

## **2019 Opening Lecture**

Having seen the moral values of our nation decline and the violence and terrorism in the world increase, we can't help but ask ourselves the question, "Is Time Running Out?" The comfortable Christianity we enjoy that's traditionally been protected by our American freedoms may be tested sooner than we expect. Having solid faith – knowing what you believe and why you believe it is increasingly more necessary.

The title of our study this year is Building Foundation Faith . . . something that can only be done by knowing the truth of God's Word. It's been said, "Some books inform, some reform. The Bible transforms." That transformation from new believer to diligent disciple starts with the sure foundation, the Rock, our Lord Jesus Christ.

You remember the lyrics of Edward Mote, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." When you build, you start with a solid foundation.

We, for the most part, are Gentiles. The Apostle Paul wrote the books of Romans, First and Second Corinthians and

Galatians to predominantly Gentile churches. We can, and should, identify with their societies, their problems, their sins, and their churches because they were so much like we are. In other words, we need to apply Paul's instruction to ourselves, right now, if we're ever going to grow and build our faith.

Throughout our study this year, we're going to hear, "and such were some of you." The really poignant question we'll have to face up to as we read the various lists of sins given in Scripture is this – "Am I a used to be?" or should I recognize the fact that this is "what I still am."

The only way we humans can effectively change the evil bent of our sinful nature is to come to salvation through Jesus Christ and receive the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul was a transformed man. In Acts we learned how the Lord Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus and how Paul admitted he was the worst of sinners. Yet the Lord turned a pagan, Gentile world upside down through a transformed man totally committed to the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The book of Romans not only ministers to you, but enables you to effectively minister to others. Paul presents the

gospel in Romans and shows us how to minister today. We have as:

- ❖ The model for ministry – Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The power for ministry – the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The tools of ministry are God's Word and prayer.
- ❖ The purpose of ministry is to glorify God.
- ❖ The motive for ministry is love.
- ❖ The foundation for ministry is character and integrity.

If you want a two-part outline for Romans it's this: the first half of Romans is what God did for us; the last half is what we may do for God.

If you want a three-part outline: Romans 1-8 is faith; 8-11 is hope; 12-16 is love.

Of course, you could outline Romans by its themes.

Salvation for example:

- ❖ 1-3:20 the world needs salvation
- ❖ 3:21-4 the means of salvation
- ❖ 5-8 the result of salvation
- ❖ 9-11 the place of Jews in salvation
- ❖ 12-16 the responsibilities of salvation

Or using the theme of faith:

- ❖ Romans 1-3 demands it

- ❖ 4-5 declares it
- ❖ 6-8 defends it
- ❖ 9-11 declines it
- ❖ 12-15 demonstrates it

What I'm saying is that the book of Romans is so rich in application of truth that any way you slice it, we'll get down to where "the rubber meets the road" as Dr. J. Vernon McGee used to say.

There's a classroom setting in a Peanuts comic strip that shows the first day of the new school year and the students were told to write an essay about returning to class. In her essay, Lucy wrote, "Vacations are nice, but it's good to get back to school. There is nothing more satisfying or challenging than education, and I look forward to a year of expanding knowledge."

Needless to say, the teacher was pleased with Lucy and complimented her on her fine essay. In the final frame, Lucy leans over and whispers to Charlie Brown, "After a while, you learn what sells."

The temptation to say, "What sells," (that is to say what others want to hear regardless of whether it's true or not) is always with us. When we give into that temptation, what we

really sell is our integrity. Paul is a model and example of real Christian integrity for us. He can bend and adapt in his circumstances, but he never compromises the truth.

In the books of this year's study, Paul "tells it like it is" – truth reflected like a mirror that makes us look at and examine ourselves and our attitudes towards homosexuality, the place of Jews in Christianity, immorality, weaker brothers, snobbish legalism, lawsuits, spiritual gifts, giving money and doing it cheerfully. Scripture will rebuke and correct us, but the goal is always a knowledge of the truth that not only sets us free, but trains us in godliness and righteousness so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

Telling it like it is isn't always negative. It also includes positive truths:

Romans 8:1 "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." That's God's encouragement and the Holy Spirit's empowerment.

Romans 8:37-39 "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God." That's eternal security.

2 Corinthians 5:5 We are given the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. That's the principle of grace . . . the promise of God.

Galatians 5:22,23 The fruit of the Spirit in a Christian's life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's transforming power!

There are a lot of words Paul uses that we will build into our Christian vocabulary. Words like the difference between ungodliness (the sin of being against God) and unrighteousness (the sin against God's will).

Depravity – meaning man is not as bad as he can be, but as bad off as he can be.

Justification – the sovereign act of God whereby He declares a believing sinner righteous while still in his sinning state. It's an act of God, not a process of man. God declares us righteous. Our position is that of being "in Christ."

