



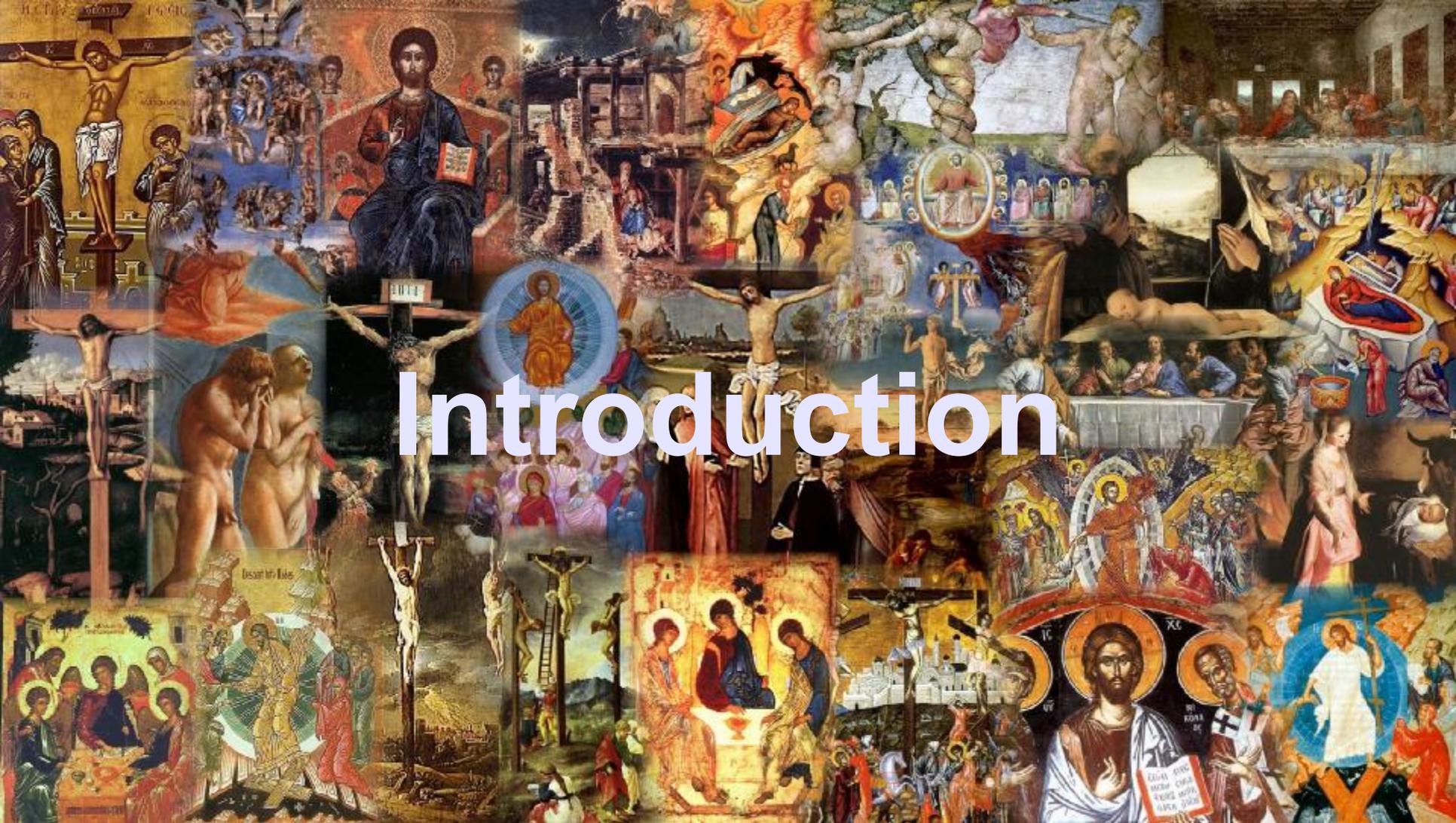
How Are We Saved?

5. Eternal Security, Blessed Assurance. Or Not.

St. John in the Wilderness

- O good Jesus, the word of the Father, the brightness of the Father's glory, whom angels desire to behold; teach me to do thy will; that guided by thy good spirit, I may come unto that blessed city where there is everlasting day and all are of one spirit; where there is certain security and secure eternity and eternal tranquility and quiet felicity and happy sweetness and sweet pleasantness; where thou, with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest, world without end.

