



How Are We Saved?

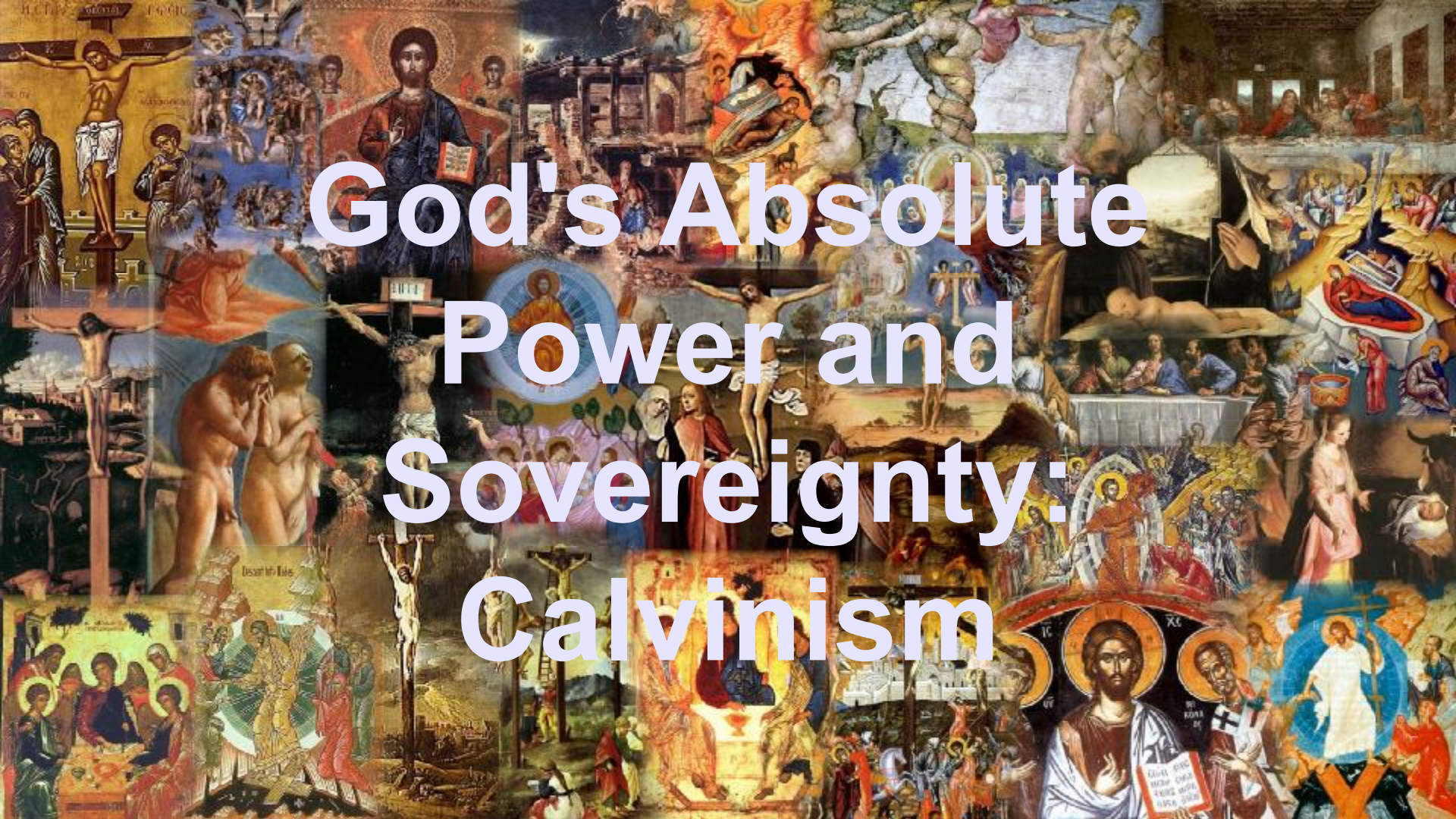
2. Grace vs. Free Will

What is Faith?

