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We Need a Reformation

We're just not ever satisfied unless we've made our mark, justified our presence, proven our worth, earned some accolade (Ezekiel 28:1-5). If someone says something, we have to add our two bits (Proverbs 18:2). If anything goes on, we have to be involved – or at the very least in the know. We do not like to be obligated and would much rather have others obligated to us. "Freedom" is viewed as the liberty to do all we want, when we want it and as much as we want. "Do your own thing", "be your own person", or the purportedly milder "be yourself" are considered watchwords for what we consider a successful life. "Be your own boss" is a goal we pursue in all walks of life.

So, we climb the Everest or win a race, buy the newest gadget and aspire to the most prominent position. When we see a TV camera, we put on a childish smile, poke our mugs into the frame and wave or invite our girlfriend to tune to the right station. We love to drop names of well-known people we've met, as if that will add to our importance and we rush a hundred times a day to see how many likes we received on FaceBook, or noted that we're drinking coffee in the Anserine Motel on top on Mount Boorishness.

That is why we find it so painful to apologize and to admit failure. We prefer to lay the burden on responsibility on others (Genesis 3:12). We were provoked; circumstances imposed themselves upon us or even justified our actions; or our education or lack thereof is to blame and so on. Moral failure – the worse kind of failure – is especially difficult to admit.

Mankind has created an endless stream of religions, all of which share a common characteristic: man becomes his own savior. He may do so by "good works", by offering sacrifice, by meditation or prayer. He may be serving a Buddha, kissing a scroll, an ancient wall or some other relic, bowing before an idol or ministering to the needy. He may be evangelizing, serving in the church, denying himself or studying the Bible. Whatever he does is what secures his salvation and assures his blessing.

Of course, in many cases we admit that most of our salvation comes from God, or the gods. He, or they, respond to our efforts and grant us the blessings we crave. But the initiative is ours, and what he or they do for us is in response to our actions. God or the gods laid the ground and paved the way. The rest is up to us. If he or they accorded us salvation, it is now up to us to ensure we do not lose it; or we must bring it to a higher level of spiritual achievement. Ultimately, it is we who make the choice. We are the ultimate arbiters of our fate. Even if saved by the kindness of God, our two bits are needed to make it stick.

But the Gospel runs contrary to this general vein. It tells us that we are never free than when in bondage to God; never more like ourselves than when we are Christlike; never wiser than when we submit to the truth of God. The Gospel tells us that we never, ever deserve God's blessing. It calls for a sincere humility that is borne out of a sense of inability and lack of worth, for a frank admission of demerit. It teaches us that without God in Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5), that with him we can do only by his kindness and enabling (Philippians 2:13), and that even after we have done our best, we are but unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10) whose labors are acceptable only because of Christ (Philippians 4:13, Hebrew 13:21).

That is the essential nature of grace – it is utterly undeserved. Not only so, but grace, to be grace, does it all (Colossians 2:10): the initiative is God's, the grounds are laid by him, he places us on those grounds, and he ensures we remain on them, guiding, sustaining and protecting us all the way to glory.

Not that grace does not call for human effort. On the contrary. The only reasonable response to grace is that we offer to God our full, hearty, unreserved, sacrificial and continuous obedience (Romans 12:1-3). But we love because we have first been loved (1 John 4:19), not to be loved. We obey, not in order to obtain but because we have been given so much, so liberally and so undeservedly. We serve, not to ensure our inheritance but because – contrary to all we deserve – we have been assured of an inheritance unblemished, undefiled, reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4).

Christian obedience is an act of love and of gratitude. It is a recognition of sweet duty (Romans 7:21), made sweeter by being rendered to God, the glorious, beautiful, worthy, magnificent, beloved One who is altogether holy, perfectly lovely, unimaginably himself.

Such was the original Faith of Israel until corrupted by human contrivance driven by prideful self-assertion.

Upon destruction of the temple at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD, Judaism took a decisive turn which set it on a path of self-obtained righteousness instead of being the religion of grace described in the Old Testament. Tendencies castigated by the prophets and which again found expression in Pharisaical understandings became the norm and Israel engaged in a major departure from the Word of God.

God in his unilateral grace gave Israel the blood of sacrificial animals as a means of atonement for sin (Leviticus 17:11). Stringent ritual now became a means by which Israel pleased God, (Isaiah 1:4-17), often without regard to the intended meaning of the ritual and without engaging the affections as the rituals were followed. Moral behavior was no longer motivated by a sense of gratitude to God, nor viewed in terms of worshipful, loving obedience. Instead, acts of generosity and kindness were ways by which man obtained merit and thereby earned God's blessing. Even humility was transformed into a kind of self-motivated, self-imposed abasement that was considered meritorious.

Of course, there were exceptions. But they were just that: exceptions, not the rule. God's authority was supplanted by an authoritarian Rabbinate in which God had no say. Indeed, tradition has it that God was silenced and his opinion rejected as the rabbis sat to determine the meaning of the biblical text.

