ" (the representative of Christ on earth). Such would be blasphemy.
 - b. Furthermore, since the Bible claims it is the sole source of authority for Christians (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3; Jude 3), no one has the right to add to, take away from, or go beyond the Bible (Deut 4:2; Prov 30:6; 2 John 9-11; Rev 22:18-19; Gal 1:6-9).

F. Catholics teach Peter was the first Pope and had the power to forgive or retain sins as have all succeeding Popes.

1. While it is true that Peter and the other apostles were promised the "keys of the kingdom" (Matt 16:19), they used these keys to open the kingdom to Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2) and to Gentiles at the conversion of the house of Cornelius (Acts 10).
2. The power to bind and loose was given to the other apostles as well as to Peter (Matt 18:18).
3. There are several reasons why Peter could not have been a Pope.
 - a. He was "a fellow elder" not "the elder" (1 Pet 5:1).
 - b. He was a sinful, fallible man (Matt 26:31-35; 69-75; Gal 2:11-14).

- c. He refused homage or worship (Acts 10:25-26).
- d. He was a married man (Matt 8:14-15; 1 Cor 9:5).
- 4. Christ is the head of the church (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:15-18).
- 5. Furthermore, there is no historical proof that Peter was ever in Rome.
 - a. If Peter had been in Rome, it seems strange that Paul would not have mentioned him when writing to the Romans (Rom 16).
 - b. Even if the tradition of Peter's being in Rome were true, it still does not prove Peter was a Pope.
- G. Catholics practice the adoration and worship of Mary.
 - 1. They claim she is the "mother of God and the spouse of the Holy Spirit." The Scriptures do not call her by such names.
 - a. If Mary's husband was the Holy Spirit, then she had two husbands – a bigamist (Matt 1:19-24).
 - b. Catholics believe that Mary is a mediator between God and man. However, the Bible says Jesus the only Mediator (1 Tim 2:5).
 - c. Catholics teach Mary was born without original sin (the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception). However, the Bible makes no mention of such a doctrine, but rather teaches that all sin (Rom 3:23; 1 John 3:4; Ezek 18:20).
 - d. Catholics teach that Mary ascended bodily into heaven without dying (the doctrine of the Bodily Assumption). And yet the Bible makes no such claim, and teaches just the opposite (cf. Heb 9:27; 1 Cor 15:50).
 - e. Catholics believe Mary has been elevated about all, and yet Jesus did not elevate Mary above others (John 2:3-5; Luke 11:27-28).
 - f. Catholics teach that Mary was perpetually a virgin, but the Bible teaches she had other children (Matt 1:25; 13:55-56; John 7:1-5; Gal 1:18-19; Jude 1).
- H. Catholics practice of the worship of departed saints.

1. Catholics believe "saints" can hear their prayers and aid them.
 2. However, the Bible teaches no such thing, and such is contrary to the teaching that Christ is our high priest, advocate, and mediator and His blood alone can cleanse our sins (Heb 4:14-16; 1 Tim 2:5; 1 John 1:5-2:2).
- I. Catholics teach an unbiblical plan of salvation.
1. They believe in original sin despite the fact that the Bible teaches just the opposite (Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:20; 1 John 3:4; Jas 4:17).
 2. They "baptize" infants despite the fact that the Bible does not authorize the practice – all who were baptized were competent, responsible persons (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Matt 10:32; Rom 10:17; Acts 8:12).
 3. They commonly sprinkle for baptism despite the fact that Bible baptism was always an immersion (burial) in water (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12; Acts 8:36-39).
- J. Catholics teach there are seven "sacraments." They define a sacrament as "a visible sign instituted by Christ by which grace is conveyed to our souls.
1. Baptism: However the Catholic view of baptism is based on their erroneous idea of "original sin" and their practice of substituting sprinkling for immersion (or burial) as the mode of baptism.
 2. Penance: Catholics teach, "The Church has the power to forgive all sins" and that "sins are forgiven by absolution which can only be given by an authorized priest."
 - a. The Bible, however, says God is the One who forgives sins – not the church (Luke 23:34; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9). In the New Testament, we never find a Christian confessing sins to a priest (Jas 5:16-17).
 3. Confirmation: This sacrament often is performed with oil directly after one's baptism as a confirming sign of membership into the Catholic community.

