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**Simply
Amazing...**

**and
Still Watching**

Moment

PMSM Pastors' Retreat in Kota Kinabalu



The Persidangan Misi Sengoi Methodist (PMSM) recently visited Kota Kinabalu, Sabah as part of their Pastor's retreat. Led by PMSM's Mission Superintendent, Rev Bah Saha, a group of 8 district leaders were hosted by the Sabah Provisional Annual Conference (SPAC). This retreat was held from the 19th to 21st of April 2018. The team from PMSM was briefed by President Hii Kong Hock, the President of SPAC about the ministry of SPAC and some of the struggles the Orang Asal Christians faced in Sabah. In return Bah Saha and the pastors were able to share about some of PMSM's own ministries in Peninsular Malaysia. This retreat also included a short sightseeing of Kota Kinabalu, a ministry visit amongst the indigenous ministries of SPAC and a Chinese church in Kota Kinabalu.

The PMSM team was very blessed through this opportunity to learn and understand the wider ministries of the Methodist Church, in particular the work in Sabah.

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"A Church After
God's Own Heart
in Turbulent Times"

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Prayer

Meanwhile let us continue earnestly in prayer for the following:

- 1 CABINET: Tun Dr Mahathir and his senior team will need to work hard to name key cabinet positions. Then within the next 2 weeks they will have to put the full cabinet in place. Pray for the appointment of right persons and also against all squabbling and jockeying over positions for selfish purposes. Pray that the component parties can demonstrate that they truly desire the well-being of the nation.
- 2 The new government has 100 days to show the nation that they can deliver and win the confidence of both its citizens and the world. They will need much wisdom, diligence and decisiveness.
- 3 The whole political landscape is being reshaped. Pray that the PH leaders will have much wisdom and not be tempted by short-term gain at the expense of longer-term developments.
- 4 Finally the Indonesian bombings remind us that we need God's sovereign protection against violence and civil disorder. Let's continue to bring this before God.

"Let's pray without ceasing."

Simply Amazing... and Still Watching

We stand in utter amazement and awe before our Mighty God – as we beheld how our Sovereign God guided the whole of the GE 14 peacefully towards a “new Malaysia” which He appointed for His own glory.

Undoubted Divine Intervention – Soli Deo Gloria

I remember sharing in a devotion with the choir of the Methodist Prayer Convention 2014 which was rehearsing in Putra Stadium, Bukit Jalil, about how the great composer Johan Sebastian Bach used— Soli Deo Gloria [S.D.G. – Latin for “to God alone be the glory”]. Bach would inscribe S.D.G. at the end of all his church compositions signifying the work was produced for the sake of praising God. We joyously echo these same words now – in the context of what God has done for Malaysia as Malaysia prayed, and we sing “to You alone be the glory for GE14”.

We appreciate the long, testing and often very difficult *“journey of prayer”* undertaken by God’s Church in Malaysia – but a journey that is not yet over! Just like Israel of old, we have just gotten out of Egypt – *with a continuing arduous journey ahead into the Promised Land yet to come!*

Truly we Malaysians would similarly make this same declaration - **Soli Deo Gloria**, because we know that only God alone could fulfil the whole process of this change that actually began many years ago. Then we see His hand in the peaceful build up to 9 May 2018 Polling Day, guarding the incident-free day of polling and safeguarding the results of the ballots cast by over 80 per cent of Malaysians. We see Him guiding the new Administration in redressing critical issues and in the inception of policies and actions that hold great promise of recovery in making Malaysia great once again.

The respected Christian theologian, J I Packer reminds us of the **divine providence** of Almighty God that he defines as *“the unceasing activity of the Creator, whereby in overflowing bounty and goodwill, He upholds His creatures in ordered existence, guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men, and directs everything to its appointed goal, for His own glory.”*

History – “HIS STORY”

History is indeed God’s story: the Almighty God of providence is at work in the very events that appear to be filled with darkness and confusion, as His people often moan “How long, O Lord”! God is in the very events of history; ultimately all events are going to lead towards glorifying

the sovereign God of the universe, the Maker of heaven and earth.

This GE14 re-affirms for us to keep our “helmet of salvation” on – to know that in the face of what appears contrary to our expectations of God, God is working out His eternal salvation plan and purpose. All creatures, regardless of their domicile, will one day sing that heavenly chorus in the ultimate Praise Worship in heaven - *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”* [Rev 5:13].