St. John in the Wilderness

- Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen thou me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent that my love may go out to my neighbour. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust thee altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in thee. In thee I have sealed the treasures of all I have. I am poor; thou art rich and didst come to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; thou art upright. With me there is an abundance of sin; in thee is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore, I will remain with thee of whom I can receive but to whom I may not give. Amen.

■ Martin Luther, 1483-1546. From *Oxford Book of Prayer*, page 53



God's Absolute Power and Sovereignty: Calvinism

Calvinism

A Faith Testimony

- Several years ago, a former Surgeon General of the United States gave a talk, a faith testimony before a gathering of Christians.
- To the consternation of many of the attendees, the title of his talk was:
- "God Killed My Son"
- The Surgeon General's son had died in a skiing accident.

Calvinism

A Faith Testimony

- The Surgeon General believed:
 - every good event,
 - every apparent tragic event,
 - every apparent evil event,
- was preordained and willed by God, part of God's plan.
- His son's sudden death was, for a reason he could not understand, a providential act ordained and willed by God.

Calvinism

A Faith Testimony

- The Surgeon General spoke of how this belief gave him enormous comfort,
- how he would not be able to bear to live if he believed his son's death was:
 - just a random tragedy,
 - just a meaningless event in a broken world.

Calvinism

Planned and Willed by God?

- Such a belief has an enormous power to comfort;
- yet ...
- Do we want to believe that every tragedy, every natural disaster, every cruel act of a despot is explicitly willed and planned by God, part of a grand plan we cannot comprehend?

Calvinism

Planned and Willed by God?

- Do we want to believe that:
 - not just the sudden death of a young man is explicitly ordained and willed by God,
 - but the slow, lingering, painful death of elderly man with cancer is similarly ordained and willed by God?

Calvinism

God's Absolute Power and Sovereignty

- This view of God's absolute power and sovereignty is representative of a view called “**4-point**” or “**5-point**” **Calvinism**.
- It emphasizes the *absolute* sovereignty and power of God.
- Every event that happens is pre-ordained by God, part of a grand plan we cannot comprehend.
- God does not merely *sustain* the physical universe and all the atoms within it,
- but God *ordains* and *plans* the precise movement and fate of every atom.

Calvinism

Doctrine of Salvation

- This very strong view of God's absolute sovereignty extends to the Calvinist doctrine of salvation:
 - God pre-decides or pre-ordains who will be saved,
 - and that power to decide is not "compromised" or "infringed" upon by what we will do or not do in this life.

Calvinism

Doctrine of Salvation

- Those that God decides will be saved are given an *irresistible* grace that will redeem their fallen, corrupt human nature and cause them be faithful.
- Because the grace causing them to become faithful is *irresistible*, because it cannot be refused, because its effects are "automatic," One might say one is "forced" to be faithful.
- "Forced," but without a struggle, without our being aware of it happening.
 - Rather, we would perceive it as coming from within us.

Calvinism

Doctrine of Salvation

- Those who are not saved are those:
 - who God "passes over," not giving them irresistible grace -- necessary to be saved -- that will redeem them (a view called **single predestination**), or
 - who God *explicitly* pre-ordains will be damned (a view called **double predestination**).

Calvinism

Doctrine of Salvation

- This view would seem to leave little if any room for human "free will" or even any sort of "free process" for the natural world to "make itself."
- God's absolute sovereignty is expressed:
 - in God's giving (or *not giving*) saving grace which is *irresistible*,
 - in God deciding who will be saved, *completely independent* of our will or actions or thoughts.

Calvinism

Doctrine of Salvation

- A Calvinist will say:
 - we still have "free will" to act (although every act is preordained by God),
 - those who are damned (or simply passed over and hence "not saved") are truly and willfully guilty of the sins they commit (even though their sins are inevitable because of their fallen, corrupted human nature)
- How this can be is ultimately said to be a mystery.