■ St Gregory, d. 638



Introduction

Introduction

- There are three “levels” of assurance of salvation we might speak of:
 - 1. “permanent” assurance = **Eternal Security** or **Blessed Assurance**: we are sure that no matter what happens in the future, we will go to heaven.
 - 2. “present” assurance; assurance at this moment only: we are sure that if we die right now, we would go to heaven. However we have no guarantee what we might do in the future.
 - 3. no assurance at all -- both our ultimate fate as well as our current fate, if we were to die right now, is uncertain. ■

Introduction

- One of the most cherished beliefs in Baptist and some Reformed Christian traditions is “permanent” assurance: **Eternal Security**, also known as:
 - **Blessed Assurance**,
 - the perseverance of the elect,
 - “once saved, always saved” ■

Introduction

- Other Christian traditions teach we may have some assurance of salvation in the present, but we cannot be absolutely sure we won't someday lose our faith and deny Christ:
 - Arminian Reformed Christians,
 - Methodists,
 - Lutherans ■

Introduction

- And some Christian traditions teach we can have neither. There is:
 - *no* Eternal Security:
 - *no* present assurance of salvation if we were to die this instant.
- These traditions include:
 - Roman Catholics,
 - Eastern Christians. ■

Introduction

- Assurance is not an academic, fine point of doctrine that only theologians would be interested in; it has enormous implications for:
 - Christian piety and spirituality,
 - the anxieties that plague us during our Christian journey,
 - how we view and live our lives. ■

Introduction

- We will look at the doctrine of “assurance” in:
 - “Classical” Calvinism,
 - Baptists (“moderate” Calvinism),
 - Arminian Reformed Christianity and Methodism (Wesleyan Arminianism),
 - Lutheranism,
 - Roman Catholicism and Eastern Christianity. ■

Introduction

- First let's set a stage:
- Let's think of heaven as a great banquet and celebration.
- Western Christians would say our goal in this life is to be allowed into the banquet and not get sent away to hell. ■

Introduction

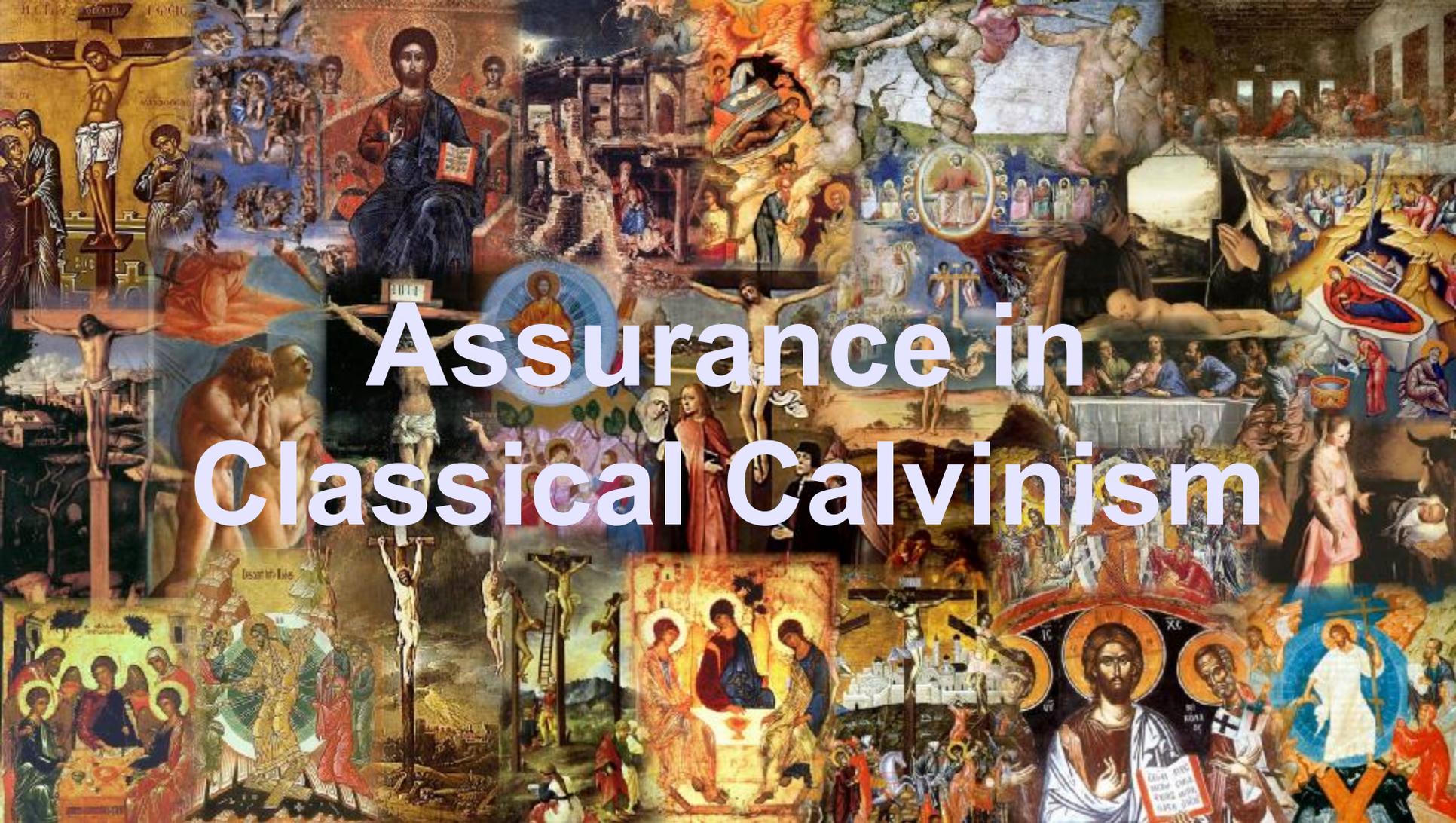
- Among Western Christians, the Reformation Churches would say the difference between:
 - those who get in (the saved) and,
 - those who get sent away (the damned),
- is the *attitude of God towards us*, not any inherent quality of our own.
- Although inside we may be ugly sinners, if we have faith, God will externally cloak us with, reckon to us, impute to us the radiant righteousness of Christ.
- When we stand before the door to the banquet, God will see us radiant with the cloak of Christ's righteousness, and we will be allowed in.
- If we have no faith, God will see only our ugly, sinful selves and send us away, to the hell we deserve as sinners. ■

