

# Youth Teaching Resources

February 26, 2023



## Season of Epiphany: What Does God Expect?

February 5, 2023—Matthew 5:13-20—“Demanding Action”

February 12, 2023—Matthew 5:21-37—“Getting Serious”

February 19, 2023—Matthew 17:1-19—“Keeping Secrets”

## Season of Lent: What Faith Produces

February 26, 2023—Romans 5:12-19—“Unearned Righteousness”

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# Unearned Righteousness

Romans 5:12-19

## YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Gathering

As the group begins to gather, take a few moments to reflect on last week's challenge. After everyone has shared, continue with today's lesson.

### Opening Activity

Show the clip "Penny's Christmas gift to Sheldon" from *The Big Bang Theory*, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlhHTdDqoBc>.

- What evidence do you see that Sheldon struggles to accept a free gift from Penny?
- Why do you think it is so hard for him to receive Penny's gift without feeling he needs to reciprocate?
- Are there ever times when we struggle to receive gifts without feeling we need to do something to deserve it?

### Listening to the Scripture

Read Romans 5:12-19 aloud.

- What words or phrases stand out to you? Why?
- In a sentence or less, how would you define "sin?"
- In a sentence or less, how would you define the word "righteousness?"
- Do you ever find yourself striving to be "good enough?" What does such striving look like in your life? What is the result of such striving?
- What does it mean for something to be given as a "free gift?"
- If our being made righteous is a free gift of God's grace, who is the primary actor? Who essentially does all the work? What are the implications of this for your life?

If the group would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

- All of us mess up and fall short, but we don't often like to name our shortcomings to one another, let alone, God. Why do you think we are so resistant to naming our sins and shortcomings?
- In what ways is it truly beneficial to name our sins and shortcomings? (Spiritually, but perhaps also physically, socially, and mentally).

## Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If the group is up for a challenge, consider discussing what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*:

- Were a literal Adam and Eve responsible for human sin?

## Application

Before closing, introduce this week's challenge.

*Repentance is all about “turning around” and choosing to live differently; choosing to receive God’s gift of grace, freely extended to us. During this season of Lent, what changes might you choose to make in your life?*

Close with prayer.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Romans, the book**—The book of Romans was probably written from Corinth during Paul’s third missionary journey, around 57-58 CE (Acts 20:1-3, assuming that his time in Greece was spent at Corinth). It is addressed to Christian believers in Rome, most of whom were Gentiles. Paul had expressed a hope that he could travel as far as Spain in his efforts to spread the gospel, and he would need a base of operations further to the west. Paul did not establish the church in Rome and had not visited it before. The letter, then, was not so much to provide instruction or deal with problems, as in most of his other letters. Rather, he seems to be concerned with a clear explication of his theology, perhaps hoping that the Romans would give him a warm reception when he arrived.

The lengthy letter to the Romans is widely regarded as Paul’s most mature expression of his faith and theology. The book makes considerable use of ancient rhetorical methods, including frequent repetitions of thought from slightly different angles.

Much of the book deals with issues related to Paul’s understanding of sin, grace, and salvation. He is particularly concerned with the concept of justification by faith and how we should understand it.

**Paul, expanded**—Paul’s discussion of Adam and Eve—literally interpreted—has led to the development of divergent doctrinal beliefs with broad implications. The 4th-5th century theologian Augustine called upon Paul’s arguments in supporting the doctrine of “original sin,” interpreted so strictly that even infants were thought to be lost sinners who were doomed to hell if not baptized. Many denominations continue to practice infant baptism today, not only as a sign of the baby’s introduction to the Christian family, but because of a belief that infant baptism (when understood as a sacrament) absolves original sin. This practice is difficult to defend from scripture.

James D. G. Dunn put it this way: “Paul could be said to hold a doctrine of *original sin*, in the sense that from the beginning everyone has been under the power of sin with death as the consequence, but not a doctrine of *original guilt*, since individuals are only held responsible for deliberate acts of defiance against God and his law.” (*Romans 1–8*, vol. 38A of Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], 291.)