The Christian always has a hope for the future; he has that great fact of a promise that God is working out His purposes in history, and therefore need not be disturbed when human situations at a macro level seem like an out of control “run-away train”. This is especially when human events and programmes appear to be going overwhelmingly wrong – with bad, unjust and unfair “deals” mushrooming.

GE14 – The Incredible Turning Point

“Evil is only allowed to do enough to overreach itself and to bring about its own downfall” are apt words from Biblical scholar NT Wright. The Sovereign Lord responded to the many and ever-increasing sustained prayers of His people in this land and abroad. Political commentators have opined that the GE14 historic event which resulted in the change of Government that had ruled Malaysia for the past 61 years without a break – began with events that took place 20 years ago. That was when Tun Dr Mahathir sacked Datuk Seri Anwar in 1998; that led to the formation of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat. At the right time, events led Tun Dr Mahathir to leave UMNO and he formed a new opposition party, and subsequently the opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan [PH] was birthed - bringing together the 4 main opposition parties.

Reflection - Some Powerful GE14 Lessons

We together witness the demonstration of the **supremacy of prayer** as God intervened. The Church in Malaysia grew in strength and unity in interceding for the nation, steadfastly calling for Divine mercy and intervention in the spirit of ^{NIV} **2 Chronicles 7:14** *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* Truly, God stretched out His hand upon our land; but this verse is not only good for pre-GE14, all the more we should now watch

and pray for the nation riding on this generated prayer wave.

We have also witnessed the power of praying in unity as promised by God in ^{NIV} **Psalm 133:1** *How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!.....³ It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*

We saw the **supremacy of the “big picture”** – to pursue a reform agenda and an unwavering commitment to change. The pursuit of this bigger picture of “Malaysia deserves better” and the responsibility of ensuring our children and theirs have a brighter future, have galvanized the reformists to set aside their personal painful memories inflicted by the other, and selfish ambitions in order to make Malaysia great once again!

We beheld the **supremacy of collaboration** in the pursuit of a goal of the highest order. The key leaders in the Pakatan Harapan forged the most unexpected and unlikely of political alliance. Forging an *esprit de corps* and common spirit meant facing and then releasing memories that are hard to erase along with the excruciating pain, shame and humiliation of being victims of unjust power play and schemes in the past.

We watched with amazement as the “jailer and prisoner” shook hands. In addition, the response of Nurul Izzah, daughter of twice jailed Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when asked at an interview how she could forgive when her father had spent 11 years in jail- was unforgettable. Her reply was “*We are here to reform the system so that no one else becomes victimized again ...We need to have a measured outlook of life, never live your life out of anger and bitterness.*” This was a clear demonstration of the **supremacy and power of forgiveness.**

We witnessed the **supremacy of the will of an awakened citizenry.** The foreign press was predicting that the incumbent BN was going to win again. In the days preceding the GE14, the PH coalition was not allowed to be registered, the anti- fake news law was passed, the electoral re-delineation was enacted etc. But the awakened citizenry courageously decided that “*enough is enough*” and spoke through the ballot.

We observed the **supremacy of persevering hard work.** Our hearts go out to a 93 year old [and those with him] who relentlessly trudged a gruelling itinerary especially during the permitted 11-day campaign period, criss-crossing states and challenging rural and urban locations, climbing onto mobile platforms and speaking into the night and early morning. We applaud all who made time and provided money and effort toward this change – volunteering in various capacities especially that of being polling and counting agents.

We together hold on to a **shared vision of the future** - daring to believe and seek Heaven for a new future for Malaysia where there is unequivocal practice of the rule of law, ho-

nouring the Federal Constitution and where freedom, justice, equality, fairness, compassion, mutual respect and harmony will prevail. We look forward to the practical restoration of parliamentary democracy which respects the separation and functional independence of the Legislative, the Judiciary and the Executive in the governance of our beloved nation.

In conclusion, may we be reminded that we are **co-responsible for a continuing journey** for a new Malaysia filled with both great potential as well as possible pitfalls. We must give thanks and rejoice for what is impossible humanly speaking that has incredibly come to pass – the Almighty and Sovereign God has acted. But we must not be trapped in the “moment of euphoria” – and forget to hoist our sails and ride on the fresh and powerful cleansing gale that has blown into Malaysia!

