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In This Issue:

Baruch's Biography (continued) pg. 1

Ministry and Family News, pg. 4

Baruch's Biography (continued)

Previously we read of Rachel's conversion, how Vitali and Anya joined the church and of a visit to Moldova.

Growing Unity

Sasha was invited to serve as an advisor to the Pastoral team. He served well, and we learned much from him. At the same time, he was exposed to the way we dealt with issues and how Reformed principles shaped our thinking and our actions. The Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference was scheduled to be held in England. I was to attend and suggested that Sasha might join me. He was quite willing.

As usual, it was an excellent conference. I was challenged and edified, and Sasha was deeply moved by the devout, thoroughly biblical, careful exegesis and application. Both of us were taken back by the impatient looks we received from participants, whose comfort was somewhat disturbed by my whispered translation of the sermons into Hebrew for Sasha's sake. There was little appreciation of Sasha's need, nor willingness to sacrifice some comfort so a brother could be edified. Nevertheless, both of us were moved, challenged and helped by what we heard.

On our way home we stopped in Covent Garden, in London, and had an excellent Italian meal, topped by a *tiramisu* that almost tasted better than Bracha's. In the course of the meal, we talked. I wanted to know what Sasha thought of the content of Conference, and of a Reformed understanding of the Faith in light of what he had heard. He was reticent to say much, but indicated that he had been impressed and wished to give the matter further thought.

A few weeks later, returning from our weekly Elders' meeting, we parked the car beside my house and began conversing. It was early morning by then -- the meeting had ended shortly after midnight. Sasha expressed his appreciation for the truths he had learned and the conference and his regard for the way grace figured so largely in our church life due to our focus on the sovereignty of God. He had always been told that the latter emphasis would lead to the opposite. Finally, he told me he was persuaded that a Reformed, calvinistic view of the Gospel was biblical, primarily because of the warm, determined and coherent pastoral concern that view engendered and the wisdom of its pastoral direction. Rather than encouraging self-reliance and human effort, it pointed to God and reliance on him while in no way neglecting the importance of obedience and sacrifice. He had been persuaded that these tensions were truly biblical.

A short while later he was recommended to the Eldership. The church examined and appointed him with gladness. Our unity was no stronger or firmer, but its grounds had expanded, and for that we were grateful.

Alex, on the other hand, persisted in the views he held before immigrating to Israel. He insisted that continuance in salvation is dependent on man. If he turns away from the Lord, the Lord will turn from him. One's salvation could never be assured until we reached the presence of the Lord. He further believed that speaking in tongues and new revelation were necessary parts of spirituality. What is more, how could he turn his back on those who had taught him the ways of the Lord?

Of course, the ultimate issue is one's loyalty to the Lord, and to his word. Alex was convinced early in his evangelistic endeavors that, in grace, God chose some to salvation, leaving others to reap the just reward of their sins. He had seen the truth of that in his labors. It was also the mainstay of his persistence in evangelistic outreach: if he thought it was all up to him, he would have given up long ago. But he believed that the pastoral implications of calvinism were not to be desired.

I suggested he talk with Sasha, who had come to the exact opposite conclusion. I further sought to point out the positive pastoral implications of grace and of God's faithfulness in the face of Christians' repeated failures.

On one occasion, we were with the young people in Galilee. They had gone swimming, so we had ample time to talk. "How does your insistence on the sovereignty of God in salvation affect the Christian life after salvation?" We thought together about God's inability to fail, about the fullness of his grace, being free from any contingency. We went on to talk about how these principles taught us as Elders to relate to those who stumbled, how even the extremity of church discipline is an expression of grace and therefore has the restoration of sinners as its goal.

Sanctification is the product of God's work on the grounds of Christ's sacrifice, by the power of the Spirit in the secret recesses of our hearts, using means such as the preaching of the Gospel, the scriptures, self- and church discipline. It is not, nor can be, the product of human effort, although not without such.

