

5 BUILDING ON FIRM FOUNDATIONS

REVISED CROSS-CULTURAL EDITION



TEACHING NEW BELIEVERS:
ROMANS and EPHESIANS

Trevor McIlwain

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Building On Firm Foundations: Volume 5: Teaching New Believers: Romans and Ephesians – Revised Edition

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Part 1



Preparations and Guidelines for
Teaching Phase 4

1

Continuing to Build and Develop the Church

Puffing and panting, the water buffalo strained forward as it dragged the rolls of newly platted bamboo walls into the clearing where we planned to erect our first house in the jungles of Palawan. Months earlier we had made up the plans for the house and ordered all the necessary materials, but the walls for our house were only just arriving. Nevertheless, now that we had the walls, we thought it would not be long before our house would be completed. How wrong we were! We eventually learned that seldom is anything done in a hurry in the Philippine jungle.

Weeks later the walls lay in the same spot where we had excitedly placed them on the day of their arrival. Why? Simple! You can't attach bamboo walls to a house that has only foundations and floor beams but as yet no wall supports. The necessary timber for completing the frame of the house had not yet been delivered. Before the bamboo walls could be put in place, the timber supports first had to be erected.

Building a house requires that each section be erected in logical progression. The foundations must be laid before the main timbers for the floor can be placed in position. The main timbers must be put in place before the walls and roof can be added. Trying to alter or rearrange this order causes confusion and hinders the completion of the building.

What is true of building a house is also true when building the Church – it must be done logically and progressively.

Building through the chronological teaching program

In Phase 1, Genesis to the ascension, we laid the foundations. The people learned that Christ is the only basis for the salvation of sinners.

During Phase 2, we reviewed the foundations. We went back over Genesis to the ascension in order to establish the new believers firmly in the assurance that Christ fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Deliverer. We emphasized that He satisfied all of God's righteous demands on their behalf. During this time we also added the necessary supports for the next logical

stage in our building program – by placing emphasis on the Holy Spirit as preparation for Acts, and by adding important Old Testament stories as background for the remainder of the New Testament.

At the end of Phase 2, everything was in readiness for the next logical step in our building program – to teach the story of what happened to the apostles and other believers following the ascension of Christ, as told in the book of Acts. Just as we taught the Old Testament as the necessary foundations and background for the New Testament, we taught Acts (Phase 3) as the introduction and foundation for the Epistles. Through teaching Acts, we built a bridge in the minds of our hearers between the Gospels and the Epistles. Therefore our hearers should now have a basic understanding of the geographical, historical, religious and political world in which the writers and the recipients of the Epistles lived and labored for the Lord. They should also know the story of how the Gospel, preached in the power of the Holy Spirit (especially through the Apostle Paul), spread from Jerusalem to Rome.

Now that we have completed teaching Acts, we are ready for the next step in our teaching and building program – Phase 4, Romans to Revelation. The further you go in teaching the Epistles, the more you will appreciate the benefits of having first laid the foundations and framework of truth for the Epistles, by teaching from the beginning of Genesis through to the end of the Acts of the Apostles.

Testimonies

As missionaries have begun teaching Phase 4, they have testified about the great advantages of having prepared the minds of their hearers to understand the Epistles by first teaching Phases 1, 2 and 3.

When Bob Kennell and George Walker taught the Epistles to the Bisorio people (in Papua New Guinea), George wrote:

“Because we first taught the Bisorios Phase 1 for evangelism, the foundations for understanding the Lord and their relationship to Him have been put in place. They understand that they were originally created in the image of God and that His purpose for them was to know, love and serve Him. They understand the fall and its effects on them personally. They know God’s character – His righteousness, holiness and justice, balanced with His love, mercy and provision of forgiveness through grace. Now as we teach through the Epistles, all of this foundational truth is continually being interwoven in God’s ongoing story. For instance when we speak of God wanting them to be conformed to the image of Christ, they know that God’s original intention has not changed – they were made to be like Him! They are increasingly understanding the Scripture to be one complete story. Praise Him!