We must remember that both **2 Chronicles 7:14** and **Psalm 133: 1-3 are not only good for the “Egypt period”**. We must continue to build on the momentum of prayer that has been generated and persist in praying “in and out of season” based on the above verses and more – so that the “results of GE14” will be fully realised and actualised. We are co-responsible with the new Government in the continuing pursuit and journey of the “new Malaysia”. The “new Malaysia” - healed, reconciled, righteous, compassionate and empowered with a new Government needs our prayer and support.

We thank the Sovereign God for blessing and continuing to bless Malaysia!

Soli Deo Gloria!

NLT **2 Chronicles 7:14** Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

Bishop Ong Hwai Teik

Soli
Deo
Gloria

“To God Alone be the Glory”

Dedication Service of Trinity Living Stream, the new wing of Trinity Methodist Church Petaling Jaya

*“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” – Isaiah 43:19*

The 18th of March 2018 is a significant milestone in the life of Trinity Methodist Church Petaling Jaya (TMC PJ), as this was when her new building extension named Trinity Living Stream was dedicated to the glory of God.

The service was held at 5.00pm in the new Sanctuary that can accommodate over 800 worshippers.

Led by Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Bishop Dr Ong Hwai Teik and President of the Trinity Annual Conference, Rev Dr T. Jeyakumar, it was witnessed by the District Superintendent of Central District 2 Rev Ashok Amarasingam, past and present Methodist pastors and a Sanctuary packed with members of the laity.

Highlights of the Dedication service were the blowing of the Shofar led by TMC PJ’s associate pastor, Rev Joshua Hong, which flowed into the presentation of the building by three members of TMC PJ’s leadership: The Lay leader Mr Andrew Wong, the LCEC chairperson, Ms Lee Siew Hong and the Redevelopment Chairman Mr Paul Lai to Bishop Dr Ong for the dedication of the Church.

Following this, they collectively informed the Bishop that the building is named Trinity Living Stream.

Bishop Dr Ong then proceeded to consecrate the building for God’s service and its holy use. He dedicated the Sanctuary’s pulpit by saying, “When Your Word is read and preached from this pulpit, purify the lives and lips of those who speak here that Your Word alone may be heard and obeyed ...”.

The Bible was then placed on the pulpit – the Word that is “a lantern for our feet and a light upon our path”.

Turning to the first of the two Holy Sacraments, the Baptismal font, Bishop Dr Ong said, “... through the waters of baptism you have given us new life ... may we walk in new and abundant life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The Baptismal font was then filled with holy water – to “wash away sin and clothe God’s people in righteousness ...”.

For the second Holy Sacrament, the Holy Communion, Bishop proceeded to the Altar Table and thanked our Lord that “when we gather at the Lord’s table the living Christ is known to us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup”.

He concluded by petitioning God to “strengthen us for Your service in the world and give us a foretaste of the feast to come ...”.

The Holy Communion vessels were then placed on the Altar Table – to “feed the hunger of our hearts with the bread of heaven and quench our deepest thirst with the cup of salvation”.

After the consecration, came the Litany of Dedication, where members of TMC PJ were called to liken the Church to the construction of the building in that “the work we see in this building is physical; it finds its spiritual counterpart in our hearts” so that as one community of faith, we can ultimately “dedicate ourselves to know Christ and make Him known”.

The Acts of Praise followed, with the singing of a new song unto the Lord – an original score composed by a regular worshipper of TMC PJ, Mr Michael Veerapan, with words by TMC PJ members, Mr and Mrs Keith and Joyce Wee, entitled “A New Thing”.

Flowing from this, the worship was elevated to a restrained tone when the Scripture Lesson from **Matthew 16:13-20** was read, after which Bishop Dr Ong delivered God’s message entitled “The Unchanging Foundation of the Discipling Church” – in reference to TMC PJ’s vision of being a “Disciple-Making Church”

Bishop’s message was summarised and translated into Mandarin by brother Lewis Loke for the benefit of those in the congregation from TMC PJ’s Chinese Ministry.

