

# GROUP LEADER GUIDE

## The Cloud: Irenaeus of Lyons

### Romans 5:18-19



#### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- September 6- Gather (Women)
- September 6- CU Football Tailgate (All church)
- September 13- Chilli Cook Off (Men)

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

#### SERMON NOTES

History is often shaped by single individuals—decisive leaders whose actions alter the course of nations:

- Winston Churchill
- Martin Luther
- Julius Caesar
- George Washington

But Scripture tells us that all of human history has been shaped by the actions of just two men. One brought sin, death, and condemnation to all. The other brought righteousness, life, and justification. In Romans 5, Paul shows us that everything about our eternity hinges on whether we belong to Adam or to Christ.

#### Scripture Exegesis: Romans 5:18-19

**18** Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. **19** For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

In Romans 5:12–21, Paul highlights the Adam–Christ comparison. Adam, as humanity's head, plunged the world into sin and death. Christ, as the new Adam, brings justification and life. Verses 18–19 are the climax, where Paul makes the parallel crystal clear.

- "One trespass" – Adam's sin in the Garden. Paul sees it not as a private act but as the decisive turning point that brought universal guilt and death to all of humanity. He is the root of the tree and all his offspring are the branches.
- "Led to condemnation for all men" – Humanity's solidarity with Adam brings universal guilt. His act had corporate consequences; all are condemned in him.
- "One act of righteousness" – Christ's obedience in his life, his obedience to the commands of God, culminating in a sacrificial death to pay the penalty for sin at the cross, brings salvation. Jesus' single, decisive act stands against Adam's single, decisive act.

- “Leads to justification and life” – Justification here is not merely legal acquittal but justification that results in life (resurrection, reconciliation, eternal life).
- “By the one man’s disobedience . . . the many were made sinners” – Adam’s sin constituted or “appointed” humanity as sinners. It’s not just imitation; it’s participation in Adam’s fallen condition.
- “By the one man’s obedience . . . the many will be made righteous” – Christ’s obedience constitutes believers as righteous. Again, this is not moral improvement but a new status and identity in union with him.

The verses have a clear parallelism:

**\*\*Adam’s act → Condemnation → Many made sinners**

**\*\*Christ’s act → Justification → Many made righteous**

This is the doctrine of federal headship: two humanities, two representatives, two outcomes. It also highlights the doctrine of imputation (what one individual does is credited to another). **STORY:** Pvt Manly at bootcamp.

Paul lays before us two representatives: **Adam and Christ**. Adam’s disobedience drags us into sin and death, but Christ’s obedience brings justification and life. This contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam became a pillar of Christian teaching. But in the second century, this truth was under attack. False teachers were denying that Christ truly became human, saying salvation came not through his obedience in the flesh but through secret knowledge. If they were right, then Romans 5 collapses—there would be no true obedience to counter Adam’s disobedience, no real righteousness to cover our sin. This ideology was called Gnosticism. And it was growing.

It was in that critical moment that God raised up a pastor and theologian named Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus took Paul’s teaching here in Romans 5 and articulated it in what he called the ‘recapitulation’ of Christ—Christ retracing Adam’s steps, living in perfect obedience where Adam failed, and in doing so, remaking humanity. In other words, he showed that the gospel Paul preached in Romans 5 was still the gospel the church needed in his day. And it’s the gospel we need now.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Irenaeus was born around AD 130, most likely in Smyrna (modern-day Turkey), a prominent city in Asia Minor. He grew up in a Christian family, and providentially, he was closely connected to the apostolic tradition. As a youth, Irenaeus sat under the teaching of Polycarp of Smyrna, who himself had been a disciple of the Apostle John. This direct line of teaching gave Irenaeus an invaluable connection to the apostolic witness and would later become central to his theological defense of the Christian faith.

Unlike some early church fathers, Irenaeus did not pursue speculative theology detached from Scripture. His entire theological framework was shaped by the conviction that the faith handed down by the apostles was sufficient, authoritative, and universal. By the mid-second century, Irenaeus migrated westward to Gaul (modern-day France), eventually settling in the bustling city of Lugdunum (Lyons). There, he served as a presbyter under Bishop Pothinus. When Pothinus was martyred during severe persecutions in AD 177, Irenaeus was appointed as the new bishop of Lyons, a position he held for the remainder of his life.

Irenaeus’ most enduring contributions to the Christian faith came through his pastoral leadership and theological writings, especially his refutation of heresies and his development of a Christ-centered theology of salvation history. The second century saw the rise of Gnosticism, a complex and dangerous heresy. Gnostic teachers claimed that salvation came not through Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection, but through secret knowledge (gnosis) available only to a spiritual elite. They rejected the goodness of creation, despised the human body, and taught that the material world was the product of a lesser deity (the “demiurge”), not the one true God.

Irenaeus recognized that Gnosticism struck at the heart of the gospel—it denied the incarnation, undermined the authority of Scripture, and distorted the story of redemption. His monumental work, *Against Heresies*, written around AD 180, systematically dismantled Gnostic teachings. He exposed their internal contradictions, mocked their endless mythologies, and contrasted them with the simple, clear faith handed down by the apostles. For Irenaeus, the test of true Christianity was not secret knowledge but the rule of faith—the core apostolic teaching preserved in the church’s proclamation and Scripture. This commitment to the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) made him one of the most important defenders of orthodoxy in the early church.