Introduction

- Roman Catholic Western Christians on the other hand, would say the difference between:
 - those who get in (the saved) and,
 - those who get sent away (the damned);
- is *not* God's attitude toward us, but whether we have nurtured and grown during our life on earth an *inner* ability to relate to God and others.
- If the state of our souls is so poor that we are unable to relate to God and others, then we can't participate in the banquet, and we will be sent away. ■

Introduction

- Eastern Christians don't worry about *getting into* the banquet: everyone *gets into* the banquet who wants to.
- Our goal in this life is to prepare for the banquet, to nurture and grow during our life on earth an inner ability to relate to God and others so we can participate and enjoy the banquet:
 - Being stuck in the banquet unprepared, unable to participate, *is hell!* ■



Assurance in Classical Calvinism

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- In Classical Calvinism, **Eternal Security** is a completely *logical consequence* of its theology of salvation, summarized by: “**TULIP:**”
- **T:** total depravity,
- **U:** unconditional election,
- **L:** limited atonement,
- **I:** irresistible grace,
- **P:** perseverance of the elect (the “saints”). ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

■ 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.” Also called **Particular Redemption**. ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

■ 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 (Perseverance of the Saints)

- Once God has given you the irresistible grace that makes you faithful, you will remain faithful until death. *Once saved, always saved.* ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- **Classical Calvinism** can be **5-Point** or **4-Point Calvinism** (“L” = limited atonement denied)
- Teaches God is *completely and totally sovereign* over his creation.
- In particular, God is the *sole actor* in the salvation of his human creatures.
- God chose before the beginning of time who he will save and who he will not save. (**Unconditional Election**)
- Those God chooses to save are given an **“Irresistible Grace”** that causes them to have a saving faith, allowing them to be externally cloaked with, imputed with the radiant righteousness of Christ.
- If you are one of the elect or the saved, you will *of course* **Persevere** to the end, because God had predestined you for salvation, and God's grace is **irresistible**. ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- Calvin taught we *can know* in this life if we are one of the elect -- and hence know if we have “**Eternal Security**” or “**Blessed Assurance.**”
- How? Two ways:
 - 1. The “**internal testimony**” of the **Holy Spirit**, bearing witness within us that we are children of God.
 - We feel a deep inner, joy or confidence or conviction that we are saved.
 - 2. “**External**” evidence. Do we have right beliefs? Do our lives manifest the “fruits” of the Spirit? Good works should follow “automatically” from a true faith, and would be evidence that we are true believers. ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- Calvinists disagree whether (1) alone, or (2) alone, or (1) and (2) are necessary to know you are saved.
- A related controversy that arises among Calvinists who believe in **Eternal Security** is whether a genuine saving faith is faith in:
 - 1. Jesus as Savior alone (= the “**Free grace**” stance). A saving faith is acceptance that God has saved us through grace alone, a pure gift.
 - 2. Jesus as both Savior and Lord (= the “**Lordship salvation**”) stance. A saving faith also means we accept Jesus as our Lord, meaning our lives must display obedience to the commandments and the fruits of the Spirit. ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- The anxiety a Calvinist may face is convincing themselves they are truly one of the elect, one of the saved:
 - Is their faith joyous or strong or confident enough (the inner testimony of the Spirit)? And / or:
 - Do they have right belief? Does their life display the good works, the “fruits” of Spirit, good works? ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- If a Calvinist does feel secure in the knowledge he or she is of the elect and saved:
 - They may expect anyone else who is *really* a Christian should feel equally secure.
- Because they have external criteria to assess a genuine saving faith:
 - They may feel they can apply those criteria to other professing Christians – suggesting so-and-so is probably not saved because they do this, or believe this (false) doctrine, or live in a certain way. ■

Assurance, Classical Calvinism

- For the elect, the law and the commandments are instruction (the so called **Third use of the law**) on how they can slowly change their corrupted and darkened souls and become holier (= **sanctification**) over a course of a lifetime:
 - They can do this with help from God (grace), who loves them and has given them the gift of salvation.
 - They can do this confident they are already “justified” and hence saved:
 - That is: they are already externally cloaked by the radiant righteousness of Christ and guaranteed entrance into the heavenly banquet. ■