Calvinism

TULIP

- The Calvinist doctrine of salvation is described by a 5-letter mnemonic "TULIP," devised in the Synod of Dordt, held by the Dutch Reformed Church (1618-1619):
 - **T**: total depravity
 - **U**: unconditional election
 - **L**: limited atonement
 - **I**: irresistible grace
 - **P**: perseverance of the elect



Synod of Dordt

Calvinism

TULIP

- **Total Depravity (T):** the image of God in the fallen human nature is totally corrupted.
- **Unconditional Election (U):** God's decision who will be saved (the saved = "the elect") is not "conditioned" by anything we will do or not do in this life.
- **Limited Atonement (L):** Jesus did not die on the cross for the sin of all humanity, but only for the sins of "the elect"

Calvinism

TULIP

- **Irresistible Grace (I):** The grace that God gives us that makes us faithful -- a grace necessary and sufficient to be saved -- is irresistible.
- **Perseverance of the Elect / Saints (P):** Once God has given you the irresistible grace that makes you faithful, you will remain faithful until death. Once saved, always saved.
 - Called “**Eternal Security.**”
 - Baptists: “**Blessed Assurance.**”

Calvinism

TULIP

- Calvinist who believe in all 5 points are **"5-point" Calvinist**.
- Calvinist who don't accept the controversial "L" of "TULIP" -- Limited Atonement -- who accept that God died for the sins of *all humanity* on the cross, not just "the elect," are **"4-point" Calvinists** (or **Amyraldianists**).
- Some Baptists modify all but the last point (Perseverance of the Saints) of the TULIP out of a desire to maintain the role of the human free will to make a "personal decision" for Christ, the human "personal decision" bringing God's saving faith. They sometimes call themselves **"1-point" Calvinists**.

Calvinism

TULIP

- *Aside:*
- In recent years, the prevalence of "5-point" Calvinism has been increasing among young people in the Reformed and Baptist tradition, in significant part because of the popularity of the writings of Twin Cities pastor John Piper.
- In a poll in 2006 by the Southern Baptist Convention, about 10% of their pastors called themselves 5-point Calvinist. But among graduating seminarians, 30% called themselves 5-point Calvinists.

Calvinism

God's Grace vs. Human Free Will

- In the "tension" between:
 - God's grace and sovereignty
 - Human free will
- Calvinism might be said to be one extreme, the extreme emphasizing the absolute sovereignty of God and the absolute power of God's grace, to the point of making human free will a mystery, a mystery because it is almost rationally untenable.



The Absolute Self-Sufficiency of the Human Free Will: Pelagianism

Pelagianism

God's Grace vs. Human Free Will

- The extreme on the other end of the balancing act between God's grace and human free will,
- an extreme emphasizing the independence and self-sufficiency of the human free will, is called "**Pelagianism.**"

Pelagianism

Pelagius

- Pelagius (c. 354-418) was probably a British born Roman monk and ascetic.
- Pelagius taught that if God gives us a commandment, we are fully capable of obeying it.
 - If we obey, we earn and deserve credit.
 - If we disobey, if we sin, it is our own fault and we earn and deserve condemnation.

Pelagianism

Pelagius

- Pelagius's reasoning seems sound:
 - God loves us.
 - Would a loving parent demand their child to do something the child was clearly incapable of doing, and then get angry at them when they failed?
- Of course not -- and neither would God.

Pelagianism

Pelagius vs. Augustine

- Augustine of Hippo opposed Pelagius, accusing Pelagius of denying the importance of God's grace in our lives.
- Pelagius denied this, arguing that our free will, the freedom to freely choose to do good or evil, is itself is a great gift of God, a profound manifestation of God's grace.

Pelagianism

Pelagius vs. Augustine

- Augustine's debate with Pelagius helped crystallize his thinking, and in answering Pelagius, Augustine developed his Doctrine of the Fall and Doctrine of Original Sin, that:
 - It was Adam and Eve's "Original Sin," that caused the corruption of our human nature.
 - We have all inherited that corrupted nature and the guilt for that Original Sin. We are no longer capable of obeying God's commands on our own. We are a *massa damnata* deserving of damnation.
 - This is why God sent Jesus to save us, the "second Adam" or "new Adam", to heal and redeem our corrupted human natures.

Pelagianism

Pelagius vs. Augustine

- Augustine won the argument.
- Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy at the Council of Carthage in 418.