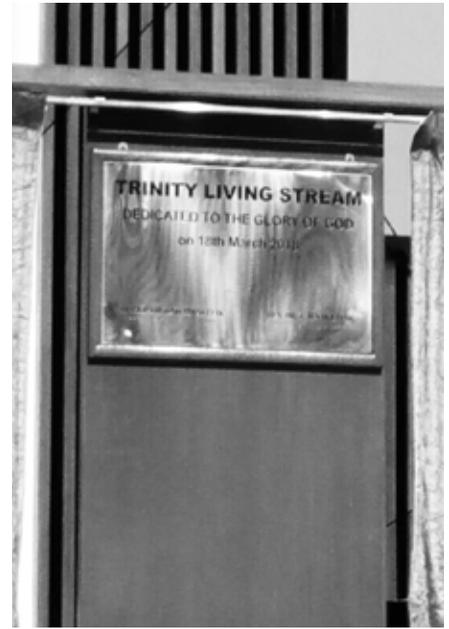
The worship service ended with an awesome wave of thankfulness to God through an Anthem of Dedication delivered by TMC PJ’s 40-strong choir together with children from TMC PJ’s kindergarten; words of thanksgiving and appreciation by TMC PJ’s Rev Ting; the unveiling of the Dedication plaque by Bishop Dr Ong and Rev T. Jeyakumar; and the Benediction by the Bishop.

The service streamed into a time of fellowship in Trinity Living Stream’s new Podium Garden with a nine-course sit down dinner attended by almost 700 people.

To God be the glory.

By Andrew Wong

Andrew Wong is the Lay Leader of TMC PJ



Footnote: Trinity Living Stream is a four level extension of TMC PJ with about 60,000sq ft of space. Within, there is a Sanctuary with a seating capacity of 800 spread over one-and-a-half floors; a kindergarten with seven classrooms besides a science lab, computer room, nursery and children's toilets; 13 meeting rooms; a visitors' lounge; a podium garden with pantry for fellowship; and a lower ground floor car-park.

Vertical movement is via staircase or, for the elderly and those with limited mobility, a pair of lifts.

The Beautiful Struggle of Operating a Retreat Centre - My Nature Leisure Farm

My Nature Leisure Farm is a farm resort situated in Sungai Pelek, Sepang. The farm resort has a total of 40 cabin lodging units with a maximum capacity of 120 guests at any one time.

My name is Addison. I grew up in KL Wesley Methodist Church. I attended the junior Sunday school back in 1997, graduated into senior Sunday school in 2003. By 2005, I went into Life Methodist Church Puchong (then called Puchong Preaching Point) and served there in the MYF and the worship team. I've had many beautiful memories in KL Wesley during my years with the 1st KL Boys' Brigade from 2003 - 2009. We showered, stayed, and practiced in the then Youth Centre. And it was from the Boys' Brigade that I picked up music and eventually became a full-time professional drummer. A few years into full-time drumming, my family had an idea to build and operate a Christian retreat centre as a ministry for God's people.

In June 2015, construction began. A year (and many setbacks) later, we opened our doors in June of 2016 as a retreat centre to host mainly Christian groups. Our vision is to utilise resources that we have, and make the most out of them so as to be the best stewards of God in whatever that He has assigned to us to take care of.

Over the last 2 years since opening our doors, we've hosted 90 groups and a total of 1900 guests. Most of them from church family camps, youth camps, small group retreats, silent retreats, worship enablers retreat, senior groups, children's group, kindergarten group, some corporate groups and also some young families.

Guests can enjoy the beauty of nature in the farm resort, accompanied by a sense of serenity, without sacrificing the comfort of quality accommodation. On certain clear nights, guests can also see a night sky full of stars.

Surrounding attractions of My Nature Leisure Farm include, dragon fruit plantations, traditional Malay kerepek factories, the Bagan Lalang beach (a.k.a Sepang Gold Coast), and Chinese restaurants.

Almost two years of operating the retreat centre, we've always prided ourselves in giving the best customer service to all our guests. My team of staff and I always made it a point to stay at the farm with our guests throughout their camp. I would like to share one rather amazing experience I've personally encountered. It was when a baptism ceremony was to be held on our grass field with a BM-speaking youth group

from East Malaysia. After lunch, they were having an intercession prayer. The moment they started praying out loud, torrents of rain started to pour. The wind was strong. For almost 2 hours they prayed, the rain and wind gradually grew more aggressive. The moment they finished the intercession to proceed with their baptism, the rain and wind immediately subsided. Even though there are no references in the Bible regarding prayer and the occurrence of a storm, but still I was amazed at the strange phenomenon. It was amazing to see God using My Nature Leisure Farm to bless His people as they come together. It was at that moment that I realized I was also playing a part in God's ministry.