- a. However, the Bible teaches that if a person obeys the Gospel, then God confirms (adds) them to the church (Acts 2:47).
4. The Eucharist: The sacrament declares that during the partaking of the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Jesus are actually present (the doctrine of "Transubstantiation").
 - a. The Council of Trent (1564) declared, "By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."
 - b. The Bible teaches the Lord's Supper is a memorial of Jesus' death. The context of the institution of the Lord's Supper teaches the elements are figures of the body and blood. (Matt 26:28-29; 1 Cor 11:23-29).
5. Ordination: This is the sacrament by which men become a part of the priesthood of the Catholic religion.
 - a. Catholic author McSorley says, "The hierarchal organization of the Church is in three grades—the episcopate, the priesthood, and the diaconate—although of divine origin, is not clearly described in the New Testament. Nor does the Gospel say that our Lord indicated the precise way in which He intended His Church to be governed and administered."
 - b. The Bible does not make this distinction – all Christians have been called by the Gospel. (2 Thess 2:13-15). In the New Testament there is no clergy-laity system. Furthermore, every Christian is part of the priesthood. (Rev 1:6; 1 Pet 2:9).
 - c. The so-called "episcopate" comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, meaning "overseer or bishop." However, the Bible uses this word as one of three synonymous terms to describe elders (*episkopos*-bishop, *presbuteros*-elder, and *poimaine*-

- shepherd). (Acts 20:28-32; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-3).
- d. The so-called "diaconate" comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning "deacon or servant." There is a clear distinction made in the New Testament between the qualifications and duties of elders and deacons. (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13).
6. Marriage: While marriage is a God-ordained union, the Bible says nothing about marriage being "sacramental" in nature.
- a. Concerning this sacrament the Catholic Church says, "The sacrament of matrimony consist of the marriage contract, so that for Christians the contract and the sacrament are inseparable. Therefore marriage comes into the legal competence of the Church. The Church may establish impediments, including diriment impediments which invalidate a marriage and forbidding impediments which make marriage illegal. She may determine the form and rite to be observed. Matrimonial causes fall to ecclesiastical courts."
 - b. While Catholics should be commended for their view of the sanctity of marriage, the church has no authority to determine who can and cannot marry.
 - c. God gave the principles of marriage (Gen 2), and Jesus further illustrates these principles (Matt 19:1-10). The church must simply follow what the Bible teaches, not make laws or impediments to annul marriages.
7. Extreme Unction: This sacrament is also known as the "last rites," and is performed by the anointing of oil upon sickness or death to help ensure eternal life. The proof text that Catholics use for this teaching is Jas 5:14-15.
- a. Concerning this rite, Catholics teach, "Extreme Unction is a sacrament in which the sick, by the anointing with holy oil and the prayers of the Priests, receive spiritual succor and even corporal strength when such is conducive to salvation. This unction is

called 'extreme' because it is usually the last of the holy unction administered by the Church."

- b. There are several things that Catholics overlook in Jas 5:14-15: (1) elders, not priests, are to perform this action; (2) Jas says this is done to heal, while Catholics usually perform it right before death; (3) the emphasis in the text is placed upon the prayers of the faithful that save, not the oil; and (4) one must determine if this is sickness is spiritual or physical.
- K. None of the doctrines or practices of the Roman Catholic Church can trace their origin to the first century.
1. Dates of the origin of major Catholic doctrines and practices:
 - Holy water (120 AD)
 - Penance (ca. 157 AD)
 - The Latin Mass (394 AD)
 - The worship of Mary (4th century AD)
 - Extreme unction (588 AD)
 - Purgatory (593 AD)
 - The Universal Bishop, or Pope (probably as early as 606 AD)
 - Instrumental music in worship (ca. 660 AD)
 - Papal jurisdiction over civil authorities (728-1870 AD)
 - Transubstantiation (1000 AD)
 - Celibacy (1015 AD)
 - Indulgences (1192 AD)
 - Confession to priests, or "Auricular confession" (1215 AD)
 - Sprinkling for baptism (1311 AD)
 - Infallibility of the Pope (1870 AD)

Conclusion:

I. Interestingly, there are many changes taking place in the Roman Catholic Church.

- A. Despite the fact that Cardinal Gibbons once said of the Catholic Church, "She is the one institution that never changes." (*Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 83):
1. Masses are now said in the languages of the people rather than Latin.
 2. Laymen may choose to confess anywhere with a priest rather than in the confessional.
 3. There is a large growing charismatic movement among Catholics, particularly in the U.S., which now involves more than 300,000 Catholics.
 4. There is widespread criticism among Catholics regarding celibacy of priests, as well as prohibitions against birth control and abortion.
 5. Both the bread and the wine are now given to the "laity" in many places.
 6. Abstaining from eating meat on Fridays is no longer required.
- B. The one true faith is never subject to change. It is absolute, and remains unchangeable to the end of time.
1. Jude, the Lord's brother wrote: "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3)
 2. This is the faith for which we must always earnestly contend.

Study Questions:

1. What are some of the fundamental differences between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches that you find most interesting? Explain.
2. What two things determine authority in the Catholic church. Which one is wrong, and why?
3. List some of the reasons why Peter could not have been a Pope.
4. What is wrong with the Catholic practice of the worship of Mary?
5. What is wrong with the Catholic practice of the worship of departed saints?

c. Confirmation:

d. The Eucharist (Lord's supper)

e. Ordination:

f. Marriage:

g. Extreme Unction: