



DECEMBER 2018 NEWSLETTER



The students also are involved in church planting in Riga, which makes the learning environment intensely practical.

LESSONS I BROUGHT HOME: It was another opportunity to see the work of Christ's church in a different part of the world. I remembered the importance of prayer for God's people as they face the challenges of serving Christ in a less-than-hospitable environment and of the importance of sound Biblical and theological training for the building up of the body of Christ.

Teaching Christian Ethics in a Very Secular Society

WHO: Dr. Michael Payne, pastor of Lebanon Presbyterian Church in Greenwood, Va.

WHERE: Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga, Latvia.

WHEN: November, 2018.

WHAT I TAUGHT: Biblical Ethics. The material focused on laying a Biblical and theological foundation for an ethical life. After surveying the contemporary crisis in ethics context and exploring its historical roots, we examined Christian ethics, rooted in Scripture and articulated in the Reformed faith.

HOW I TAUGHT OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: I met with several full-time students to discuss issues of importance to their work in church planting and the challenges they face in sharing the Gospel to a very secular society.

Prayer Requests

1. Praise for the teaching of Mark Jenkins on Pastoral Counseling and Mike McLaughlin on Church Planting in November in Bolivia, for Phil De Hart's teaching on Biblical Leadership in Indonesia, for Dr. Michael Payne's teaching on Christian Ethics in Latvia and for Cal Hoogendoorn's teaching on Living in Grace in Ukraine.
2. Praise for the sound decisions that were made at the Nov. 2 ITEM Board meeting.
3. Pray that God's people will provide generous financial support of ITEM in December so ITEM can expand the ministry in 2019.

How to Contribute

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Exploring the Roots of Our Family Tree in Christ

When did the tradition of the Christmas tree begin? Some historians say it started when Boniface, an 8th century missionary, cut down an oak tree worshipped by pagans. Immediately a fir tree sprang up from its roots, which Boniface pointed to as a sign of Christ's power over false pagan gods. But actually the first Christmas tree was Jesus' family tree.

For Christians, the people in Jesus' family tree are part of our spiritual family tree. His ancestors are ours, also. These genealogies tell us something about how God works through people to accomplish His plan.

God is not limited by people's limitations. God will either work through us or around us, but He will work. Like all of us, Jesus had two sides in His tree. Matthew begins his gospel with Joseph's family to show his Jewish audience that Jesus could legally claim to be the Messiah from King David's royal line. Luke's genealogy follows Mary's line. Luke begins with Adam, not Abraham, to show Jesus was the Savior of every ethnic group.

God is not limited by human differences. Matthew's genealogy lists lots of men, but the presence of four foreign women stand out—Rahab (Canaanite), Tamar (Canaanite), Ruth (Moabite), and Bathsheba (Hittite). The genealogy lists kings and commoners, well-knowns and unknowns, favorites, firstborns, fourth-borns such as Judah, eighth-borns like David and who knows Solomon's birth order, with all of David's wives.

God is not limited by human inabilities. Several times it seemed that the line of Jesus would disappear—Abraham was unable to have children at age 99 and Boaz was an older bachelor with no wife or children. But God gave Abraham a son in his old age and Boaz a family later in life. And then there's the impossibility of the virgin birth.

God is not limited by human depravity. God works despite and even through people's sin to fulfill His plan to redeem sinners. God begins with Adam, whose first rebellion plunged all mankind into sin. Scripture tells about Judah, who committed adultery with his deceased son's wife. God uses the prostitute Rahab, the jaded Jezebel of Jericho. He works through David's adultery with Bathsheba. There's wicked King Rehoboam, who split God's kingdom and King Manasseh, who sacrificed his son to an idol, and Abraham, who lied twice about his wife Sarah.

God works through our depravity, disabilities and differences to finish His plan of redemption for someone across the street or across the sea.