Over the past 2 years of operating the business, we've had our fair share of struggles in all aspects of building a business from scratch. We've been broke, weathered by the sun and rain, we've encountered power outages and water cuts, we've been cheated and stolen from, but all in all God has made us wiser and stronger in doing His work. I hope my frankness keeps you reading until now. I would say the journey was a beautiful struggle.

Looking forward, our aspiration for My Nature Leisure Farm is to continue to host Christian groups, and to provide them with a comfortable and safe environment where they can gather and experience God's presence. We've also created Nature Farm Chicken, a chicken farm without using chemicals and hormonal injections. We are also in the process of acquiring a new piece of farm land to start our own dragon fruit farm.

More information can be found at:

www.mynatureleisurefarm.com

Look for "My Nature Leisure Farm" in Facebook!

We would like to host your retreats. For inquiries or quotations, feel free to contact me, and I will assist you in your planning.

Addison Ooh
Operator

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年会MY TEAM献身营

报道：陈凯祥

<以赛亚书>6章8节如此记载：“我又听见主的声音说：‘我可以差遣谁呢？谁肯为我们去呢？’我说：‘我在这里，请差遣我！’”

第五届MY TEAM献身营于3月9至12日，在槟城的Penang Christian Convention Centre (PCCC), Batu Ferringhi进行。本届献身营共有二十位感受呼召和有全职服侍上帝心志的卫理青年参与。营员们的年龄层和背景各不相同，但在分享个人承蒙呼召的过程中，引起大家共鸣，彼此毫无距离感。营会的最后一天，共有十五位弟兄姐妹回应自己确认上帝的牧职呼召，更有十一位立定心志，要在未来五年内进入神学院，接受全时间的装备。

献身营的主题是“来，跟从我”。几乎所有营员都处在预备献身的阶段。透过牧者们真心分享的个人经历，营员们清楚看见，献身的确是一条不容易的路。献身者除了要面对自己的心理是否已预备好，也需要面对家人的意见和多样拦阻。

耶稣又对众人说：“若有人要跟从我，就当舍己，天天背起他的十字架来跟从我……”（路9：23）确实，献身者虽会遭受许多拦阻和多样的属灵争战，但整个营会让营员们明确知道：献身是一条祝福满满的“不归路”。献身的代价虽然大，却无法与主耶稣基督在十字架上的爱相比！感谢主，在营会中清楚献身代价后的营员们不但当逃兵，反而很期待将自己奉献给主耶稣基督使用。

营会的主题和专题讲座帮助营员了解献身的事宜，也有一系列的活动帮助营员了解牧职的现实景况，使营员较具体地明白自己即将面对的考验和挑战。“安静之旅”帮助营员安静地在神面前，好好省察自己。整个旅程帮助营员学习放下自我，敞开地面对上帝。在整个旅程中，营员可体验上帝同在的平安与喜乐，也必然会在旅程后更了解上帝在自己生命中的旨意和前面的方向。

“实战体验”这个活动让营员“预尝”将来在教会全职服侍中可能会面对的实际问题和考验；藉着牧者们的经验分享，营员可以学习未来如何去应对这些难题。整个活动帮助营员清楚认知从未思考过的突发状况，让营员们大开眼界。吾会会长——郭汉成牧师夫妇也莅临营会第三天下午进行的五周年感恩礼拜仪式，并勉励所有出席者。晚餐时刻，北部教区青年指导——张振祥牧师也来探访我们和参与晚上的工作坊。

整个营会让营员们确认，全职服侍上帝这条路一点也不容易，但透过这次的营会认识同有献身心志的同路人，可以在这条路上不断勉励彼此，增加各人坚持到底的动力。那些确认自己没有承受牧职呼召的营员们，在看清回应牧职呼召的不易之处后，更坚定自己未来在教会的服侍中，会多体谅牧者，也更爱牧者！盼望接下来的几