Irenaeus argued that the authentic faith could be verified through the apostolic succession of bishops, especially in churches founded by the apostles themselves. This emphasis was not about ecclesiastical power but about continuity of teaching. He wanted believers to know that the gospel preached in the churches across the Roman Empire was one and the same (i.e. the message of the apostles). In this way, Irenaeus helped solidify the principle of catholicity (universality) and the early sense of canon, pointing Christians back to the Scriptures as the deposit of truth.

One of Irenaeus’ greatest theological insights was his doctrine of recapitulation. He taught that Jesus Christ, as the new Adam, retraced and redeemed the steps of humanity. Where Adam disobeyed, Christ obeyed. Where humanity fell into sin and death, Christ entered, lived faithfully, and brought life. In Christ, human nature was “summed up” (recapitulated) and restored. This vision of salvation was cosmic in scope: Christ was not only saving souls but redeeming the whole created order. In contrast to the Gnostics, Irenaeus affirmed the goodness of creation and the hope of its restoration. This emphasis laid important groundwork for later Christian theology on the incarnation, atonement, and eschatology.

Irenaeus served his flock in Lyons during times of intense persecution under the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. He comforted the martyrs, preserved their testimonies, and exhorted believers to endure faithfully. His pastoral concern was not abstract but practical, strengthening ordinary Christians to hold fast to Christ in the face of suffering.

Precise details about Irenaeus’ death are uncertain. Later tradition, recorded by Jerome and others, claims he was martyred around AD 202 during the persecution under Emperor Septimius Severus. However, earlier records are silent, and some historians believe he may have died peacefully in old age. Regardless, his life was marked by courageous faith and unwavering devotion to Christ.

Elements of Irenaeus' legacy include:

- **Theological Clarity:** He helped define and defend core doctrines of the faith, ensuring the gospel message was not lost amid heretical distortions.
- **Scriptural Authority:** His appeal to Scripture and the apostolic rule of faith strengthened the church’s confidence in the reliability of the biblical canon.
- **Christ-Centered Vision:** His theology of recapitulation emphasized the centrality of Christ in God’s redemptive plan, influencing later thinkers such as Athanasius and Augustine.
- **Pastoral Example:** As bishop, he modeled how theological depth and pastoral care belong together. He was not an ivory-tower theologian but a shepherd guarding his flock from wolves.
- **Church Unity:** Irenaeus emphasized unity, showing that the church’s strength lay in its shared apostolic foundation

Today, Irenaeus is often remembered as the “Father of Christian Theology” because he developed a positive, systematic articulation of the faith.

## Close:

I want to close by emphasizing Romans 5 and the doctrine Irenaeus emphasized.

Who are you found in today? Are you in Adam or Christ?

You were born into Adam, but you must be born-again into Christ. You must put your faith in Jesus. You must trust Him. By doing so, you are transferred into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14). You are credited with His righteousness and your sins are atoned for by His death. You are now in Christ. You are saved, forgiven, and reconciled.

Put your faith in Jesus. He is our hope. He came for us. He was sent to rescue those born into Adam so that we would not die in Adam (because all in Adam die eternally 1 Corinthians 15). Call upon Him and be saved.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**
  - Read Romans 5:12-21 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
  - Additional Scripture
    - 1 Corinthians 15:42-49
    - Jude 3
- **DISCUSS**

### Personal Reflection on Federal Headship

1. In Romans 5:18–19, Paul contrasts Adam's trespass with Christ's obedience. How would you explain this "two representatives" idea (federal headship) to someone new in the faith? Was this the first time you have heard of this idea?

2. What does it mean that Adam's sin brought *condemnation* for all, while Christ's obedience brings *justification and life* for many? Have you heard of people struggling with the concept of being punished for Adam's sin?
3. Why do you think Paul emphasizes that we are not just imitators of Adam's sin but *participants* in it? How does this deepen your view of human sinfulness?
4. Conversely, why is it good news that we are not just imitators of Christ's obedience, but actually *counted righteous* in Him? How does that affect your assurance as a Christian?

### Learning from Irenaeus of Lyons

5. Irenaeus taught the doctrine of "recapitulation"—that Christ retraced Adam's steps in obedience where Adam failed. How does this enrich your understanding of Jesus' earthly life and ministry?
6. The Gnostics denied that Christ truly became human. Why is the humanity of Christ essential for the gospel? What is lost if Jesus wasn't fully human?

### Application for Today

7. What does it mean for you personally to be "in Christ"? How can we as a group encourage one another to live out our new identity in Him?



- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT**
  - How are you making yourself known at church this week?
  - How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
  - How are you making Christ known this week?
- **PRAYER**
  - Pray over any request from your group members.
  - Pray for our team: Laurie Diccico
  - Pray for our replanters: Christ's Fellowship
  - Pray for our short-term teams:
    - Rome Team departing on November 15, 2025
    - Nashville Team departing on November 17, 2025

- **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
  - The Wilsons
  - The Grays
  - The Starks
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>