

Phil Fernandes's Tribute to Dr. Norman Geisler

Jesus's description of John the Baptist reminds me of the late Dr. Norman Geisler. Jesus said of John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet" (Matthew 11:7-9, NIV). Now, Dr. Geisler never claimed to be a prophet; he just wanted to defend the faith and contend earnestly for the faith. But, like John the Baptist, he was no reed swayed by the wind. He sought not the applause of man—he sought only to please his God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I first heard about Dr. Norman Geisler from my Liberty University professors Terry Miethe and Gary Habermas. It was in the mid-1980s and I was taking my first philosophy course. Miethe and Habermas spoke highly of Geisler's scholarship and they used his textbooks for several of their courses. I began reading his books and he quickly became my favorite Christian apologist. I listened to hundreds of his lectures on audio cassettes in the 1980s and 1990s. I remember watching his debates on the John Ankerberg Show with atheist Paul Kurtz and Jewish Rabbi Harold Kushner.

I considered myself a "Geislerite," even though I did not really get to know him until 2007. After a day of lectures and presentations at the International Society of Christian Apologetics annual conference, Gary Habermas told me the way to Dr. Geisler's heart was through his love for ice cream. So, I suggested to Dr. Geisler and the other apologists who were present that we go out for ice cream.

I told him that ice cream was therapeutic for me since it calmed my heart burn. Dr. Geisler's face lit up with a smile, and we became friends.

Over the next decade, Dr. Geisler and I often spoke at the same conferences and we got to know each other better. Younger philosophers like myself often had to answer questions from the audience since apologists like Dr. Geisler and Dr. Habermas were hard of hearing. I often felt uncomfortable responding to audience questions knowing that more seasoned veteran apologists like Geisler and Habermas could do a better job. But, Dr. Geisler never complained. In fact, after a question and answer period, I remember him encouraging me by patting me on the back and telling others "this guy is solid physically (I lift weights), intellectually, and theologically." Coming from him, this was a great compliment. At one conference he even tried to imitate my Lieutenant Columbo-like voice. He was in his early eighties, and he said, "I've got everything down but the muscles. I can't seem to get the muscles."

After conferences we would often go to a restaurant with the other speakers. Sometimes, I had the honor of sitting next to Dr. Geisler. During the meal and conversation, he would occasionally gently pat me on the back, giving me the impression that he saw my potential and was praying for me. Over the years he would attend my paper presentations at ISCA conferences. He liked what he heard, and asked me to contribute a few chapters to the book *Vital Issue in the Inerrancy Debate*. Later on, he was instrumental in nominating me for the Vice President of ISCA, and he asked me to become a general editor for the *Defending Inerrancy* website. He was also instrumental in getting me appointed a professorship with Veritas International University.

Whether I teach on the high school, college, or seminary level, I continue to use Dr. Geisler's textbooks (i.e., *Christian Apologetics*, *Christian Ethics*, *An*

Introduction to Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, etc.). I pray that his books will be read for generations to come. I pray that we never reach a generation that knew not Geisler.

Dr. Geisler set a great example for apologists like myself. Though he was diligent in his studies and his writings, his family always came first. When my wife and I stayed with the Geislars for a week at their home, Dr. Geisler's love for his wife Barbara was evident. Dr. Geisler was also very proud of his son David who has become a great apologist in his own right.

Dr. Geisler never abandoned a friend. Even when his friends had moral failures, he was there for them and encouraged them. Still, he had no patience for heresy. He defended the faith with passion. He not only debated atheists and other non-Christian thinkers, but he was also willing to confront evangelicals who were not consistent with biblical inerrancy. He, more than any other apologist for the past sixty years, has defended the purity of American evangelicalism. And, he was not always popular for the stances he took. But again, he sought to please the Lord, not man. By the grace of God, Norman Geisler's work and legacy will last for generations through not only his writings and lectures, but through the many apologists he has taught. Dr. Geisler fought the good fight, he ran the good race, and he kept the faith. I am sure the Lord Jesus has already told him, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

I will never forget Dr, Norman Geisler and the impact he has had on my life and the lives of many others.