BIBLE CONNECTIONS WITH JOSEPH

Romans 5–8: Free in Christ

A working companion for Romans 5–8, read in order, start to finish · Bible Connections with Joseph

Romans 5 through 8 is four chapters with one line of thought. Most of us have only ever met these chapters in pieces. For example, chapter 8 read at a funeral (nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God," 8:39), chapter 7 quoted as an excuse ("I do not do the good I want," 7:19), chapter 6 preached at a baptism ("buried with Him through baptism," 6:4). In contrast, if you read them in order, they hold the key to how we can live free in Christ.

> Before you start: have your Bible open. Don't worry about the version right now. If you don't know where to start, ESV, NASB, CSB, NKJV, and NIV are all good choices. If you don't have a Bible, there are free apps for your phone that work great. The short quotes on this sheet are from the Berean Standard Bible, so your wording may differ a little; the verse references are the same.

Here is what each chapter says, in a line or two each, so you can see where Paul is going before you start. Chapter 5: you are declared right with God, what the Bible calls being justified. God, as judge, pardons you and counts you righteous because of what Christ did, not anything you did, and you receive it by trusting him (5:1, 5:8). Chapter 6: you are set free from sin's ownership; Paul pictures sin as a master that used to own you and give the orders. Chapter 7: the struggle with sin, one of the most debated chapters in the letter (more in Step 4). Chapter 8: there is no condemnation, and you are God's child. We end this study at chapter 8 on purpose, so the struggle of chapter 7 is followed by its answer.

The six numbered headings below are my bridge method: six steps that take you from the Bible's world into yours. You are learning Romans here, and you are also learning the steps, so you can use them on any passage. You can take one step a night.

1 · Read It — the passage and what's around it

Read Romans 5 through 8 in one sitting, out loud if you can. Twenty minutes is enough, and Paul's point comes through when you read it whole.

Here is where these chapters sit in the letter. Romans is Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Paul starts the letter by showing that everyone, Jew and Gentile (non-Jewish) alike, has sinned, and that God declares people right with him through faith in Jesus Christ. This study focuses on chapters 5 through 8, where Paul shows what life looks like for someone God has declared right. They get to the heart of how we live free in Christ. They open on the verdict, "since we have been justified through faith" (5:1), close on the promise that nothing can separate us from God's love (8:39), and each of the four closes with a verse naming Christ as "our Lord" (5:21, 6:23, 7:25, 8:39).

Start with what the text says, before what it means. Romans 8:1 opens with a word most of us read past: therefore. Therefore means the conclusion rests on what Paul has just said. At the very least it reaches back to the end of chapter 7, where Paul cries out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" and then answers, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24–25). Chapter 8 opens by telling you what that rescue means. And the word "condemnation" in 8:1 takes you back further, to chapter 5, the only other place Paul uses the Greek word behind "condemnation" (5:16, 5:18). Chapter 8 stands on chapters 5 through 7, which is why you read all four, in order.

One note while you are in verse 1. Some older translations, such as the King James Version, add "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" at the end of the verse. The oldest complete copies of Romans we have end the verse at "Christ Jesus," and most modern Bibles follow them. That is normal. Before printing, the Bible was copied by hand, and scholars compare the many old copies to see what Paul first wrote. What the Bible teaches stays the same either way, and so does the promise of the verse: no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If you want to see how scholars compare those old copies, Wes Huff explains it clearly on his YouTube channel (youtube.com/@weshuff).

In verse 2, "law" most likely means a power or rule at work in you, different from the law of Moses: the Spirit, who gives life, has set you free from the hold of sin, which leads to death. And "in Christ Jesus" means joined to Jesus by his Spirit through faith, so that what he did counts for you and his life is at work in you.

◆ **Read Romans 8:1–2 slowly. There are two claims in it, and most of us only ever hear the first. Write both down.**

◆ **Now, from your own reading, write one sentence for each chapter, 5, 6, 7 and 8, saying what you think each one claims. Write yours first, then compare it with the chapter-by-chapter summary near the start.**

2 · Cross Over — who wrote it, to whom, and what was happening

Paul is writing to a church in Rome in the mid-to-late AD 50s, a church he has not yet visited. That is unusual: most of his letters go to churches he started himself. This letter introduces him to people who are meeting him for the first time.

The church is mixed: Jewish believers raised with the law of Moses, and Gentile believers who came to faith from outside it. Later in the letter (chapters 14 and 15) Paul spends time on their disagreements over food and holy days. As you read, picture both groups listening, because Paul is writing to both.

Slavery was everywhere in Rome when Paul wrote this letter. The idea can seem odd to us, but it was part of everyday life for his readers, and some of them were likely enslaved themselves. Paul tells you in 6:19 that he is "speaking in human terms": he uses slavery as a picture because his readers knew it firsthand.

◆ **Read Romans 6:15–23. Count the words about slavery in your Bible (some translations say "servants"): slaves, slavery, obey, set free. How many times does Paul come back to them? What does he want you to see by repeating them?**

◆ **If a change of master is the picture, what is Paul claiming has already happened to his reader?**

3 · Stand in Their World — hear it the way they heard it

Picture three people in the room when this letter was first read aloud to the church in Rome. Stand by the door first. You are enslaved, and you hear "you have been set free from sin" (6:18). A change of master is a fact about who you belong to, whatever you feel that day.

Now sit beside a Jewish believer. He has kept kosher his whole life, eating only the food the law of Moses allows, just as his family has for generations. All his life he has counted on the law to keep him on the right path. Then this letter arrives saying he is not under law but under grace (6:14). Grace means God's favor given as a free gift, received by trusting him instead of earned by keeping rules.

Now cross the room. You are a Gentile who grew up in Rome, raised among many gods and new to the law of Moses. You hear that God reconciled you to himself while you were his enemy, through the death of his Son (5:10). He paid the cost, and he gives it to you as a gift.

◆ **Write down what each of the three might feel as this letter is read aloud. Then write which one sounds most like you, and why.**

Three notes on Romans 8:2–4 before you answer the next question. "The flesh" means our sinful nature, the part of us pulled toward sin, not our physical body. In 8:3–4, unlike verse 2, "the law" is the law of Moses: Paul says it could not do what God did by sending his Son. "An offering for sin" in 8:3 points to Jesus' death as the sacrifice for our sin.

◆ **Put yourself in the Jewish believer's place. If the law is no longer what keeps him on the right path, what will keep him from living like everyone around him? Write that question the way he might ask it. Then read Romans 6:14 and 8:2–4 and write down how Paul answers him.**

4 · Verify It — hold it up against the fullness of Scripture

A right reading holds together with the fullness of Scripture, so test this one against it. Start with the honest objection: if there is truly no condemnation, what do we do with everything in the New Testament that sounds like a warning?

Before the hard questions, one thing to hold on to. These questions ask which way your life is facing, and every believer answers them as someone still growing. Paul said so himself: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on" (Philippians 3:12). Romans 7 is full of the same honesty. So answer them honestly and calmly, as someone still pressing on. And if you find sin you need to turn from, 1 John 1:9 tells you what to do: confess it to God, who is faithful and just to forgive.

Four places to check, and then a promise. First, 1 John 1:8 says that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. Second, Romans 8 gives you questions to ask of yourself: does the Spirit of Christ live in you (8:9)? Are you being shaped, slowly, into the image of the Son (8:29)? Is your life turning toward God, even when you stumble (8:5–7)? Third, Jesus himself warns about people who were sure they belonged to him and never truly did (Matthew 7:21–23). Fourth, Hebrews carries some of the sharpest warnings in the Bible about falling away (Hebrews 6:4–6, 10:26–31); read the box below before you sit with those.

Then notice what Paul puts right after his questions: a promise. Those he justified, he also glorified (8:30). Glorified means finally made complete and like Christ, with God forever, including a raised body. Paul writes "glorified" in the past tense, as if it has already happened, because God's finishing the work is that certain. Verses 29–30 also say "predestined," which means God set his saving purpose on his people beforehand. Christians have long discussed how that works. If you want to go deeper, chapter 3 of the Westminster Confession, a summary of Reformed Protestant teaching from the 1640s, sets it out. For now, notice where Paul puts it: in a chain of promises, meant to comfort you.

> Here is where I land on Hebrews, and it is the same thing I say in my Romans 5–8 video. The warnings are one of the ways God keeps his people pressing forward — true believers hear them and keep going — and they expose people who claim saving faith without ever having it. Someone God has truly saved, he keeps to the end. Others read these warnings differently, and careful readers have long disagreed about them. My video on the Hebrews warning passages walks through all five warnings and how the main readings understand them.

If those warnings unsettle you, read them next to this. Paul gives you help with those questions: "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (8:16). The Spirit's witness shows up in plain things: you trust Christ, you call God your Father (8:15), and you keep turning from sin, however unevenly.

If you are reading this worried, remember who Jesus warned about: people who were confident, pointing to everything they had done for him (Matthew 7:22). Worry, on its own, tells you little either way. The questions are there to make you look honestly at where your trust is resting. If it rests on Christ, Romans 8:1 is talking about you. And if you look honestly and find it has been resting on yourself, the way forward is open today: confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9).

◆ **Read 1 John 1:8–2:2, then Romans 8:7, 8:9, 8:29 and 8:30, next to Romans 8:1. Write down, in your own words, how these warnings and the promise of 8:1 fit together.**

Romans 7 needs one more note, because "For I do not do the good I want to do" (7:19) is one of the most debated passages in the New Testament. Careful readers have held three main views for centuries: that Paul describes himself before he trusted Christ; that he describes the normal Christian life; or that he speaks in a voice that stands for anyone trying to be right with God by keeping rules, the way a teacher might say "I" to stand for every student. I read it as the struggle of someone who already belongs to Christ, and the Reformers — Protestant teachers of the 1500s such as Martin Luther and John Calvin — read it the same way. Whichever view you take, chapter 8 is written about the believer, and its promise of no condemnation holds.