Assurance in the Baptist Tradition

Assurance for Baptists

- Baptists tend to say they are “moderate” Calvinism or “**1-point Calvinist**” in that they have modified the TULIP, keeping intact *only* the **perseverance of the elect = Eternal Security = Blessed Assurance**. “TULIP:”
- T: total depravity → near total depravity
- ~~U: unconditional election~~
- ~~L: limited atonement~~
- ~~I: irresistible grace~~
- P: perseverance of the elect or saints. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Now in Classical Calvinism, **P, the perseverance of the elect** follows logically from the fact that **election is unconditional**:
 - God decides before the beginning of time who will be saved and who will be damned.
 - That decision is not “conditioned” by anything a human being does. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Baptist however believe **election is *conditional*** -- although we are nearly depraved from original sin, we are still capable of making a decision for or against Christ.
- Furthermore **God's grace is *not irresistible***. God is love, and love works persuasively but not coercively.
- We can choose to reject God's grace (in this belief they are very "Arminian"). ■

Assurance for Baptists

- But nonetheless, Baptist teach that if we do, at some point, have a “moment of faith,” and:
 - accept what God is offering us,
 - accept that Jesus is our Lord and Savior,
- Then that moment of faith causes us to be externally cloaked with, imputed with the righteousness of Christ, and:
 - We are then eternally saved, we have **Eternal Security**.
“Once saved, always saved,”
 - The loss of salvation is impossible for us. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Now God's grace is still *resistible*.
- We can still choose to accept or reject God's grace.
- But even if our faith later falters, God's faithfulness does not.
- God *will never take back* the gift of salvation.
- God is bound by his own unconditional promise to be faithful, even if we are faithless, for "God cannot deny himself."
- We cannot *gain* salvation by good works, nor we cannot *lose it* by "bad" works. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- The moment of faith “tattoos” you with salvation.
- Once you have the “tattoo,” it remains with you indefinitely.
- You don’t have to maintain an attitude of fondness for tattoos to ensure that the tattoo remains on your arm.
- In fact you might change your mind the minute you receive it!
- But that does not change the fact that you have a permanent tattoo on your arm.
- Forgiveness and salvation is applied at the moment of faith, and its permanence is not contingent upon the permanence of one’s faith. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Adrian Rogers, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention:
- Can you imagine the emotional state of a child who does not know from day to day whether or not he is a member of the family? Today, since he was a good boy, he is considered a member. But tomorrow, if he misbehaves, he may no longer be a member. Today he is loved by his father. Tomorrow he may not be. This child would be a neurotic mess! You are a part of your family, regardless of your behavior. So it is in the family of God, too. If you belong to Christ, you are part of the family, and can enjoy the emotional security our Heavenly Father wants us to experience. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29). ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Charles Stanley, senior pastor First Baptist Atlanta writes: “[Hodges] argues convincingly that Satan can completely shipwreck a believer’s faith but that this in no way affects the believer’s security.” ... “The Bible clearly teaches that God’s love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand.” ■

Assurance for Baptists

- You can see how powerful this idea would be for evangelism.
- All you have to do to “save” someone is bring them to a moment of genuine faith.
- If you can just get someone to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, then they are God's and God will never let them go -- even if they later lose their faith! ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Now a Baptist will say in practice it does not really happen often -- if ever -- that someone who is saved will later lose their faith.
- But theoretically, if it did, they would still be saved. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- The anxiety of a Baptist might be: did they really have a genuine, saving faith when they made “their decision” for Christ?
- If they have any doubt, it might be a good idea to respond to the altar call again, commit again to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, just in case ... ■

Assurance for Baptists

- Generally, if one is saved, then you will manifest:
 - a continuing faith,
 - the fruit of a continuing faith -- good works.
- Some Baptist will say works *always* naturally accompany a saving faith.
- Others insist that works are *not* automatic and *not* necessary at all. ■

Assurance for Baptists

- As justified, saved Christians, the law and the commandments are instruction (the so called **Third use of the law**) describing how we can slowly change our corrupted and darkened souls and become holier (more sanctified).
 - We can do this with help from God (grace)
 - We can do so confident we are already "justified" and hence saved.
 - That is: we are already externally cloaked by the radiant righteousness of Christ and guaranteed entrance into the heavenly banquet.
- **Sanctification** (becoming holy, changing internally) is a process involving obedience, a manifestation of our love for God, a free act -
- but it is not necessary to be saved. ■



Assurance in Arminian Traditions (Reformed and Methodist)

