A RESCUE MISSION FROM LEGALISM TO GRACE IN NATLINO, UKRAINE

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Back in September of 2019, upon completing a DM2 Galatians 1-3 workshop with Mark Musser in Nikolaev in southern Ukraine, Vasya C and I went on a scouting trip to a farming community in Natalino, Ukraine, hoping to conduct a similar workshop there. Since Vasya has relatives in this community, we were invited to speak in their church. After introducing the book of Galatians, we were invited to come back in the winter to teach. Last week we finally did just that, and it was indeed an incredible time. Pastor Zhenya S from Baryshikva also joined us.

Workshop Location

In the Natalino area, there are three small churches in neighboring villages, but only one pastor. As such, the pastor is only able to visit these churches individually once a month or so. Not long ago, the churches began to succumb to the influences of legalism, in which parishioners were being taught to observe the Sabbath Day and the Law of Moses as the true spiritual way of life. Those who did not observe the Sabbath were subjected to criticism. The pastor knew something was wrong, but since he does not have a strong theological education, he could not successfully oppose the growing influences of legalism in the churches he was serving. As it turned out, the book of Galatians was the perfect antidote to the problems that were beginning to suffocate these three churches.

During the first day of the workshop there were many attempts to protect the legitimacy of using the Law of Moses in the church. We were thrown many provocative questions. However, on the last day it was quite clear that many had changed their minds about God's grace – true repentance! I approached one of the men who had been upholding the Law of Moses as the true Christian way of life and asked him his impression of the seminar. His answer pleased me very much. He said that Galatians was a good course and asked us to not leave them completely, but to come back again! When the time came for him to teach Galatians 3:1-5, he did a fine job as he had already changed his mind about the Law of Moses and its relation to salvation and sanctification. We started out with only ten people on the first day, but by the final day we had approximately 25.

The pastor was overjoyed that the seminar helped stop the penetration of legalism into the church, since now many of the people finally understood that the point of the Law was to show the dangers of sin, but it could not stop sin, save, or sanctify; only the grace of God through the coming Messiah could do that.

When we first visited in September, the people asked us to come back in the winter when there was no work in the fields. However, after the workshop they said we must come back as soon as possible. They said they would even be ready to stop their work in the fields to continue to study the Word of God with us. What a real example of rest and grace versus works and legalism.

More on Reverse

The pastor decided to continue teaching Galatians 4-6 in our absence. If God wills, we wish to return to Natalino at the end of April to teach the book of Hebrews. Please pray for these churches and for our future outreach to them.

Pastor Sasha of the churches in Natalino gave us this testimony, *"Praise God for these blessed days of instruction, as the seminar was without a doubt very useful for each one of us. Sound Bible doctrine (2 Tim. 4: 3) strengthens our faith and helps us to concentrate on Christ Himself. I think that for each of us this was a great opportunity to reconsider our relationship with God and think much more seriously about the greatness of God's love for us, as well as the greatness of His grace and our absolute insufficiency to achieve God's standards by our own strength. I had noticed that a lot of Pharisaical views had penetrated our churches, so this was a timely reflection on this theme. I really hope this is not the end of our studies with DM2. First, we will continue to study this theme with the materials you have presented to us. Secondly, we will try to put the acquired knowledge into practice. Thirdly, we look forward to your next visit. May God bless you and your families abundantly, and through you all people among whom you are called by the Lord to perform your service."*

"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." **Isaiah 55:11**

PRAISE AND PRAYER:

- We thank the Lord for the team of Bolivian and American teachers who recently returned from another successful workshop in Mexico.
- This week DM2 teams are heading to Sierra Leone, Liberia and the South Pacific. Two recent college graduates, Cody Hughes and Alex Musser, who have led numerous DM2 youth and college ministries in America, will be joining the Liberia teaching team. Bret Nazworth, along with a veteran Papua New Guinea missionary, are hoping to make contacts in the South Pacific in order to begin an outreach there. Pray for the safety and health of all team members and for the clear teaching of God's word to be multiplied.
- We are extremely grateful for native French speakers, Gaetan and Ivy Pilon, who graciously translated the DM2 Romans 1-8 curriculum into French. We are excited for their plans to teach this material in French on Sunday nights at their church in Quebec from February 9 to May 15.