



*Enjoy the
Learning Process*
Which Lasts
a Lifetime

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The following is a response I gave to someone who asked for prayer in light of a Bible study they were asked to lead on Romans 7. There seemed to be some trepidation at the prospect.

Romans 7 is a favorite theological “hobby horse” of mine. That may make it sound rather superficial but that is not the case. As I study Scripture, certain passages seem to be more affected by particular approaches to interpretation. Different approaches (dispensational, covenant, progressive dispensational) can often come to different interpretations because they are forced there by deductions they have already made with respect to other interpretations on other passages. Much theology is then biased and instead of letting Scripture speak for itself, an interpretation is forced on it.

What I have become convinced of is that it is not important to get it right ... at first! That may sound preposterous, but hear me out. To be overly concerned with getting it right implies strongly certain presuppositions. What I mean by that is people assume a number of things before even having studied something out. I think it is a big mistake to not test those assumptions in the first place and at the very least, leave them open to questioning and discussion. In other words, to really engage Scripture honestly, we have to remain open to modifying our theology and understanding.

The reason for this is that it allows us to examine and learn and grow in our understanding of God’s Word. If we have decided to stick with some teacher or group of teacher’s interpretation without ever questioning it, or if we subscribe to a particular doctrinal statement and decide to defend it on every point without ever allowing ourselves to disagree with it, we gain loyalty in a group but we cut ourselves off from learning the truth better. In a nutshell, we often decide that we have joined a group that has all the truth and any disagreement with the group or its teaching is error. That is to have fallen into a trap.

We shoot ourselves in the foot and cripple ourselves if we allow ourselves to be boxed in to someone else's interpretation. We all have to start somewhere and the best way to do that is to borrow someone else's interpretation. Typically we do that from our teacher or teachers. Teachers have a personal interest in their students and hopefully it is for edification in the Lord rather than just propagating their own teachings. Now having adopted or borrowed someone's interpretation, we use that as a starting point from which to learn and explore. It should never ever be a resting spot beyond which we never venture.

What is important then? To start somewhere with something that at least appears consistent. Dispensational theology qualifies. But we must be active and dynamic in study. We must allow our position to be challenged. We must never take the position that "I have the truth which must be guarded at all costs." No man or organization can claim such infallibility. We rather trust in the written Word of God against which we can study and compare all things like Bereans. We lean on other saints who edify us. We test what we learn in day to day living by practicing the principles of God's Word. These things will keep us closer to God and safer than any doctrinal statement or movement or denomination claiming to have recovered the truth.

Allowing our knowledge and understanding to be challenged allows us to go back to the Word and learn, explore more, and grow in God's grace.

What does this mean for you? Have no fear! Don't grasp any theological interpretation or teaching so tight that you can't let go of it when you learn that it is wrong. But when you have a strong conviction, live it and defend it with all your strength until such time you learn better. To do so will more quickly show you if it is in error or not. It is better to be absolutely wrong with conviction and then to learn better and correct yourself than to be somewhat right and live as though it is not important. Even if one does go really wrong on some doctrine, I am convinced that living it out and continued study of the Word and the love of the saints will be very, very effective in correcting the error.

Take a position and study it. Challenge it yourself in light of what you read and learn. Ask others to challenge it and reflect. Don't apologize for not changing your position, and don't be afraid to change your position – do both with conviction. Some things will always be confusing in Scripture, but over years of study, some of them clear up. Sometimes a new interpretation clears it up.

Enjoy the learning process which lasts a lifetime. Be responsible yourself for what you believe. When you stand before Christ at the judgment seat, your church's doctrinal statement, nor the teachers to whom you have subscribed will be there to answer for you. You answer for yourself. It is better to have very little you have mined for yourself than much borrowed from someone else.

What is scary is that sometimes this method challenges big chunks of your own theology and you have to toss it all out. You feel like you have to start all over again and it is going to be painful! It might happen several times in your life! But the joy is in learning and exploring and living and knowing we are not trapped in something that never lets us move beyond it.

Unfortunately, many churches base their fellowship on whether you will adhere to and defend their doctrinal teaching rather than on their relationship to you as a fellow redeemed-by-Christ saint in the family of God.

I could give you a packaged position on Romans 7. But it would be mine and not yours. You need to extract your own. Is there any worry about it being inadequate, unrefined etc.? That is unimportant. Take what you find and present it. You will be challenged probably by some other interpretation. Good! Discuss it, and consider if you may have something wrong. Leave it sit awhile on the shelf and when you come across something in your study that reminds you of it again, revisit it and study a little more and put it back on the shelf again. Ask questions of those you respect and see how it affects your understanding. Take up different and opposite positions and try to defend them as if you held them whether you do or not. That is the best way to see their merits. Never take the word of someone who is against a certain interpretation as to what people actually believe who hold the position. Always find out from the folks who hold a position as to what they believe. Never trust a Calvinist to tell you what an Arminian believes and vice-versa.

I shall pray for you. Please enjoy the opportunity to learn and teach. Do not be discouraged if folks strongly disagree. Take it as an opportunity to resort back to the precious word of God and study some more. God speaks to us through His word, and through Holy Spirit led lives and deeds of those who love Him and His precious anointed Son who lived and died for us and was raised and exalted for us. Because of our Lord and His grace and if you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I can relate to you and love you whether or not we agree on any number of doctrines.

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