Assurance for Arminians

- Christians in the Arminian traditions (some Reformed, all Methodists) explicitly reject the high view of God's absolute sovereignty found in Classical Calvinism,
- They explicitly reject that God's absolute sovereignty means God predestines who will be saved and who will be damned without regard to human free will.
- They agree that **Original Sin** totally depraved our human nature, making it impossible for us to choose anything but evil.
- But God gives everyone a **"prevenient" ("preceding") grace** that gives us the ability to choose or reject God's subsequent **saving / justifying grace**.
- If we accept God's saving / justifying grace, our response of faith will justify us and save us. We will be externally cloaked by the radiance of Jesus' righteousness. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- All Arminians hold, however, that people can *resist* God's saving grace.
- Divine grace does not function like a tsunami tidal wave, totally overwhelming the sinner's will in its wake.
- Rather, God's grace works through persuasion, influencing sinners, drawing them toward God, enabling them to respond in faith.
- When people respond in faith and repentance, it is truly their response, but it might have been otherwise. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- If we have faith, we have assurance in the present that we saved:
 - if we were to die right now, we would go to heaven.
- However, although we can have a present assurance of salvation, we cannot have **“Eternal Security;”** we can never be sure we will persevere to the end.
- Because God has given us the ability to reject his grace, we can never rule out the possibility that sometime in the future we might reject God and lose our faith. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- But as long as we have a genuine faith based on:
 - 1. The "internal testimony" of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness within us that we are children of God:
 - We feel a deep inner, joy or confidence or conviction that we are saved; and / or:
 - 2. "External" evidence. Do we have right beliefs? Do our lives manifest the "fruits" of the Spirit? Good works should follow "automatically" from a genuine faith,
- We know we are justified, externally cloaked with the radiance of Christ's righteousness, and are assured of salvation. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- Reformed Arminians would agree with Calvinists in the Reformed tradition that as justified, saved Christians, the law and the commandments become instruction (the so called **Third use of the law**) on how we can slowly change our corrupted and darkened souls and become holier (= **sanctification**):
 - We can do this with help from God (grace).
 - We can do so confident we are already “justified” and hence saved.
 - That is: we are already externally cloaked by the radiant righteousness of Christ and guaranteed entrance into the heavenly banquet. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- Wesleyan Arminianism (that is: Methodism) departs from Reformed Arminianism and from all the Churches of the Reformation in putting a major emphasis on growth in holiness or **sanctification**. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, agreed with all the churches of the Reformation that when we are justified by faith, we are externally cloaked with the radiance of Christ's righteousness.
- However unlike the other Churches of the Reformation, Wesley taught that when God *imputes* to us an *external* righteousness that cloaks us, he also *implants* righteousness *internally* in our corrupted and darkened souls. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- That is: when we are justified through faith:
 - We are externally "cloaked" with the righteousness of Christ (= we are justified) and,
 - We begin a growth in holiness with an initial *implantation* of righteousness inside us (**sanctification**). ■

Assurance for Arminians

- **Sanctification** involves first the transformation of our wills and affections.
- One of the normal benefits of this early stage of sanctification is that the believer receives the gift of the present assurance of salvation.
- Gradually we come to love and desire that which God loves.
- Soon a desire for greater **sanctification** becomes a pursuit of ultimate joy.
- We do what is right and avoid what is evil because that is what our transformed wills *truly* desire. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- The ultimate goal of sanctification is “**Entire Sanctification**” or “**Christian Perfection.**”
- Christian Perfection or Entire Sanctification is primarily the perfection of our love for God and for our neighbor:
 - The sanctifying power of God's Spirit invades our beings and enables us to have perfect love for God and for our fellow human beings. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- As we grow in holiness and Christlikeness through imparted righteousness, we will also be growing in a sensitivity to any movement *away* from God, in whatever form that movement may take.
- It is nonetheless always possible to fall from grace and ultimately lose our salvation. ■