Pelagianism

Pelagianism Today

- All existing Christian traditions are traditions that emphasize the overriding importance of God's grace in our lives.
- There are *no* Christian traditions that teach "Pelagianism" (the ultimate "works righteousness.")

Pelagianism

Pelagianism Today

- Outside of 4-point and 5-point Calvinism, other Christian traditions try to find more of a balance between:
 - God's grace and sovereignty
 - human free will

Pelagianism

Pelagianism Today

- However, in debates among Christians, whenever one party thinks the other party has wandered too far to the side of emphasizing the role of human free will in salvation, the accusing cry of
 - "pelagianism,"
 - "works righteousness"
- often arises.

Pelagianism

Pelagianism and Arminianism

- Within the Reformed tradition, Jacobus Arminius taught an alternative to "5-point" Calvinism, an alternative that emphasized human co-operation with God's grace, the human freedom to reject God's grace.
- Calvinist accused the Arminians of being "Pelagians"
- Arminianism was condemned by Calvinists in the Synod of Dordt, where the "5-point" TULIP doctrine was devised and enshrined.

Pelagianism

De Auxiliis controversy

- In 1597, Pope Clement VIII called Dominican and Jesuit scholars together to try to find the proper balance between God's grace, and human free will (*Congregatio de Auxiliis*)
- The Dominicans argued a view emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the power of God's grace.
 - The Jesuits called the Dominicans “Calvinists.”

Pelagianism

De Auxiliis controversy

- The Jesuits argued a view close to Jacobus Arminius, emphasizing the freedom of the human being to accept -- or reject -- God's grace.
 - The Dominicans called the Jesuits “Pelagians.”
- The pope finally had to put an end to the debate, prohibiting further discussion of the matter, the precise balance between God’s grace and human free will to be henceforth considered a mystery.
- This prohibition in the Roman Church remains in effect today.



Searching for a Balance Between God's Grace and Human Free Will: Arminianism

Arminianism

Jacobus Arminius



- Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) thought the view of God implied by Calvinism was too harsh, and proposed a greater role for human free will in salvation.
- He taught God's grace is necessary for salvation, but we can choose:
 - to cooperate with God's grace, or
 - not to cooperate with God's grace; that is: to reject God's grace.

Arminianism

God's Grace vs Human Free Will

- This idea of giving the human free will a role in salvation by allowing us the freedom to cooperate (or not) with God's grace is how most non-Calvinist Christian traditions strike a balance between:
 - God's grace and sovereignty,
 - human free will

Arminianism

God's Grace vs Human Free Will

- Some traditions prefer not to use the word "cooperation," as that perhaps implies an equal share in what might be labeled "work." (smacking of "works righteousness" or Pelagianism).
- They prefer to say God does something, and then we have to do something, but God is doing most of it.

Arminianism

TULIP

- Arminius agreed with just one of the five "TULIP" points:
- YES: Total Depravity (T)
 - Arminius agreed the image of God in the fallen human nature is totally corrupted. A totally corrupt nature can only choose to do evil.
 - He therefore suggested God first gives everyone a "**prevenient**" (= "**anticipating**," "**going before**," "**preceding**") **grace** that overcomes our corrupted fallen human nature sufficiently to allow us to freely chose to cooperate (or not) with God's subsequent saving grace.

Arminianism

TULIP

- NO: Unconditional Election (U)
 - Arminius taught God's decision who will be saved is *conditioned* by whether or not an individual chooses to cooperate with God's saving grace.
- NO: Limited Atonement (L)
 - Arminius taught Jesus died on the cross for the sins of *all of humanity*, not just the elect.

Arminianism

TULIP

- NO: Irresistible Grace (I)
 - Arminius taught that God's saving grace is *not irresistible*. God's initial “prevenient” grace gives us the ability from that point forward to freely accept or reject God's graces.
- NO: Perseverance of the Elect or Saints (P)
 - Arminius taught that since God's grace is *not irresistible*, there is always the possibility we will ultimately reject God's grace and lose salvation.