年内，会有更多同路人加入MY TEAM这个大家庭。献身者，你并不孤单！



MY TEAM献身营五岁了！



萧院长在台上率众祷告



分组讨论



Arminianism and Calvinism: Debated Scriptural Passages (Part 3)

By Rev. Dr. Andrew Tan and Mr. David Tan

Introduction

This is the third in a series of four articles written to assist Methodist members to be aware of their own doctrinal position which is Arminian. In the first article, we explained how the “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement has brought Calvinism back onto the theological centre-stage, and raises challenges to our Arminian beliefs. We also discussed issues of God’s sovereignty, human free will, and the problem of evil and unbelievers. In the second, we examined some of the key Scriptural passages in this debate. Now, we will look at some common misunderstandings about what Arminians actually believe. This article in particular draws heavily (though not exclusively) from Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities by Roger Olson. We hope that this series of articles will help us not only to understand our doctrinal position and the Scriptures that support it but also to see it as credible, and be able to articulate and defend it.

Why Discuss Misunderstandings?

Why devote an entire article to discussing misunderstandings about Arminian theology? Arminian theology is often misunderstood, even by those who claim to be Arminians! As a result, beliefs that are neither Scriptural nor Arminian become confused with proper Arminian theology. This results in (1) the spread of unsound teaching among those who are Arminians, and (2) erroneous rejection of Arminian theology because of these unsound (but not actually Arminian!) teachings. Much, though certainly not all, Calvinist criticism of Arminian belief is due to these misunderstandings. While addressing these misunderstandings will not resolve all the differences between these two parties, (1) it can help Calvinists see Arminian theology as a reasonable belief, (2) helps both parties be on the same page in dialogue, and (3) keep us Arminians on track in what we actually hold to.

As with each of the preceding articles, we are limited in both scope and depth, and a list for further reading will be provided in the fourth article of this series. The misunderstandings we will cover here are: (1) Arminianism promotes salvation by works and denies grace, (2) Arminianism is human-centred rather than God-centred, (3) Arminianism believes in human free-will and denies God’s sovereignty, (4) Arminian teaching that salvation can be lost leads to a fearful Christian life, and (5) there is a middle ground between Arminian and Calvinist theology.

Does Arminianism Teach Salvation by Works?

A frequent accusation against Arminianism is that it denies salvation by grace alone because it introduces a human element of works. In this accusation, the Arminian belief that human beings can choose to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation is tantamount to earning salvation through our act of repentance. The only way to preserve salvation by grace alone, many Calvinists say, is to deny human beings any role in our salvation. Beyond this, the Arminian teaching that it is possible to fall away from salvation (which we shall explore in further detail below) makes staying saved dependent on human works.

Let us make it clear: Arminians affirm that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. Nothing that we do can earn or merit salvation. Even the ability to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation must first be made possible by an act of God’s grace (see our first article, where we discuss prevenient grace). Does accepting God’s gift of salvation make us any more worthy, give us a better standing than other human beings, or earn us our salvation? To each question, the Arminian response is no! If I were to receive a cheque for a sum of money as a gift, and proceed to deposit that cheque in my bank account, would I have earned that money or worked for it in any way? In receiving God’s gift of salvation, we do even less – in the example provided, I would have had to travel to the bank and make a deposit! In receiving God’s salvation, we rest fully in God to do all the work. Our only role is entirely passive – to stop resisting God’s grace.

What then of works in order to “stay saved?” Many Arminians, John Wesley being a prime example, have emphasized the importance of works in the Christian life. This is a biblical teaching, exemplified clearly not only in the letters to the Hebrews and to James, but also throughout Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels and Paul’s teachings in his letters. Let us once again clearly state: we have been saved, not by good works, but for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10)! The call to remain in Christ lest we are thrown away and wither (the parable of the vine, John 15:1-17) is not a call to be hard at work for fear of losing our salvation. Rather, it is a clear statement that if we reject God’s grace and fail to remain in Christ, we will perish. When we separate ourselves from Christ, one sign of that will be our inability to be fruitful, as true faith must be more than intellectual assent but a belief and trust in Christ that will necessarily result in a life of good works that reflect

that belief (James 2:14-26).

Is Arminianism Human-Centred?