Assurance for Arminians

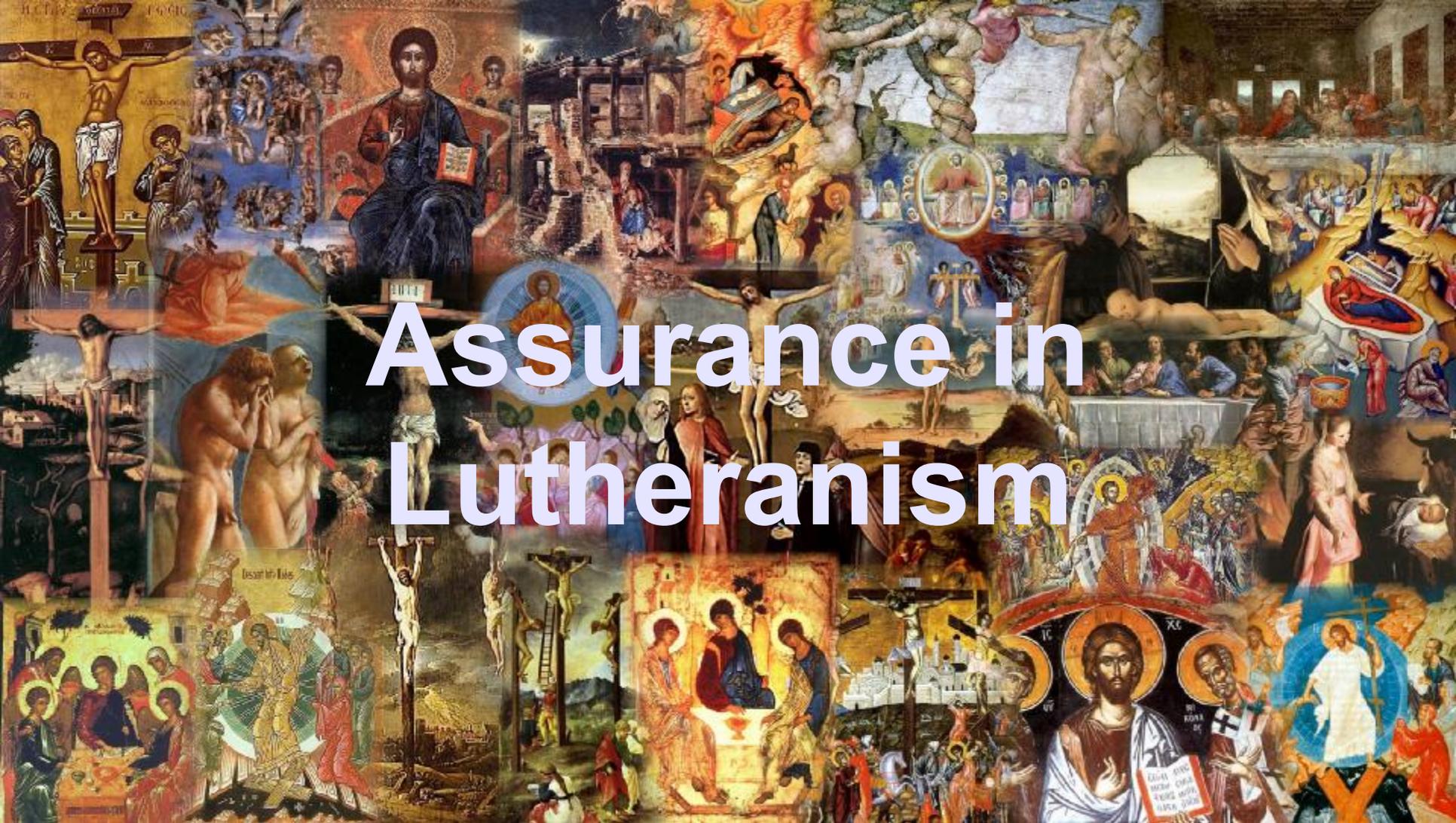
- Wesley taught there are two primary pathways that could result in a fall from grace:
 - unconfessed sin,
 - apostasy.
- Unconfessed sin is sin that is:
 - consciously held without repentance, and
 - continued without regret. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- If we continue to yield in degrees to the temptation:
 - Sinning will begin to be more pleasing to us.
 - The Spirit will be grieved.
 - Our faith will be weakened.
 - Our love for God will cool.
- The Spirit will warn us more sharply, but we may persist in the downward spiral, turning further away to the point that we essentially resume a life of rebellion akin to that which we knew before we were born again. ■

Assurance for Arminians

- Yet even when we fall *from* grace, we never not fall *beyond* grace.
- We can always repent and be justified again.
- In contrast to Methodists, Reformed Arminians teach that apostasy is a sin we can never recover from. ■



Assurance in Lutheranism

Assurance in Lutheranism

- Lutheranism, like Calvinism, teaches that through God's irresistible grace, we are given the gift of faith, a faith which justifies us, externally cloaking us, imputing to us the radiance of Christ's righteousness.
 - Unlike Calvinism, Lutheranism teaches the irresistible grace that causes us to be "born again," become children of God, is given through baptism. ■

Assurance in Lutheranism

- Lutheranism also teaches predestination, that God has predestined who will be saved.
- Unlike Calvin, Luther taught it is not for us to know if we are of the elect.
- Luther: "In my judgment, we must believe in the mercy of God, but remain uncertain about our and others' future perseverance [in faith], or predestination. ... 'if you think that you are standing, watch out that you do not fall,' ■

Assurance in Lutheranism

- But if we have faith, we have some present assurance we are saved.
- How do we know if we have a proper faith?
- In contrast to Calvinism, Lutheranism teaches we *cannot* determine whether we have a proper faith by looking *inside* ourselves for the internal testimony of the Spirit (that in fact would be the wrong place to look, creating only pride or false assurance or doubt). ■

Assurance in Lutheranism

- A proper faith:
 - is anchored *externally* in God's Word and promises,
 - grabs ahold of the gospel promise, trusting in God's mercy and promise of salvation,
 - remembers over and over that Christ *died for me*.
- Faith for Luther is **trust in God's gospel promise.** ■