**Sin, and Lent**—The church season of Lent is designed to make us more conscious of ways in which we have fallen short of God’s ideal, and lead us to repent. We can profit from spending time reflecting upon the sins that have so easily ensnared us during the past year. Then, we can spend equal time reflecting upon the grace of God that forgives—and gives power to overcome.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Structure**—The structure of the Greek sentences making up this passage are quite complex, made up of a long series of comparative statements. Dale Moody saw it as a hymn in three stanzas, each containing three or four comparative statements (“Romans,” *Broadman Bible Commentary* [Broadman Press, 1970], 195). A more likely view is outlined by C. E. B. Cranfield (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 Vol. [T. & T. Clark, 1980]), and followed by Dan Via (“Romans,” in the *Mercer Commentary on the Bible* [Mercer University Press, 1995], and others. The governing comparison begins with v. 12 (as sin came through Adam. . .), but the second member of the comparison does not appear until v. 18b (. . . justification came through Christ). In between, vv. 13-17 are sort of an extended rhetorical parenthesis, and v. 18a repeats the thought of v. 12, since the reader has probably forgotten it. Although the lectionary text stops with v. 19, the literary unit extends through v. 21.

**Grammar matters**—As evidence that Paul was not teaching universalism despite his claim that death for all came through Adam but life for all through Christ, Dan Via has noted that when Paul speaks of human involvement with the sinful legacy of Adam, he uses the aorist tense and the indicative mood to indicate factuality (vv. 15a, 17a, 19a, 21a). When he speaks of the effect of Christ’s free gift, however, he uses the future tense or subjunctive mood to indicate possibility (vv. 17b, 19b, 21b). The one exception is v. 15b, where he uses the aorist to say that grace has already abounded (“Romans,” in the *Mercer Commentary on the Bible* [Mercer University Press, 1995], 1145-46).

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Were a literal Adam and Eve responsible for human sin?

The creation story in Gen. 2:4b-25 does not use proper names for the two humans: they are called “a man” (*’adam*) or “the man” and “a woman” (*’ishah*) or “the woman.” Only in chapter four is “Adam” used as a proper name. Previously, he is said to have named the woman “Eve” (*havvah*) “because she was the mother of all living”—*havvah* means “life.”

Adam’s name literally means “man” in a generic sense, or “humankind.” The English name “Eve,” as noted above, is from the Hebrew *havvah*, which means “life.” Both “human” and “life” appear to be intentionally symbolic, rather than personal names.

Readers may be surprised to know that, except for brief mentions in two genealogical lists (Gen. 5:1, 3, 4, 5 and 1 Chr. 1:1), Adam is never again mentioned in the Old Testament (a geographical place called “Adam” is mentioned in Josh. 3:16 and Hos. 6:7). This is a clear indication that the stories of Adam and Eve played little or no role in Israel’s theology, which focused primarily on God’s covenant with Abraham’s descendants, with special and frequent attention given to the deliverance events and covenants with Israel at the heart of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Sin abounds in the Old Testament, but neither the narrators of Israel’s history nor the prophets—thought to be in direct communication with God—ever blamed it on Adam. Israel’s persistent rebellion was recognized as the result of personal choices made by individuals and the nation as a whole—not as a sinful nature inherited from the earliest ancestors.

The notion of Adam as responsible for human sin did not receive prominence until the New Testament period and beyond. It figured prominently in the apocryphal book of 2 Esdras, a largely apocalyptic work. While ascribing sin to Adam, however, the book acknowledged that all are responsible for their own sin: “O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants” (2 Esdras 7:118[48]). Esdras, which was written in the late first and into the second century CE, is a composite work that contains elements of both Jewish and Christian teaching. It would have been written after Paul’s writings, however, so it could not have influenced him.

Jewish teaching of Paul’s day had little to say about Adam, but it followed the Old Testament testimony that one could in fact live a righteous life that pleased God through following the Torah and putting his or her faith in God. Why should God continue to send prophets calling for repentance and a return to God if such a thing was impossible? Old Testament heroes like Noah (Gen. 6:9), Abraham (Gen. 15:6), Caleb (Num. 14:24), and King Josiah (1 Kgs. 22:2) were described as righteous. Job was memorably described as a man who “was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Although the Pharisees are routinely portrayed negatively in the New Testament, they were consciously dedicated to keeping the law and living what they believed were righteous lives.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

Jesus charged the Pharisees with missing the mark by focusing on ritual purity rather than caring for others. He called them to repent, but did not suggest that they could not do better.

None of Jesus' recorded teachings mention Adam or imply that humans inherit sin. If Paul did not originate the idea that Adam and Eve doomed humans to an inherited, "original" sin, he was the one who popularized it. In service to rhetoric as much as theology, Paul took an ancient story largely ignored within Judaism and turned it into a rhetorical hinge upon which his arguments about sin and salvation turned: all died through Adam, but all can live through Christ. Paul's use of the text served a purpose as an illustration of the need for sin and redemption, but we need not follow him in using that as the core truth around which theology is shaped.