Arminianism

Arminianism and Other Traditions

- John Wesley and the Methodist movement he founded are explicitly Arminian.
 - Wesley called the view of God presented by 5-point Calvinism "blasphemy" against God
- Many Christians in the Reformed and Baptist traditions are in fact Arminians, but don't know it or don't want to admit it, because the name "Arminianism" has been denigrated in many of their Christians circles as forms of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism or "work's righteousness."

Arminianism

Arminianism and Other Traditions

- Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions hold views very similar to Arminians, except they do not accept total depravity of the fallen human nature.
- The image of God in fallen human nature has been defaced, but is not totally corrupted; fallen human beings are not totally depraved.
- The Eastern Orthodox are the most optimistic about the fallen human nature, teaching fallen human being can still freely choose to cooperate (or not) with God's grace.
 - In other words: no "prevenient" grace to "upgrade" the fallen human nature is needed.



What Exactly is Grace?

What Exactly is Grace?

God's Helping, Aiding Presence

- In general, in the context of Christian theology, **grace** is shorthand for:
 - God's actual presence within us,
 - aiding, helping us,
 - a presence given to us as gift, without condition.

What Exactly is Grace?

Uncreated vs Created Grace

- One Christian tradition is an exception to this general rule: Roman Catholicism.
- From Thomas Aquinas, the Roman Catholic tradition teaches two forms of grace:
 - **(1) uncreated (= divine) grace.** God's actual helping, aiding presence within us
 - commonly called "actual" grace
 - **(2) created grace.** A change in us (created creatures) produced by God.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace

- To understand this Roman Catholic idea of "**created grace**", we have to go back to Thomas Aquinas who came up with the idea.
- Thomas Aquinas liked **Aristotle's theory of virtue**.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace

- Aristotle's had noted when we practice something, it shapes us, forms us, hones us, making us better at it.
- For example, when we practice playing the violin, the constant, daily practice will gradually shape us, form us, hone us,
 - so that playing the violin well becomes in us a "second nature,"
 - playing well becomes a "habit."
- Practice changes us from a bad violin player to a good violin player.
- Practice changes us from someone who makes ugly, dissonant music to someone who makes beautiful music.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace

- Aristotle reasoned becoming virtuous must be the same:
 - We become virtuous by practicing / doing virtuous things.
 - We become good by practicing / doing good things.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace

- Thomas Aquinas liked Aristotle's theory of virtue, but Aquinas was a theologian of grace.
 - Saying we become "good" by practicing / doing good things (all on our own) sounded pretty Pelagian.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace

- Aquinas suggested that God molds, shapes, hones, forms our soul, so that the shape and form of our soul:
 - is the shape and form a soul would have if it could acquire years and years of "practicing" love,
 - is the shape and form a soul would have if it could acquire years and years of "practicing" hope,
 - is the shape and form a soul would have if it could acquire years and years of "practicing" faith.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace

- God molds our souls into the "habit" of doing years and years of practicing" love, hope and faith,
- so that,
- without having to do the "practice" ourselves,
- we become people fully capable of loving, hoping, and being faithful.

What Exactly is Grace?

Created Grace = Habitual Grace

- Thomas Aquinas called this change God renders in the form of our souls "**created grace.**"
- He called this grace in particular "**habitual**" **grace**, because in a single fell swoop it "molds" our souls in the "habit" of doing years and years of "practicing" love, hope and faith.

What Exactly is Grace?

Habitual Grace = Sanctifying Grace

- Today, this "habitual grace" is commonly called in Roman Catholicism "**sanctifying grace.**"
- Every good Catholic knows that as long as you die "in a state of grace" -- with sanctifying grace -- you will go to heaven (albeit with a possible side stop in purgatory).
- And the only way you can lose sanctifying grace is to commit a very grievous sin -- a "**mortal**" **sin** -- such as murder, or adultery, and not repent of it.

What Exactly is Grace?

Protestant Disagreement

- The Protestant reformers totally disagreed with Thomas Aquinas' acceptance of Aristotle's theory of virtue.
- Luther did not like Aristotle:
 - "This defunct pagan has attained supremacy; impeded, and almost suppressed, the Scriptures of the living God. When I think of this lamentable state of affairs, I cannot avoid believing that the Evil One introduced the study of Aristotle."

