

Romans 5–8, as One Argument

A working companion for Romans 5–8, read as one argument · Bible Connections with Joseph

Four chapters, one argument. Most of us have only ever met them in pieces — chapter 8 at a funeral, chapter 7 as an excuse, chapter 6 as a baptism sermon. Read in order they answer a single question: what does it actually mean to live free?

Before you start: read Romans 5 through 8 in one sitting, out loud if you can. Not a verse a day. Twenty minutes is enough, and the argument only works as an argument. This companion assumes you have done that.

The four moves, so you have the shape in your hand before the work begins — chapter 5, standing. Chapter 6, ownership. Chapter 7, struggle. Chapter 8, ground. Notice that the struggle sits in the middle, not at the end. Paul does not finish on chapter 7.

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

Start with what it says, not what it means. Romans 8:1 opens with a word most of us read past: therefore. Therefore means the conclusion rests on something — three chapters of something — which is exactly why you cannot begin at chapter 8.

One textual note while you are in verse 1, so you find it here rather than wondering later. Older translations add "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" to the end of the verse. The earliest manuscripts do not have it, and it changes the verse, because it makes the no-condemnation conditional.

◆ **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 write one sentence for each chapter — 5, 6, 7, 8 — saying what it claims. Do not look at my four words above until you have written your own.**

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

Paul is writing to a church in Rome in the late fifties, and he has never been there. That is unusual — most of his letters go to congregations he planted. This one is an introduction, which is part of why it is his most carefully argued letter.

The church is mixed: Jewish believers raised with the law, and Gentile converts who were not. They do not agree about food, calendars, or circumcision, and Paul spends the back half of the letter on that tension. Keep both groups in the room.

And Rome ran on slavery. Historians differ on the exact proportion, but a substantial share of the city was enslaved and household slaves were everywhere — cooking, teaching, keeping accounts. Paul tells you himself in 6:19 that he is using a human analogy. It is an analogy drawn from something his readers could see across the room, or were living in themselves.

◆ **Read Romans 6:15–23. Count how many times ownership language appears. What does the repetition do to the argument?**

◆ **Transfer from one master to another was a real event with paperwork. If that 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

Sit on one side of that room. You are a Jewish believer in Rome. You have kept kosher your whole life; your grandmother kept kosher. The law is not a burden you are looking to escape — it is the shape of your relationship with God, and the thing that kept your people identifiable through every empire that tried to absorb them. Then this letter arrives saying you are not under law but under grace.

Now cross the room. You are a Gentile with no history in Torah, out of a world of household gods and imperial cult where the gods were transactional — you gave them something, they gave you something. You are being told the God of the universe reconciled you while you were his enemy, at his own cost, with nothing to repay.

◆ **Neither of those is simple relief. Write down what each one would actually feel like. Which of the two is closer to how you first heard grace?**

◆ If the law is not the boundary, what keeps a person from becoming like everyone around them? Answer it the way the Jewish believer in that room would have asked it — then read Romans 6:1–4 and see how Paul answers.

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

A reading that sounds right on its own and falls apart next to the rest of Scripture was never the right reading. So test it. The honest objection: if there is truly no condemnation, what do we do with everything in the New Testament that sounds like a warning?

Three places to check. First John 1 says if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves, and that if we confess, he is faithful to forgive — which assumes Romans 8 rather than contradicting it, because you only confess to someone you are already safe with. James says faith without works is dead; Romans 6 says the same thing in other language. And Hebrews carries some of the sharpest warnings in the canon about falling away.

I am not going to tidy Hebrews up for you. How Hebrews 6 and 10 fit with Romans 8 is genuinely argued, and careful readers land in at least four places. What I would say is narrower: Hebrews is urging a community to endure, and Romans 8 is speaking to where a person stands before God. That is not a resolution. It is the honest shape of the tension.

◆ Read 1 John 1:8–10 and James 2:14–26 next to Romans 8:1. Write down, in your own words, why they are not in conflict.

Now the one I have to flag. Romans 7 — "For I do not do the good I want to do" — is one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament. Serious readers have held at least three positions for centuries: that Paul describes himself before Christ; that he describes normal Christian life; that he writes rhetorically, in the voice of anyone trying to be righteous by keeping rules.

◆ Read Romans 7:14-25 and write down which of the three you find yourself assuming — and where you got it. Most of us inherited a position without being told it was one.

◆ Here is the thing worth noticing, and it is worth writing out in your own hand: on all three readings, what happens to the conclusion in chapter 8?

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

Three words underneath the English change how this lands.

katakrima — the word translated "condemnation" in 8:1. Three occurrences in the New Testament, all three in this letter. A courtroom word: the sentence handed down, the penalty attached to a verdict.

huiiothesia — "adoption" in 8:15. Something like the placing of a son. Read against Roman law it names a formal act of choosing that carried the family name, the property, and the family's religious rites. Not everyone reads it that way — some read it against Israel's sonship in Exodus 4 and Hosea 11. That argument is live, and I am not settling it for you.

Abba — an Aramaic word dropped into a Greek letter and then translated, right beside huiiothesia. How intimate it was is debated; the old claim that it simply means "daddy" is generally regarded as overstated. What is not disputed is that it is the household word, and that Paul kept it untranslated as if the sound of it mattered.

◆ Katakrima being a sentence rather than a feeling changes the promise. Write the difference between "you will not feel guilty" and "the sentence is gone." Which one is Romans 8:1 making?

◆ Put the three together — sentence, standing, household word. 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 not primarily a feeling, and it is not the end of struggle. It is a change of ownership already recorded, and a sentence already vacated. Which means the question on a hard Monday is not "am I free?" but "what is true about me while this is hard?"

That is not a word game, and here is the test of it. If freedom were a feeling, a bad week would be evidence against it, and the only honest responses would be try harder or give up. If freedom is a standing, a bad week is just a bad week.

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

◆ If you teach or lead: which of these four chapters do you reach for most? Most of us have a favorite, and the favorite usually fits how we already think.

◆ One thing to do this week — and make it small enough that you will actually do it. And how does that point you to Jesus?

If the gap is still there on Monday — if you know it and do not feel it — that is what chapter 8 is for. Paul does not say you will stop groaning. He says creation is groaning too, and that the Spirit is at work in it. What tells you that you belong to him is the Spirit himself, testifying together with your spirit that you are God's child.