Assurance in Lutheranism

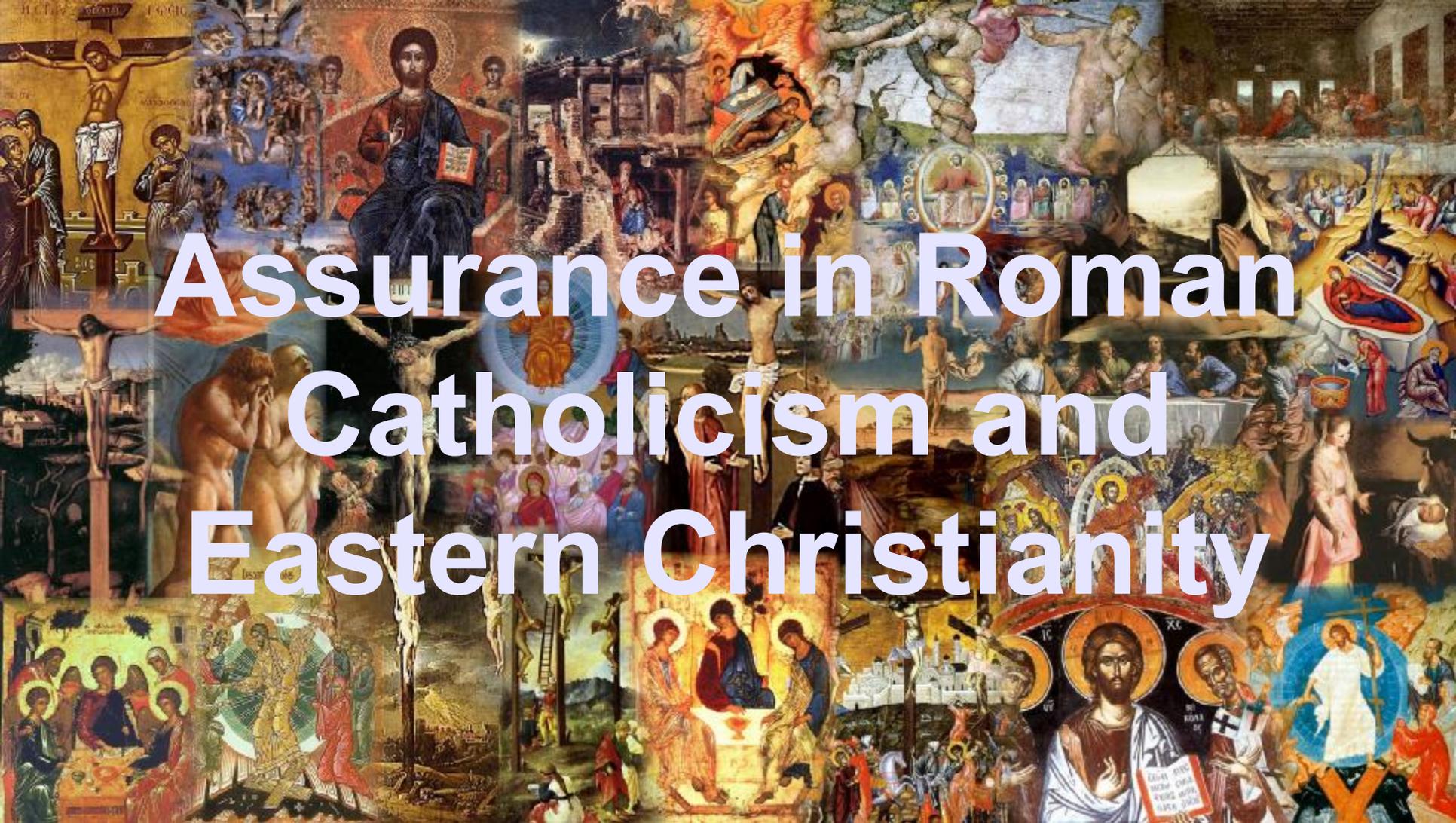
- The anxiety we feel because of:
 - doubts,
 - concern our faith is too weak,
 - the uncertainty of our salvation,
- are *normal signs of faith*, not signs of unbelief, since the unbeliever has no concern or anxiety about doubts, faith or salvation. ■

Assurance in Lutheranism

- Luther called such anxieties and terrors (which he frequently experienced himself) *Anfechtung*, German for “assault.”
 - They are temptations of the devil.
 - Their deepest form is the worry that the hidden God of predestination might be different from the revealed God of the promise.
- The only solution is to keep holding on to the gospel promise, the promise of our baptism, remembering **Christ died *for me*.** ■

Assurance in Lutheranism

- The journey of life as a Christian is the daily struggle to believe, to trust, to "get used to" that Gospel promise, holding onto it, refusing to let go amid the assaults and terrors, the devil's *Anfechtung*. ■



Assurance in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Christianity

Catholicism and the East

- Unlike the churches of the Reformation, in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Christianity there is *neither*:
 - eternal security (assurance we will persevere to the end to our lives), or
 - assurance of salvation in the present. ■

Catholicism and the East

- In both churches, salvation is thought of as a lifelong process of internal transformation and change, a journey:
 - whose ultimate outcome cannot be known until the journey is completed,
 - whose "current status," we can perhaps guess at with some approximate degree of accuracy; but only God alone knows. ■