What Exactly is Grace?

Protestant Disagreement

- Luther and the Protestant reformers insisted:
 - You cannot become good by doing good.
 - You have to *be* good *first*, and only after you have become good can you *do* good:
 - Only a good tree can bear good fruit.



What is Faith?

What Is Faith?

By Grace Through Faith

- All Christian traditions agree:
 - **Salvation is by grace through faith**
- The only difference among traditions is:
 - Churches of the Protestant reformation say: **Salvation is by grace through faith *alone***.
 - Other traditions (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, some Anglicans), will only say: **Salvation is by grace through faith** (declining to add "alone.")

What Is Faith?

By Grace Through Faith

- The difference is partly a difference in what each tradition includes in the term "salvation,"
 - that is: what they define as *what we need to be saved* from (see last week's session).
- We will explore some of the nuances of this "alone" difference next week.

What Is Faith?

By Grace Through Faith

- Knowing what "faith" is, would seem to be important:
 - If you are a 5-point Calvinist, faith is a gift given to the "elect," so you need to recognize it to know if you are of "the elect."
 - If you are a Baptist who believes a personal decision for Christ arising from genuine faith saves you once and for all, you want to know if your faith is genuine.
 - If you are a Roman Catholic, you believe faith is an effect of God molding your soul, of God giving you "created" = "habitual" = "sanctifying grace." Faith would be a sign you still have sanctifying grace in you.

What Is Faith?

Definitions

- Faith According to the author of Hebrews:
 - Hebrews 11:1 **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."**
- What degree of "assurance" is necessary to call it faith? (On a scale of 1 to 10)
- What degree of "conviction" is necessary to call it faith? (On a scale of 1 to 10)
- Where do we draw a line? Can we draw a line?

What Is Faith?

Definitions

- Three Dictionary Definitions:
 - Belief in and commitment to something or someone ... specifically a complete trust in Christ and his work (Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology. Millard J. Erickson, a Baptist theologian)
 - ... belief, trust, and obedience to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. affects all dimensions of one's existence: intellect, emotions, and will. (Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Donald K McKim, a Reformed theologian)
 - ... a free, reasonable, and total response through which we confess the truth ..., obediently commit ourselves, and entrust our future to God. (A Concise Dictionary of Theology, Third Edition, Gerald O'Collins, SJ, and Edward G. Farrugia, SJ, Catholic theologians)

What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- Consider this scenario proposed by a philosophy professor,
 - who was sympathetic to Christianity,
 - who wanted to "believe" in Christianity, but as a professional "skeptic," found it hard to believe,
 - yet who was willing to commit himself to Christianity, to "walk the walk" in the *hope* it was true.

What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- You a political refugee in a despotic country.
- You are running towards the rugged, wilderness border of a country that can offer you asylum.
- You are being chased by the police of the despotic country, who will certainly kill you in a very unpleasant way if they capture you.

What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- Running beside you is another refugee, a stranger. You have not spoken to him much.
- In the back of your mind you have noted he does run with an unusual grace and athleticism.
- You both reach the border.

What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- Between you and the country that can give you asylum is a deep gorge.
- The bridge over the gorge is out. Only a single thick strand of a support wire remains.
- The stranger besides you says, "I am a circus trapeze artist. I can get us across. Climb on my back and hold tight."

What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- You can hear the police in the distance.
- You desperately *want to believe* the stranger.
- You desperately, with all your soul, *hope* the stranger is telling the truth, that he is right.

What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- Out of your *hope*, out of your *desire to believe* the stranger, you make a decision. You make a commitment.
- You climb on his back and hold tight.
- As you both begin to cross the strand, if someone could ask you:
- "in your heart of hearts, do you *believe* you are going to get across, or do you believe that within a few seconds are you going to be falling to your death in the gorge?"
- you would have to honestly answer: "I *believe* we will be falling to our death into the gorge."