“Because the Bisorios have a background in the Old Testament Scriptures, references in the Epistles to the Old Testament (e.g., Abraham in Romans 4; Adam in Romans 5; Israel and the Gentile world in Romans 9-11; the Law of Moses and the faith of Abraham in Galatians) do not create a problem. If we had endeavored to teach the Epistles without sufficient Old Testament background, the results would have been confusion in the people’s thinking and frustration in our teaching efforts.

“Teaching the entire book of Acts in Phase 3 was also of great value in preparation for teaching the Epistles. Not only did Acts lay the important background about the Apostle Paul and the developing Church, but also the background for all the Epistles

can only be understood through the perspective of the book of Acts. When teaching from the Epistles, I can easily review who the people were to whom Paul was writing – the background has already been laid.”

Mike Mikolavich, when working among the Lamogais of West New Britain, reported:

“Because of Phases 1, 2 and 3, the believers among the Lamogai people know beyond a doubt that their sins are washed away and that they are in Him. As we teach from the Epistles, we don’t have to spend time establishing these truths.

“The Lamogai believers have a profound admiration for the Apostle Paul because they saw the testimony of his life through the book of Acts. Day after day, year after year, Paul continued to walk with God. He did not grow lazy nor give up nor turn away. Through Paul’s life and the lives of others, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Peter and Stephen, they have already seen that the power to live victoriously comes by faith and dependence on the Holy Spirit. The doctrines of the Epistles are illustrated so wonderfully in these lives. As we teach the Epistles, doctrinal truth will come alive because of this wealth of background knowledge and biblical illustrations.”

The development of the tribal church

Following the conversion of believers through the presentation of the Gospel in Phase 1, we began our program of establishing and developing the tribal church. This development of the local church has gone hand in hand with the chronological teaching we have given from the Scriptures in Phases 1, 2 and 3, and it will continue in Phase 4 as an essential part of our work.

See chart, *“Church Development and the Chronological Teaching Program,”* on page 6.

Church Development and the Chronological Teaching Program	
Stage of the Chronological Teaching Program	Church Development
Before Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new believers began to meet separately from unbelievers as a called-out assembly of the Lord Jesus Christ.
During Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new church learned to worship through prayer and singing hymns, particularly their own compositions. • All believers learned that it was important to be involved in every aspect of the work and function of the church. • All believers were trained in evangelism.
During Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The believers were baptized. • The believers began to observe the Lord’s Supper. • The believers were introduced to the concept of church elders and deacons.
During Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The believers will be strengthened in meaningful worship of the Lord. • The believers will be encouraged to be involved in every aspect of the work and function of the church. • The believers will continue to be guided in evangelism. • The church will assume the responsibility of applying the Word of God to all situations that arise in the church. • Faithful men will be trained and will take over the responsibility of teaching others how to teach new believers. • Qualified men will be entrusted with the job of teaching sections of the Epistles, and later whole Epistles to the church. • Elders will be appointed. • Deacons will be appointed.

Make the Church responsible

When the infant tribal church faces problems, it is very easy for the missionary to fall into the trap of being a spiritual policeman or judge. Take definite steps to avoid this pitfall.

Sometimes in Palawan, the believers, wishing to escape the embarrassment of having to confront an offending church member with the truth, tried to get me to act as the authority in the church. They wanted me to command the person to either come into line or leave the fellowship of believers.

On one occasion a leader of a church was sent by his fellow leaders to obtain my assistance. This representative from the church requested that I write a letter to a church member who refused to repent after committing adultery. He wanted me to tell the offender that he was to be disciplined by the church.

I felt that writing an authoritative letter of discipline was beyond my God-given jurisdiction. I said to this church leader, “Brother, you don’t need a letter from me telling you what to do and declaring that that man must, unless he truly repents, be disciplined by the church. You already have a letter which gives you and the church the authority to discipline people like him.”

Looking at me in obvious confusion, he said, “No, I don’t. I don’t have any letter regarding this matter.”

I answered, “Oh yes, you do! You have God’s Word! That is God’s letter to you telling what you and the church must do. You don’t need any letter from me to give you authority. God’s Word is your authority.”