A few days later, Alex came to the office to tell me that he had been moved by his reading of scripture, and that he embraced what he formerly rejected. He understood that the work of the Spirit had to do with our holiness, and that holiness had more to do with God-directed morality than with an affection for God. (This, of course, is not to say that one can be holy without such an affection.) A few weeks later he was recommended to the Eldership. The church examined and appointed him a few weeks later. Our Eldership now consisted of four: David, Sasha, Alex and myself. We were on the lookout for more.

A Baptism

Nine congregants were ready for baptism, all of whom but my second daughter, Shlomit, were immigrants from the former Soviet Union. God had worked wonders among us. Four were couples who had turned to the Lord together. We hired the CM&A Church building in Jerusalem, reserved three buses and made preparations. The Orthodox, who almost always had someone among us presenting himself as either a believer or as interested in the Gospel, prepared.

On Saturday morning, as the bus stopped at various locations to pick up passengers, there were members of the Orthodox community at every pre-arranged

stop, to protest. In Ashdod, some of the protestors scrambled up the bus and forced the driver to stop, until the police arrived and removed them from the bus. At church, where we were all to meet, a large contingent of protestors blocked the street and the entrance to our facility. Once again we were forced to call the police, who cleared the street and made it possible for us to access the facility, equip ourselves with whatever was needed, and make our way to the buses. We then drove off, with the cries, threats and pleas of the Orthodox following us until we disappeared from sight.

We expected a similar welcome at the CM&A building and took precautions by instructing the buses to pull up directly at the entrance so folks could enter the building at once, but parking our private vehicles at a distance so they would not be identified and damaged. No such welcome awaited us.

The large, vaulted hall, built of Jerusalem stone, was freezing cold -- December is cold in Jerusalem! The baptismal water was likewise cold but we managed to heat it somewhat and, with the majority bundled up in their coats, we proceeded with the ceremony.

Our baptismal services followed a set order, devised around the fundamental concepts of baptism as we understood them. We believe that the sacraments should always be accompanied by preaching from the word of God with direct reference to which ever sacrament is being enacted. We further hold that only those who, like Abraham, can make a credible confession of faith may be baptized, as an expression of the righteousness they have by faith in the virtues of Christ's life, death and resurrection. These only should be admitted to the Lord's Table, and all of these should not decline to participate. Both sacraments are viewed as a public act under the jurisdiction of the church.

Consequently, after worship in prayer and song, a short message is given, explaining baptism. Two or the Elders -- always two and by rote -- invite the baptizee to enter the water, where they await him or her. A question is posited: what are you about to do and why, in response to which a brief testimony is given by the person being baptized. One of the Elders would then announce: "On the strength of your testimony and in the presence of God's people, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Coming out of the water, the baptized individual is embraced by each of the Elders and makes his or her way out of the pool.

Emerging from the baptismal pool, two congregants await each person baptized with a large towel and a hug. All those baptized are given a bouquet of flowers and invited to sit on the front row. Meanwhile, the congregation sings praise. When all are seated, a short message explains the meaning of Communion. The Elders are invited to the front, the Pastor breaks the bread, repeating the words of the Lord, "This is my body, broken for you for the remission of sins. Eat you all of it" and one of the Elders is invited to pray. The Pastor then hands the bread to the Elders, who move among the congregation, dispensing the bread, while the congregation sits or stands in silent prayer.

The Elders return, hand the bread to the Pastor, who places it on the table and distributes to each of the Elders a cup of wine. One of them is invited to pray and the Elders dispense the wine. A common cup is used to express our unity in Christ. Upon returning, the Elders hand the cups to the Pastor, who then dispenses the bread and the wine to the Elders and then steps back. The Elders then dispense

the bread and the wine to the Pastor and one of the Elders prays a prayer of thanksgiving.

Further worship in song is followed by a (relatively) short sermon (some 25-39 minutes), concluding in prayer and then a question and answer period. Finally, the congregation is invited to stand and the benediction pronounced.