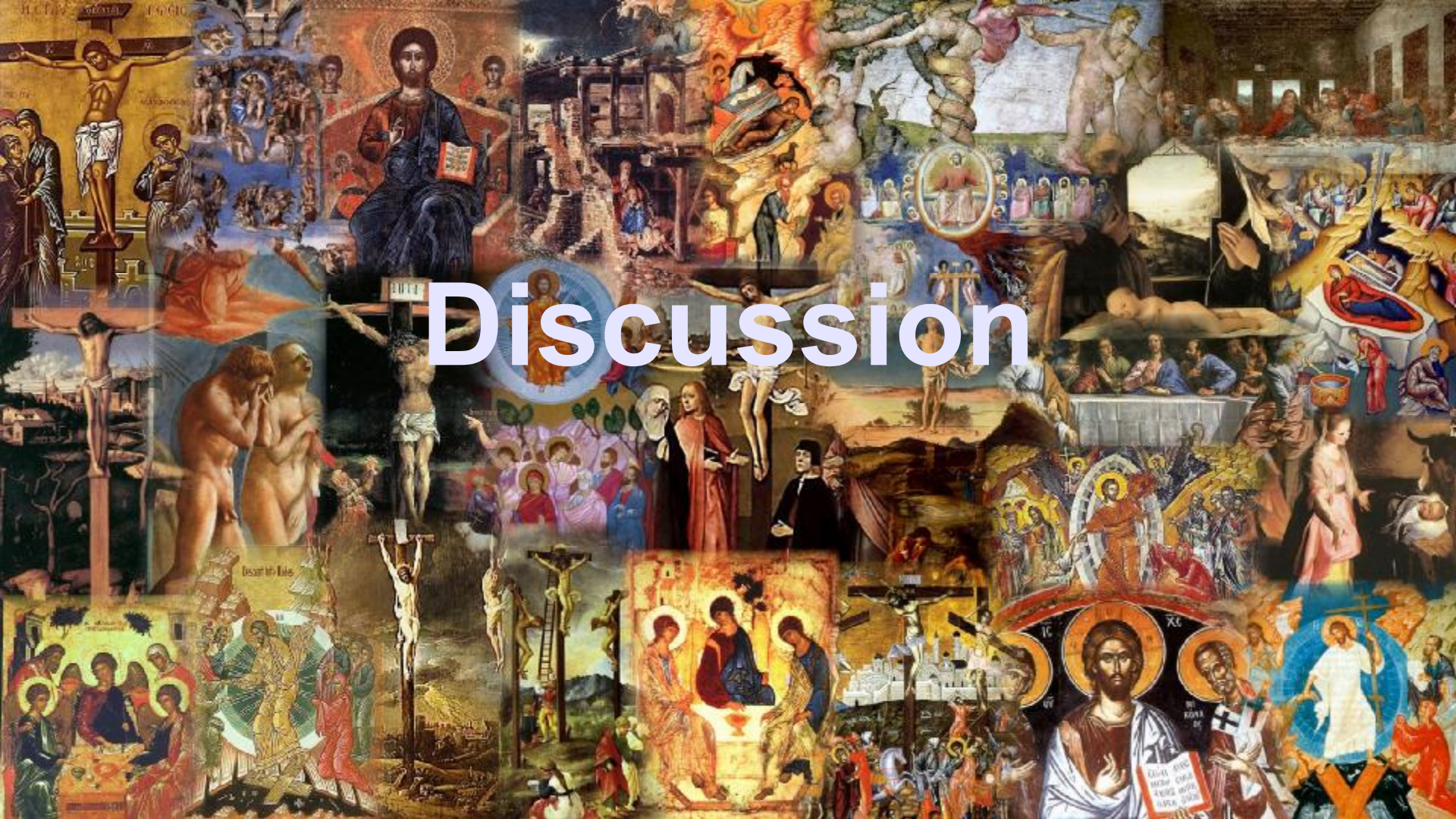
What Is Faith?

The Faith of the Refugee

- Can you be said to have "faith?"

The background is a complex collage of religious art. It features numerous depictions of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Last Judgment. In the center, a large white text overlay reads "Next Week: Justification, and Sanctification". The art includes various figures, including Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and other saints, set against a backdrop of dramatic, often fiery, scenes. The overall style is reminiscent of traditional religious painting and tapestry.

Next Week: Justification, and Sanctification



Discussion