Through the teaching of the Epistles, the believers will be taught God’s answers to their individual needs and the corporate needs of the church. Therefore the further you progress in Phase 4, the more responsibility you should place on the believers to deal with problems that affect them as a church. Rather than you continuing to take the initiative in solving their problems and being responsible to see that the Word of God is obeyed, you should present those matters that need to be dealt with to the church. Make it clear to them that it is their duty as a church to deal with problems in obedience to the Word of God.

As situations arise, and as you make the church accountable for dealing with them, you are providing opportunities for faithful men to develop their gift of leadership – guiding God’s children according to the truth.

Teaching faithful men to teach others

Earlier in this series I recommended that you disciple all believers in the local church during Phases 2 and 3. As you develop the church during Phase 4, you personally should slowly move toward discipling the men who have begun to evidence that they are faithful men who have the gift of teaching (2 Timothy 2:2). You need to give these men more and more attention, with the purpose of handing over to them the work of teaching and discipling other believers.

Of course, if at this stage there are not enough men who are capable of this vital work, then you need to continue in your efforts to disciple all believers until qualified men are available. However once there are faithful men in the church with an ability to teach – the further you move into Phase 4 – the more responsibility you should entrust to them in teaching and discipling the other believers in the church.

I would like to emphasize that, although these developing leaders should be invited to meet with you at separate times from the regular church services, others should feel free to attend. If you limit these times to only those who have already evidenced faithfulness, you may be closing the door to other men who in a very short time may prove that they too are faithful ones whom the Lord is planning to use. So in addition to inviting the developing leaders to meet with you, you may also wish to invite others. Although some may not yet have proven themselves sufficiently able or faithful to be given responsibility to assist in the teaching program, they are beginning to evidence a sincere desire to be used of the Lord.

Before you invite the developing leaders to meet, explain to the church your purpose for beginning these classes, your reasons for selecting particular men, and the type of training you will be giving them. Furthermore make it clear to all the believers that they are welcome to attend any of the sessions in order to listen and observe.

Ata Discipleship Manual

This church planting resource is an English translation of the manual that the Ata Bible teachers in Papua New Guinea use to disciple new teachers. It is in essence a Bible teacher training manual, and was developed by four Ata Bible teachers, along with NTM missionary, Paul McIlwain.

This is a practical manual written by tribal Bible teachers for use when discipling trainee teachers. The first section deals with instructions for the Bible teachers such as “How we choose disciples” and “How we evaluate and train them as teachers.” The second section presents instructions for the Bible teachers to present to the teacher trainees, such as “Instructions about the way to study” and “Instructions about the way to teach.”

The Ata Discipleship Manual is available on CD. The CD has both Word and .PDF formats.

Available through:

New Tribes Mission Bookstore
1000 East First St., Sanford, FL 32771
Phone: 1-800-321-5375
E-mail: books@ntm.org
Cost: \$3.95, plus shipping

Faithful men teaching new believers

New believers who are added to the church during Phase 4 will need to be taught the previous phases. They will be greatly disadvantaged unless they are taught all phases in their correct order. For example unless taught Phase 2, they will lack important background knowledge concerning the Holy Spirit. Likewise unless taught Phase 3, the new believers will not know what happened following the ascension of Christ. They will not know of the fulfillment of the promises concerning the Holy Spirit and of the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles through the ministry of Paul. Therefore it will be difficult for them to understand by whom and to whom the Epistles were written. What has been taught in Phases 2 and 3 is vital for understanding the teaching of Phase 4.

I am not suggesting that those saved during Phase 4 should be excluded from the normal teaching times of the church. Regardless of what Phase is being taught at the time of their conversion, they should

be included in all church meetings. But I am recommending that time should also be given to teach these newer believers carefully, yet as quickly as possible, through Phases 2 and 3.

This task of teaching new believers should be assigned to faithful men. Just as you trained men in evangelism and then handed over to them the responsibility of evangelizing and teaching others to teach Phase 1, you now need to prepare them to teach Phases 2 and 3 and to disciple new believers.

As these faithful men are ready, they should take on the full responsibility for not only teaching Phases 2 and 3 to the new believers and nurturing them in the faith, but also teaching other maturing believers how to teach Phases 2 and 3 and disciple new believers. Men, women, teenagers and even children, if carefully instructed, can participate in teaching Phases 2 and 3 to new believers. The men you are discipling should teach and disciple their pupils just as you taught and disciplined them.