We were preparing for the ceremony when Alex approached, with Misha alongside him. Misha had recently come to faith. He was an eager, devout, enthusiastic individual, somewhat superficial and extremely naïve. He had requested baptism earlier and been rejected because his testimony was not deemed reliable. Now he pleaded to be baptized.

- "Alex, what do you think?"

- "I think he's ready."

- "Let's call the other Elders. This is highly irregular, but that does not make it wrong. Let's think together about this."

We called the Elders, invited Misha into a side room and interviewed him. He was able to give a solidly credible confession.

- "Well, brethren, what do you think?"

- "We've no doubt of his sincerity, nor of his experience of grace."

- "Is there, then, any reason, to refuse him baptism?"

- "He's not undergone our pre-baptismal classes."

- "True, but the course is a dictate of wisdom, not a biblical requirement. It cannot be the grounds of a refusal."

- "Let's baptize him, then, and require him to undergo the course afterwards."

That is what we concluded, and Misha exuberantly joined the nine who awaited baptism. It was a glorious service. Our way home that afternoon was uneventful.

Ministry and Family News

The course on **Biblical Leadership** has been completed and all fifteen sessions recorded. Studying, praying about and writing the course has been an exercise in self examination and a renewed discovery of how much better I could and should have served.

I am making good progress in writing the **commentary on Colossians**. This project is expected to be completed by mid-April at which time I will fine-tune **Micah** both for publication and for oral delivery and, in May, revert to my **Romans commentary**. At the same time, I am fine-tuning my **translations of the Gospels and Acts** as well as studying for the **translation of the Epistles**.

Discussion at **church** has resulted in a compromise in terms of changes. A greater effort will be made to integrate the congregation into Israeli social norms while – of course – maintaining as clear and as consistent Gospel standards as we are enabled. We **MUST** not obscure the Gospel as we reach out toward cultural relevancy. The Gospel counters every culture it addresses, transforming its assumptions as well as many of its norms.

The revolution that perhaps was needed in our congregational life will not be carried out, but renewed and conscious effort will be made toward relevancy and more coherent communication. As an aspect of that effort, I have been asked to

preach every other week and am presently editing the hymns to improve the quality of the Hebrew and assist the Pastor in improving their theology.

This brings me to my next conundrum: I am very reticent to play too large a role in the life of the church, and am certainly unwilling to fill any roles that our Pastor should fill. Preaching to and praying for the congregation are the primary duties of a Pastor, and I ought not fill that role to any significant extent unless there are compelling objective factors that render my doing so necessary. I have agreed to preach so often because our dear Pastor's Hebrew has some room for improvement, and an effort to help the congregation toward cultural relevancy has to address the issue of language.

The **Erez family** (Eran, Avital and children) are preparing to move to Washington State, to be closer to the **Richardsons** (Marcus, Tamar and their children). They intend to buy a house there and Eran is looking at the possibilities of either working from home or taking up a position with another employer. **Shlomit's** pregnancy has proceeded well: it's another girl. **Tamar** has joined her sister and is now also expecting her third child. With Shlomit expecting to give birth at the end of July and Tamar in October, Bracha will be living out of her suitcase while to-ing and fro-ing quite a bit this year... The **Richardsons** expect to move to whichever area of the city in which the Erez family settles.

The **Volynskys** (Felix and Katya) have undergone a lengthy period of illness from which they are finally emerging, and **Alan and Rose** have settled on September 4th for their wedding date. I will have the privilege and the pleasure of marrying them, following which they will hold a reception in Sunderland, England, where Alan serves.

We are seeking ways to reduce our costs and have decided to move to a much **smaller home**. We have found such in a nearby township and signed a contract for its eventual purchase. Presently we are engaged in efforts to sell our lovely home. This is a difficult step; especially for Bracha, who has never liked changes. Moving house at our age is quite a physical challenge. But it is a wise move and we seek the Lord's blessing.

Baruch's sermons may be heard, among other sites, on Sermon Audio. Click this link:

[Baruch's Sermons on Sermon Audio](#)



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