◆ **Read Romans 7:14–25. Which of the three views seems most natural to you on a first read, and why? This is a first read, so write what you think now. If you have heard one of them taught before, note which one.**

◆ **Why does the promise of no condemnation in 8:1 hold on all three views? Write it in your own words.**

5 · Come Back — put what you found into today's language

Paul wrote this letter in Greek. Three words in it, two Greek and one Aramaic, do most of the work in these chapters.

> *katakrima — the word translated "condemnation" in 8:1. It is a courtroom word: the sentence handed down, the penalty attached to a verdict. Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses it, and all three times are in this letter. Twice in chapter 5 (5:16, 5:18), he explains how condemnation came to everyone through Adam, the first man, whose disobedience in Genesis 3 brought sin and death into the world (5:12–14). The third time is 8:1, where Paul says that for those in Christ it is gone. The sentence that came through Adam is the one removed in Christ.*
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> *huiothesia — "adoption" in 8:15. The ordinary Greek word for adoption, built from "son" and "placing." In Roman law, adoption was a legal act that gave the adopted son the family name and a share in the inheritance. Notice that Paul uses the word twice in this chapter: you have already received the Spirit of adoption (8:15), and you are still waiting eagerly for your adoption as sons, the redemption of your body (8:23). Redemption means being bought back and set free; here it is the day God raises your body and makes it new. So which is it, adopted or still waiting? Both. You are already his child now, and the full finish is still ahead.*
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> *Abba — a word from Aramaic, the everyday language Jesus spoke. Paul keeps it in his Greek letter, right beside huiothesia. It is the intimate family word children of any age used for their father, more like "Dad" than a formal "Father," and it is the word Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, the garden where he prayed the night he was arrested (Mark 14:36). Paul shows us that, as God's children, we have access to that same word: we can call God Abba too (8:15).*

◆ **Katakrima is a sentence, a verdict with a penalty attached. Write the difference between "you will not feel guilty" and "the sentence is gone." Which one is Romans 8:1 promising?**

◆ **Put the three together — the sentence gone (katakrima), a son's place in the family (huiothesia), and the family word a child uses for Dad (Abba). What do they add up to about where you stand on a hard day?**

6 · Carry It Home — what it asks of you, and how it points to Jesus

Freedom in Romans is a change of ownership already recorded and a sentence already cancelled, and it holds while the struggle goes on. So on a hard Monday, move from doubting the fact to asking about the feeling. Trade "Am I free?" for "Why don't I feel free when life gets hard?"

Here is why that difference matters. If freedom depended on how you feel, a bad week would be evidence against it, and the only honest responses would be to try harder or give up. Because freedom is a standing, a bad week is just a bad week.

◆ **Name the thing you were carrying this past week that you are still carrying. Then write what Romans 8:1 says is true about you while you carry it.**

Paul gives three ideas that show you how to live free. Romans 6:11: count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:13: present yourself to God. Romans 8:13: put sin to death by the Spirit, relying on his strength. Dead to sin means sin no longer owns you, even while you still feel its pull. That is why Paul still has to say, "do not let sin reign" (6:12). Under grace, can you keep living in sin? Paul asks that himself and answers, "Certainly not!" (6:1–2, 6:15), because you now belong to a new master.

For example: counting yourself dead to sin might mean answering an old temptation with "that is not who I am anymore." Presenting yourself to God might mean using your hands, your words and your time today for what is right, on purpose. Putting sin to death by the Spirit might mean praying for help in the moment and then turning away from it, rather than white-knuckling it alone.

◆ **Read Romans 6:11, 6:13 and 8:13. Pick one, and write what it looks like for you on an ordinary day this week. Then: how does that point you to Jesus? Start with what God did in giving his Son, which is what makes any of it possible (8:3–4, 8:32).**

> If the gap is still there on Monday — if you know you are free and still feel bound — that is what chapter 8 is for. Paul says the groaning goes on in this life: we groan, and the whole created world groans too, like a mother in labor, waiting for God to set it free from decay and make it new (8:21–23). And the Spirit helps us in our weakness (8:26). The Holy Spirit himself tells you that you belong to Jesus, testifying together with your spirit that you are God's child (8:16).

Now go back to the verse this sheet started with, the one so often read at funerals.

◆ **Read Romans 8:31–39 straight through, now that you have come to it in order. By the time Paul says nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God" (8:39), what is that promise resting on? Write it down.**

> One more thing. This companion follows one line of thought through four big chapters, so it moves past a lot along the way. Break Romans 5 through 8 into smaller sections, a few paragraphs at a time, and run the six steps on this sheet on each one. That is where you will find the details we moved past.

Open your own Bible for every passage — this companion quotes only a short line where a point turns on the wording, and leaves the rest to you, because reading it is your step. Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible unless noted. My video on Romans 5–8 reads the Christian Standard Bible, so some wording will differ from this sheet's. Bible Connections with Joseph · bibleconnectionswithjoseph.com