Catholicism and the East

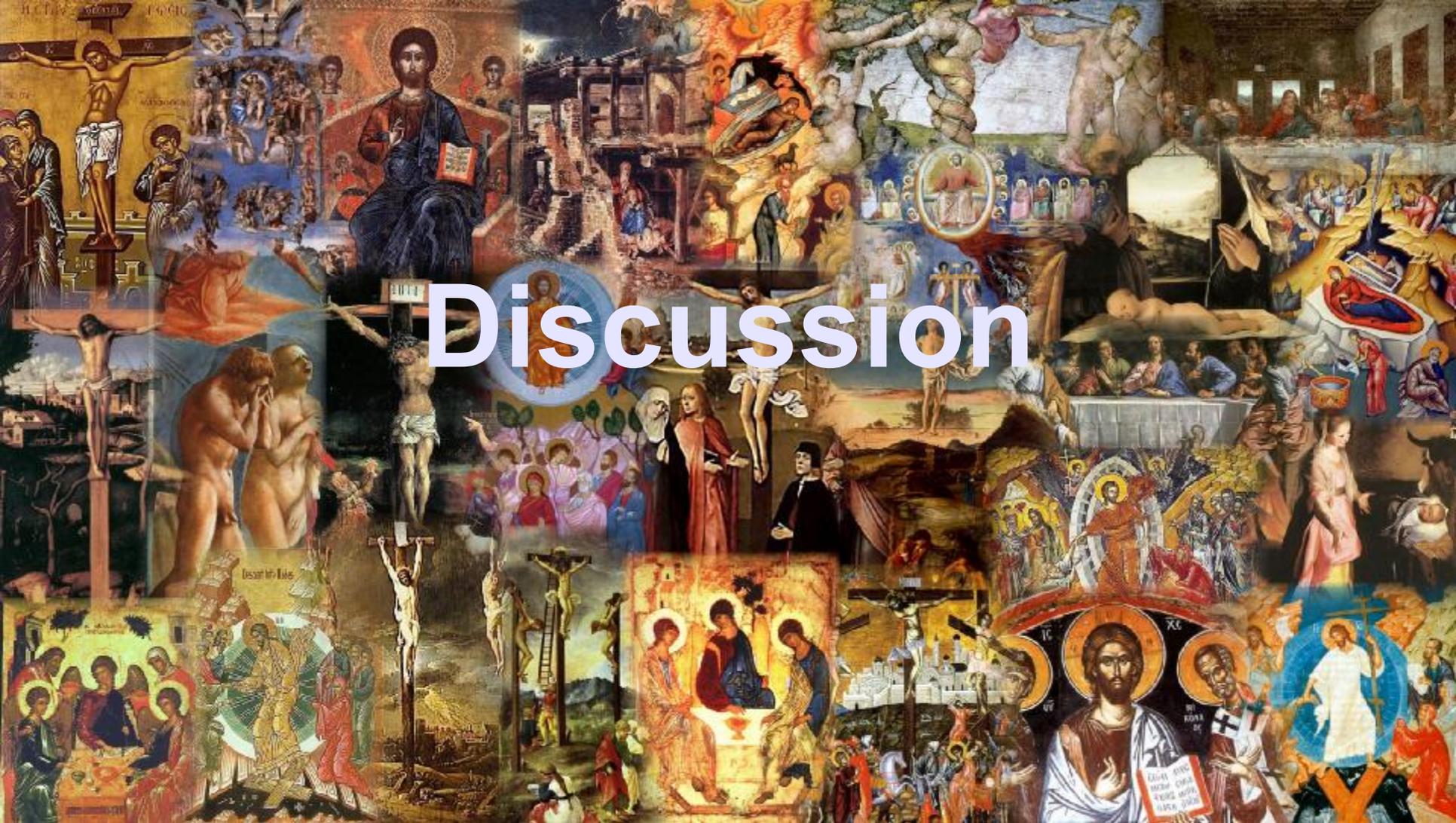
- The key difference from the churches of the Reformation is that Roman Catholics and Eastern Christianity teach we enter the "heavenly banquet" not on the basis of:
 - an external cloak of the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness "imputed" to us in a single event of "justification," associated with faith,
- but on the basis of:
 - the actual degree of holiness and righteousness within us, acquired through the grace of God over a lifetime, a lifetime full of:
 - fits and starts
 - progress and backsliding
 - spiritual success and failures. ■

Catholicism and the East

- A pious Christian who believes in Eternal Security may confidently declare "I am saved" (= meaning he or she is confident they are externally cloaked with righteousness of Christ) and will never lose it.
- But a pious Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christian would be very reticent to make any declaration that he or she is definitely "saved." (= meaning they have acquired an inner holiness and purity sufficient to stand before God or participate in the divine life). ■

The background is a complex collage of religious artwork. It features numerous depictions of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Last Judgment. The central text is overlaid on this collage. The text is in a large, white, sans-serif font. The background images are in various colors and styles, including traditional religious paintings and more modern, abstract interpretations. The overall composition is dense and visually rich.

**Next Week:
What Are Human
Beings That You Are
Mindful of Them?**



Discussion