Even after their pupils have gained a reasonable degree of competency in teaching, and can be given the responsibility of teaching new believers, the faithful men who trained them should continue to keep in close contact with both the new teachers and their pupils. If the new teachers need help to answer the new converts' questions or give them spiritual guidance, they should ask advice from the faithful men who taught them and are overseeing their work. The faithful men in turn should come to you with any questions or problems they cannot handle.

If there is a group of new believers, they can be taught together in daily classes by older believers. If there are only one or two new converts, it would probably be more convenient for them to be taught on a one-to-one basis. If possible, someone of the same sex and in the same age bracket as the new convert should teach them. For example, if the convert is an elderly lady, the men in charge of the teaching program could give the task of teaching her to a couple of elderly Christian ladies. Likewise, if the new believer is a teenager, the task may be allotted to teenagers.

Teaching may be done at any time and in any place – whenever and wherever it is most convenient for the teachers and the students. The teachers should use the printed lessons you prepared on Phases 2 and 3. The teachers should guide the new converts through these lessons, adding any supplementary teaching or explanations they consider necessary, answering the new believers' questions and nurturing and guiding them in their walk with the Lord.

Faithful men teaching Phase 4

In addition to giving faithful men the opportunity to gain experience by teaching Phases 2 and 3 to new believers, you should also give them the opportunity to teach Phase 4.

As soon as you begin Phase 4, these developing teachers can participate in the following ways:

- Reading the Scripture portions during the lesson.
- Asking the review questions at the beginning of a lesson and giving any necessary clarification of the answers. (One man could handle the review, or several could share the responsibility.)
- Asking the questions at the close of a lesson and giving any further explanations required. (This responsibility too could be entrusted to one man or shared among several men.)

- Giving a cultural or biblical illustration during the lesson. (Different men may be given this responsibility at various stages during a lesson.)

As you progress in Phase 4 and the tribal teachers develop in their abilities, they can be entrusted with:

- Teaching part of a lesson, with you as the main teacher.
- Team teaching a lesson with other tribal men.
- Teaching a complete lesson.

I would encourage you to train the men to teach as a team. This type of instruction, if maintained in the church, will be less burdensome to the tribal teachers for they will not have the full responsibility for any one session. In addition team teaching will encourage closer fellowship and dependence on one another as church leaders. Furthermore under this system of teaching where each man is only required to concentrate on expounding a small section of Scripture, the teaching is likely to be clearer and more profound.

When team teaching, one or two men who are not yet as proficient as others in their teaching ability may begin by asking the introductory review questions covering the previous lesson. Whether one or more men ask the questions will depend on how many questions are to be asked. The introductory portion of the new lesson can then be entrusted to another man. Yet another may give a cultural illustration at the appropriate time. The remainder of the lesson and the closing questions can be allotted to as many teachers as seems practical.

Many things which will be taught in the earlier stages of Phase 4 will be completely new to all the believers, including the men whom you are training to assist in teaching. Therefore these men should not be involved in teaching part of a lesson or team teaching during the early stages of Phase 4. The new truths being taught are basic and vital to the life of the individual believer and to the growth and development of the church. Until the men have had opportunity to learn and know the reality of these truths in their own lives, it would be unwise for you to commit to them the great responsibility of teaching these truths. You should be the one who introduces and teaches the basic doctrinal truths to the church.

However when a particular doctrine recurs later in the book you are teaching, or in another book which you teach at a later date, you may then feel confident to teach that section of the lesson to your class of faithful men and allow them to teach it to the church.

For example because Romans is the first book you will teach in Phase 4, it would be unwise to entrust the teaching of any part of Romans 6-8 to the developing teachers. In the future however when you are preparing to teach the same truths from Galatians (for example compare Romans 8:14-17 with Galatians 4:4-7), then you may prepare the teachers and give them the opportunity to teach these truths once again to the church.

Another example is teaching on the qualifications of elders. After you teach this as new information from 1 Timothy, you may entrust the faithful men to teach the same truths from Titus (compare 1 Timothy 3:1-7 with Titus 1:6-8).