Another common misunderstanding about Arminianism is that it is a human-centred rather than a God-centred theology. This view states that Arminian theology places the focus on human free-will and choice, placing our ultimate destiny in our hands, and denying God the full glory of His work in our salvation. These critics then proceed to say that this high view of humanity in Arminianism has a tendency to diminish our acknowledgement of the centrality of God in our lives and in the world, compromising our ability to worship Him, leading us to put our faith in human beings rather than in God.

In actual fact, Arminian theology begins and ends with God. Yes, Arminian theology emphasizes libertarian free will – that God gives those He calls a real and free choice to choose or to reject Him. However, the concern of Arminians in upholding free will is not to put the spotlight on wonderful human beings but rather to explain why God is not the author of sin and evil, and to understand why the Bible teaches that not all will be saved. We have written at length on this in our first article, under the section “The Problem of Evil and Unbelievers.” Arminians teach human free will and choice because we believe the Bible teaches that it is the way God has chosen to relate to His creation, and because this doctrine should lead us to worship a good, generous, and self-giving God.

Arminian theology does not in fact have an optimistic view of fallen humanity. Both Calvinism and Arminianism affirm total depravity – that there is no part of human beings that is not affected and marred by sin. We are made in the image of God, but sin has marred that image and irrevocably crippled our ability to be good, to form healthy families, to love our neighbours, and to construct a just and equitable society. Our hope is not in human beings or human society, but in the fact that God’s plan to redeem and restore the world, to create a new heaven and new earth, and to have His kingdom come and His will done on earth, as it is in heaven, come to fruition in His time.

Does Arminianism Deny God’s Sovereignty?

Many Calvinists believe that if libertarian free will exists, God cannot possibly be sovereign. If human beings can go against God’s plan, it would mean that God’s will can be thwarted. In this view, we Arminians may say that we believe in God’s sovereignty, but in actual fact we do not believe that God is able to dictate every detail of the universe. If God is not fully in control of everything, how can He be truly sovereign, and how can we trust that His promises and plans will come to pass?

In our first article, under the section “God’s Sovereignty and Human Free Will,” we have discussed the very different Arminian and Calvinist understandings of this subject. It will suffice to say here that Arminians believe God can dictate

every detail of the universe including every choice we make, but He has made us moral creatures with the real ability to choose good and evil, to choose God or to reject Him. We have discussed in the above sections of this article how both sin and God’s grace have affected our ability to choose. Ultimately, our ability to choose or reject God is a God-given gift twice over – first in how God originally designed us to be, and second when by prevenient grace He enables us to receive His gift of salvation. God’s power enables all this, and thus His sovereignty is preserved.

The question remains, however, whether human choice can thwart God’s will. The Arminian answer to that is yes, but only with God’s permission and enabling, and only temporarily. It may seem shocking that a Christian would claim that human beings can defy God’s will, but if we think upon it, that is what sin is – human beings going against God’s will. Each rejection of God, each act done in hate, pride, envy, or self-love, all these things are acts that clash with what God desires. And yet, if we look at the story of the Scriptures, God is able to take into account human sinfulness to bring good out of it, and to work out His ultimate plan to defeat sin and restore all creation to Himself. We see this in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, and the whole story of the nation of Israel. We see this at the cross in the death of Jesus at the hands of sinful men. Because God has triumphed at every point in spite of human rebellion, we can trust that He will be able to fulfil all that He has promised. In the meantime, we are called to pray as Jesus taught us, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Does the Possibility of Falling Away Create a Life of Fear?

As we covered in the second article in this series, most Arminians believe the Scriptures teach that it is possible to turn away from the faith and compromise one’s salvation. For those who hold to a “once saved always saved” view of salvation, the Arminian position appears to be frightening. What happens to assurance of salvation? How can one know that one will persevere to the end? Won’t such a teaching cause Christians to work to keep their salvation, rather than do good works out of thankfulness to God? And how can this belief be compatible with the peace, joy, and hope that Jesus promised?

The Scriptural basis for the possibility of falling away has been explored in more detail in the second article, under “Warnings against Falling Away.” Briefly, Scripture contains both promises that God can and will keep us, and warnings that we can choose to go astray if we choose to remove ourselves from our connection with Christ, and from under God’s promises and protection. Arminians contend that these two statements are not incompatible. We need not fear that we will accidentally lose our salvation, and we know that God works to protect us from the temptations of the world

and to pursue us when we wander away. Yet, it remains possible for us to make a shipwreck of our faith (1 Timothy 1:18-20) by repeatedly and persistently rejecting God's grace until we no longer desire God or His grace. We will accidentally lose our salvation, and we know that God works to protect us from the temptations of the world and to pursue us when we wander away. Yet, it remains possible for us to make a shipwreck of our faith (1 Timothy 1:18-20) by repeatedly and persistently rejecting God's grace until we no longer desire God or His grace.