Grace – the unmerited favor of God. If there's one goal I would have for all of us in this study it would be to fully understand the concept of God's grace. You will never fully enjoy the freedom in Christ until you comprehend the difference between faith and works, grace and law. We'll also

learn about the two dangers of grace: failure to claim it, and the misuse/abuse of it.

We'll talk about God's sovereignty. As one old preacher said, "Two things I know. There is a God. I'm not Him." The issue of Israel in the sovereign plan of God couldn't be more timely in light of today's world events. God does have a plan and a future for His chosen people. Paul addresses that subject too.

Sometimes we think it's right on to say, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." In reality, it should be, "God said it, that settles it, I believe it." We have a faithful God!

Well, building our vocabulary is great, but what we store in our heads isn't effective unless we know how to share that knowledge with an unbeliever – witnessing, if you will. Perhaps some of you are already familiar with how to witness from the book of Romans – some call it the Roman Road using verses 3:23, 5:12, 6:23, 5:8, 10:9-13, 8:1. If you know it, you'll get a good review in lesson ten; if not, be ready for a great lesson in evangelism.

So, if Romans is going to tell us to use our heads to grasp the great facts of Christianity, then 1 Corinthians is going to tell us to put out our hands and grasp our privileges in Christ.

It may come as a shock to some, but becoming a Christian doesn't automatically furnish us with impeccable manners and suitable morals. In the Corinthian church factions had developed, society's morals were infiltrating, worship had degenerated into a selfish grabbing for the supernatural. Paul doesn't disown them as brothers and sisters in Christ, he takes them (and us) by the hand and goes over the old ground again, directing them how to effectively translate God's saving love into their love for one another. The Corinthian church was a troubled church, but we mustn't lose sight that there were those who were faithful and pure. Just like with our children, it's the troublesome ones who seem to need the most attention.

The letter we call First Corinthians had a purpose: to correct problems and answer questions. First, Paul rebuked them for sinful conditions of division and disorder in the church; then he replied to specific questions about marriage and divorce, liberty and license, women and worship, spiritual gifts, death and resurrection, and giving and receiving.

We'll get a look at what some call a carnal Christian – He is a Christian, but lacks spirituality (a babe in Christ), his focus is on the horizontal often resulting in jealousy/strife, and, in truth, he can resemble a non-Christian. They're recognized by



their – activity, attitudes, associations, and appetites. But every Christian has an obligation, whether he's a babe in Christ or what we'd call a "weaker brother." That obligation is – Grow UP!

While that growth is taking place, however, Christian love enables us to sacrifice the rights and freedoms we have in Christ, for the sake of another's spiritual growth. We're prone to judging one another – what they do or don't do – as the measure we use for their Christian/spiritual acceptance. "We don't dance, or drink or chew, and we don't go with girls who do." (That's an old legalistic saying you might have heard.)

When it comes to acceptance: God is a lot easier to live with than are most of His children. Since we're hard to please, we think God is. Truth is, if you're in the Son, in Christ, God is pleased with you. He is fully able to teach His children what they need to know: How?

1. By meeting our needs when we are helpless, He teaches us trust.
2. By making us wait for what we need or want, He teaches us patience.
3. By stretching us beyond the realm of the familiar, He teaches us vision.

4. By taking us through the consequences of wrong choices, He teaches us values.
5. By allowing us to fail and make terrible mistakes, He teaches us wisdom.
6. By sustaining pain and affliction, He teaches us humility.
7. By involving us in the lives of difficult people, He teaches us unselfishness. It's no secret what God is doing, He's conforming us to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In conforming us, God has also gifted us. We call them spiritual gifts. Paul has a lot of instruction to give us on that subject, not the least of which is the application of tolerance and love. We serve the same Lord, but we don't all have the same spiritual gifts. There is great privilege in Christ but there is responsibility too, especially in interpersonal relationships and the church body as a whole. First Corinthians helps us get it together.

We'll not only study that great chapter 13 describing love that we hear quoted so often at weddings, but we'll also get the great teaching from chapter 15 about the resurrection of the body and the rapture of the church. In First Corinthians 15 the emphasis is on the fact we'll be changed, while Paul wrote

in First Thessalonians chapter 4 with the emphasis on the order of events.

As we get into the book of Second Corinthians we'll find that it is a book that lifts our hearts to receive the comforts that are ours in Christ. Have you ever been personally attacked? Faced with defending yourself? Misunderstood? In this letter of Paul's we're reassured of God's presence and comfort in those times. Life without struggle is impossible / struggle without surrender is miserable. George Washington Carver speaking of the gracious lifestyle said, "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the surviving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong; because someday in life you will have been all of these."