Today Israel has followed the logical path outlined by such presumption. The choice is presented as between secular humanism and blind obedience to a tradition as interpreted by the rabbis, and the majority has chosen the former.

The church has likewise repeatedly departed from its biblical moorings and degenerated into liberalistic humanism, a means by which man obtains merit, or a form of blind obedience to traditional practices and doctrines expounded from the pulpit. Many of the historic churches have chosen the latter option. Common evangelicalism has chosen the second. The majority, disappointed by both, has chosen the first.

Yes, common evangelical thought and practice assumes a kind of meritocracy which affirms that Jesus did much but the rest is up to us. This is expressed in many ways. Some affirm that God would dearly love to save every single human individual, but his good will is stymied by man's independence. His sovereignty has to do with everything but man's freedom to choose. Election is man choosing God, God foreseeing that choice, and then running ahead of man and choosing him first. Others affirm that evangelism, prayer and fasting, Bible study, self-denial or other such commendable activities are the means by which Christian ascend the ladder of spirituality and secure their final arrival at heaven's gates.

Few today have more than a mediocre understanding of the Faith. They prefer "practical" sermons, shallow evangelistic appeals, mega-churches in which their emotions are stirred while their minds are ignored and where there is no clear call to holiness in life, the fear of God, repentance and the forsaking of sin. People come to church to be petted, pampered, encouraged and taught to feel good about themselves. Hence the popularity of preachers such as Joel Olsteen, Mark Driscoll and the like.

The church has refused the discomfort of truly prophetic ministries, or of congregational life in which men of all races and cultures mix. We prefer the cultural and linguistic ghettos in which our practice is never challenged and our assumptions never questioned, so that we are not called upon to change except in the direction of our cherished prejudices. We separate into congregations and clusters to which only those who agree with us are allowed to enter, and then love fellow-Christians over the fences our self-love has erected – until we divide again because some area of disagreement has been discovered.

We are in desperate need of reformation. We desperately need to return to the word of God and to re-examine the best of our traditions, Confessions, practices, polity and systematizations, lest our fear of God our Savior be the fruit of human traditions rather than of the mighty, truthful, powerfully living word of God, which is able to save and sanctify us to the glory of him for whose sake we were created, redeemed and assured glorification.

Ministry and Family News

DAILY DEVOTIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES, consisting of 365 exegetical and applicatory discussion of the Pentateuch, is presently being written. Having completed Genesis, I am now working on chapter 22 in the book of Exodus.

Editorial work on John Acts are being reviewed. My time while travelling in the US is limited but I am seeking to make the maximum progress possible in this important project.

Bracha and I are presently engaged in a visit to the US. We spent just over two weeks in Seattle WA, with our two daughters and their families. We then flew to Baltimore and drove to Mechanicsburg PA where, after a time with our daughter and her family, will commence

our trip through the continental USA. We have to date 81 engagements and still a few small windows which we would be glad to fill. These are: June 12 in the vicinities of Visalia and Sacramento CA, July 27-29 just about anywhere in Michigan.

Bracha's mother, aged 90 is in hospital with an infection following a fall from which she was unable to get up. She lay on the floor for many hours, until the police (alerted by a care-giver) broke through the door and took her to hospital. Until now she lived on her own. Due to the infection, she is unable to walk or tend for herself. Bracha's sister is caring for their mother, but Bracha may have to cut her trip short and return earlier while I complete the tour in my own or in the company of a friend. We await developments.

Important notice

The bank servicing our account with Berean Baptist church has been purchased by Chemical Bank. The new details for all support of our work are now as follows: Beneficiary Name and Address: **Berean Baptist Church, 6705 Rustic Ridge Trail, Grand Blanc, MI 48439, Chemical Bank, 333 E. Main Street, Midland, MI 48640, Account 1148701325** Routing Number (ABA#): **072410013** SWIFT Code: **CHEMUS33**. Please note this change and direct future contributions accordingly. Thank you very much for your support.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

You can help by purchasing copies of Baruch's books from Barnes & Noble or from Amazon by asking for them at your local bookstore and **by posting reviews of these books** on Barnes & Noble or Amazon websites. Positive reviews help sell the books!

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER (On the Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church), P&R. This book presents Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation.

JONAH: A PROPHET ON THE RUN, Shepherd Press, a devotional commentary on the book of Jonah.

MALACHI: A PROPHET IN TIMES OF DISTRESS, a devotional commentary on the book of Malachi. Founders Press.

Colossians: The All-Sufficient Savior, a devotional commentary on the book of Malachi. Founders Press. Due approximately June 2017

The devotional commentaries are well suited for personal devotions and group Bible studies

Baruch's sermons may be heard on [Sermon Audio](#)

To remain abreast of developing circumstances in Israel, visit the [MaozWeb](#) or "follow" Baruch on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and on [Twitter](#) (@BaruchMaoz).

Intermittent bulletins are produced as necessary



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We reserve the right to use personal funds for the purposes of the ministry.