The possibility of turning away from God should be a sobering and difficult teaching. Just because a teaching has unpleasant implications does not make it incorrect. How though, is the Christian supposed to find peace while heeding this warning? Let us start by comparing human relationships. I (David Tan) have a good relationship with my father. I know him and trust him, and I have never worried that our relationship could be damaged beyond repair. I realise that it is possible that this could happen, but it would require one or both of us to change in ways that are inconceivable. Simply put, I enjoy our father-son relationship, and know that it is a constant I can rely on. If this is the assurance one can find in a human relationship, how much more it should be with God! Scripture compares the relationship between Christ and the Church to the relationship between husband and wife. We know that in the broken world we live in, there are many marriages that fail, and many more that fall far short of what they should be. Yet, when a marriage relationship is healthy, husband and wife can both recognize that their relationship can be wrecked, while knowing there is no reason that should ever take place. They need not live in fear or worry. This is all the more true for us as Christians, for it is God who is our partner, and He is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13).

Why Can't Arminians and Calvinists Find a Compromise?

When Arminians and Calvinists start debating, many Christians wonder why we can't find some middle ground, affirm both human choice and God's sovereignty, and move on. These arguments are often divisive, are never-ending, and seem irrelevant to many aspects of the Christian life. They would like us to find a compromise, establish unity, and focus on the work of preaching the good news of Jesus, and what he accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection.

Indeed, Arminians and Calvinists both need to recognize that we have a common cause – proclaiming Christ and His Kingdom – that is far more important than the theological differences we have. We have different understandings of how we are saved and how God's sovereignty is expressed, but we preach the same gospel. We may disagree, dialogue, and debate, but we should not let this obscure the fact that we are co-workers for Christ. Too much inflammatory lan-

guage has been used, with each side accusing the other of distorting, or even denying the gospel. Seeking the truth is important; but so is our testimony to the world around us in the way we treat one another.

Having said this, there are at least two reasons why this debate of four hundred years and counting will not just go away. First, these theologies have important implications for our understanding of God, of the role of prayer, for how we explain and respond to evil and suffering, and much more. These are not merely theoretical issues, but affect the lives of individuals, the shared language of church communities, and the practice of pastoral care. Second, Arminian and Calvinist theology agree on many points but are logically incompatible with each other. It is a gross oversimplification to say that Arminianism is about human choice and Calvinism is about God's sovereignty. Both Arminianism and Calvinism affirm human choice and God's sovereignty, but explain how these interact in different ways. One states that human beings can choose to accept or reject God's offer of salvation while the other denies this. One holds that salvation is truly available to all while the other affirms that salvation is only for some. It is possible for both to be wrong or incomplete, but both cannot be correct – this would go beyond paradox into sheer logical contradiction.

A Call for Understanding

We have tackled here four common misconceptions about what Arminians believe, and a fifth question that many frustrated with this debate have. It is not just Calvinists who have these misconceptions! Many Arminians have questions about their own beliefs, and we hope that these four misconceptions will provide a starting point for answering these questions. For those who find themselves in dialogue or debate with Calvinists, we hope that this paper will help to clear up these misunderstandings – not to score debate points, but so that you can have an actual conversation instead of talking past each other. And, to Calvinists, we recognize that this is an important and contentious issue. Let us seek first to understand what the other side actually believes before we put forth our objections.

Even as we call for understanding and hope that we can overcome acrimony, we realise that actual agreement may well need to wait until Christ returns. Beyond civility and mutual understanding, we need to figure out how we will live and work with each other, both in our local churches and in the larger Christian community. We will offer some suggestions on this and other issues in the final article in this series.

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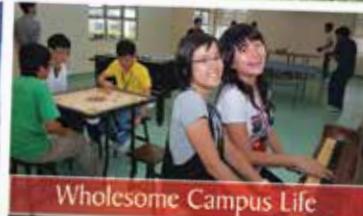
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