The Corinthians had bucked Paul's authority, accused him of inconsistencies, impugned his motives, and questioned his credentials. He was now in the position of having to defend his leadership. Leadership is a demanding task. We often think of leadership as being high profile. But you're a leader in a variety of ways . . . as a parent, in your community involvement, in your job. Sometimes we do want to quit. But perseverance is what Paul models for us. We're going to appreciate what Paul

has to say as he points us to Jesus, the Someone who can and does understand all about us and the struggles we face in our daily lives.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh and he prayed for God to remove it. But God knew it was more important to keep Paul humble than it was to make him comfortable, so He allowed the thorn to stay. What does God use in our lives to keep us humble? Maybe an illness, a circumstance, or another person? One thing we know, God's grace is sufficient for everything we need.

Not one to shy away from confrontation, Paul addresses the issue of church discipline . . . something we see little of these days. But confrontation was accompanied by commendation, "you are ambassadors for Christ" and a challenge, "Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."

How do we do that? Am I a true Christian or a counterfeit? Has life changed since I professed Christ as personal Lord and Savior? How can we know? We know because:

**We have an inner witness**, God's spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. We have an

inner sense of identity with God as our Father. Our spirit cries out Abba Father. (Romans 8:16)

**We have inner peace** because we have been justified by faith. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

**We have an inner sense of destiny.** We are going to heaven when we die because of what Jesus did.

**We have an inner hunger** for what 2 Peter 2:2 calls “milk of the Word.” It’s a hunger to be fed, to know truth.

All this **inner change** in us also produces outward change as light overcomes darkness.

Second Corinthians is a very personal letter from Paul. He assures us that God knows how to balance our burdens, our blessings, our suffering and our triumphs. Life is like a prescription (I know you thought I was going to say “it’s like a box of chocolates”), but life is like a prescription: the individual ingredients may hurt us, but when properly blended by God, the Great Physician, they help us. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we may comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we

ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) We’ll learn a lot in Second Corinthians.

Well, what better way to end our study this year than in the book of Galatians.

This book of Galatians has done more than any other in the New Testament to free our Christian faith from the burden of salvation by works. You’re going to hear the words “grace” and “liberty” a lot this year. We need to remember that liberty is not freedom from law (that is recklessness) . . . but liberty is freedom within the law. The Law says do, grace says done!

Do you ever get mad? I’m not talking about the normal things in life that frustrate us, but righteous anger. You know we never unseat wrong until we become sufficiently angry to take action. In Galatians Paul tells us to stand on our feet in the liberty that Christ gives! When people get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others, either by putting or keeping them in their place. It’s called legalism.

Through Jesus, Paul learned that God was not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in a prescribed way, but a personal Savior who set us free to live a free life. It was a glorious experience and he set off to tell the

world about it. A few years later Paul learned that the leaders of the old school were trying to reintroduce the old ways back into the Galatian church, herding all the freedom-loving Christians back into the corral of religious rules and regulations. He was furious with those of the old guard for coming in with strong-arm religious tactics and intimidating Christians into giving up their free life in Jesus . . . and he was furious with Christians for caving into being intimidated. Galatians is the strongest argument that we are saved, kept and finally redeemed by grace without works of the law.

So we begin with Romans by standing in Christ (our position) and we'll end with Galatians where we take our stand for Christian freedom and liberty in God's grace. Like the illustration of the building in our brochure, we will build the assurance of salvation, the application of grace, the right attitude toward spiritual gifts and the anatomy of faith on Jesus Christ the solid foundation. Worship and fellowship complete the structure. This will be a wonderful and rewarding year for all of us!

Some of you may have been building up your faith through diligent Bible study for several years, while for others this is a new and challenging discipline for your life. The

weekly studies we've provided are for you like celery sticks at a buffet table . . . they're easy to pick up and grasp . . . (we've pre-cut the portions into daily bite size servings) . . . but he who takes it must eat it for himself. What nourishment you get from this study is what you will prayerfully and consistently put into it. Remember, in studying the Bible "The plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things."

In your lesson packet, you'll notice that the lessons are divided into five-day segments. This is to promote daily Bible study and should take about 10 to 15 minutes a day. There are content questions to move you through the text for the day, cross-reference Scriptures and some application questions for you to think about. You'll work the lessons at home, come back next week to a small group to discuss your answers and then we'll have a lecture over the same material.

I urge you to review the guidelines for our study as well as the list of memory verses. Those Scriptures we commit to memory become the solid basis for Building Foundation Faith.

One last thing, as our last slide shows, the lessons and lectures for this series are available on Dan Leppo's website [dictationsfromthespirit.com](http://dictationsfromthespirit.com). There are handouts available on the counter for those who wish to access them that way.



