

My Five Profound Memories of “Stormin’ Norman” Geisler

By Steve Shadrach, 1983 DTS Grad

Sadly, Dr. Norman Geisler passed away today, July 1, 2019 at age 86. As I learned of his death, my numerous experiences with him flooded my mind. I couldn't help but spend a couple of hours remembering and recording five stories where God used Dr. Geisler to dramatically impact my life and ministry:



1. Holding Firm to the Truth

I was walking by the chapel of the denominational seminary I was attending and heard loud yelling coming from within. Curious, I poked my head in to see what was happening. The auditorium about half full, I slipped into a back row behind some profs and grad students who were laughing at and mocking the dark haired man with the three-piece suit standing alone at the podium.

Turns out the theology club of that seminary had invited a new professor at Dallas Theological Seminary to be the guest lecturer that afternoon on the subject of biblical inerrancy. The speaker, Dr. Norman Geisler, had just published a book on the topic and begun answering questions from the crowd when I entered.

The yelling came from the numerous people lined up at the mics on each aisle who were screaming angry comments and questions toward Dr. Geisler about his conservative stances on the authority of the Scriptures. Their red faces and protruded neck veins told me they did not appreciate how literal he took the Bible.

I was amazed how calmly and kindly he took each question (i.e. attacks and accusations!) and responded with gracious and common sense answers. Numerous times he would try to aid the irate questioner by saying, “I think what you are trying to ask is...” and attempt to help them reword and untangle their mess of emotions and opinions.

At the end of the session, I had to find out who this man was and where he was teaching. I had never heard of Norman Geisler or Dallas Seminary, but knew I must find out more. The next semester my roommate and I both transferred there and took any and all courses we could from this brilliant, but humble, professor. That was only the beginning to my “real” seminary education!

2. The Answering Machine

My seminary buddies and I would sit at the back of Dr. Geisler’s classes and try to dream up questions that would stump him. We never did. Every time we were sure we had come up with a “doozy”, he would respond with something like “Well, there are three ways to look at that issue” and then begin to delineate his three oh-so-articulate points. We suspected he started some of his answers off like that to buy him some time to conjure up a plausible response...but I don’t think so. No, it didn’t matter whether it was theology, apologetics, philosophy, even history, he possessed the sharpest and quickest mind of any prof I ever had.

For instance, I took a course on Angelology under him that was particularly fascinating. Not knowing there were over 300 verses in the Scriptures about angels, and thus the need for a whole course on the subject. He had organized all these verses into a logical and methodical outline and spent the semester unpacking it for us “self-imagined” theologians.

This particular day, it appeared to us he was interpreting certain verses to communicate it was not God Himself who was actually listening to and giving answers to our prayers, but groups of angels assigned to be the “go-between” us and God. Hmm, “that sounds rather fishy” our little cantankerous gang at the back of class thought. So, we carefully crafted and laid out a trap for our beloved Dr. Geisler. I did the honors by asking this

impressive question, “Prof, if it’s the angels who are primarily handling the prayer requests/answers, what exactly is God Himself doing—right now—at this VERY moment”?

Well, I’m sure, as always, he provided a powerful and profound answer that day, but I was so proud of my question, I can’t remember what he said. Oops!

3. Master of Debates

Word got out around campus Dr. Geisler had been invited by Perkins School of Theology to debate one of their professors that night on Creation vs. Evolution. I had heard he was good at debates, but had never seen him in action. I arrived at the SMU campus about 45 minutes early and already there were at least 100 people milling around a small classroom designed to hold about 50. They wisely moved the debate to an auditorium which sat about 1,000, but by the time it began there were easily 1,500 people present—even hanging out windows and doors. It was definitely an exciting “standing room only” event!

Each man took turns presenting his positions and supporting evidence, but it soon became clear Dr. Geisler had come much better prepared. He was proving his points (and annihilating the other man’s statements) with undeniable facts and professionally done slides and graphics. This produced continuous applause from the obviously one-sided and raucous crowd that had gathered to cheer on our hero, the famous “Stormin’ Norman” Geisler!

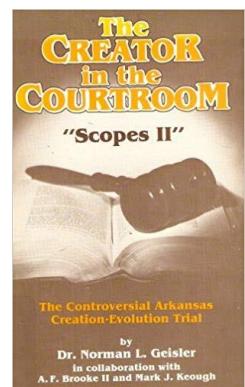
As I sat there listening to all of it, I felt sorry for the theology professor who had been put forth by their school to face Dr. Geisler, thinking his so-called “evidence” for evolution was going to forever expel the myth of a Biblical creation. But it turned out to be like the Dallas Cowboys playing a local junior high team. And finally, after about 30 minutes of slaughter, the deflated Perkins professor confessed, “Dr. Geisler, obviously I did not know what I was getting myself into. Why don’t we just spend the rest of our time listening to your presentation?”

I will never forget the way Dr. Geisler showed patience, humility, and clarity as he compared the never-changing truths of the Scripture to the ever-changing “facts” the latest wave of scientists claimed to “discover” every decade or so.

4. The Scopes II Trial

During one of my semesters with Dr. Geisler, the 1981 Arkansas state legislature passed a bill saying it was academically limiting to teach only one theory of origins (i.e. Big Bang/Evolution) and that Creation (or as it was termed “Creation Science”) should also be presented in the classrooms across the state. Immediately the ACLU filed a suit against Arkansas and brought 30+ full time lawyers to Little Rock to work non-stop to overturn the law.

The young Attorney General had no background or even interest in defending the new law. Someone told him about a Dallas Seminary prof who might willing to travel there and represent the state against the overwhelming ACLU forces. The AG called Dr. Geisler and gladly turned all the preparations and presentations over to him. If there ever was a David vs. Goliath courtroom scene--this was it.



Dr. Geisler flew to Little Rock numerous weeks that semester to testify before the constant barrages of the lawyers. Being the state’s only witness, they pounded him with questions hour after hour—but could not make a dent in his arguments. Finally, the lawyers realized their only recourse was to read every single book and article Dr. Geisler had ever written to see if they could find something to disparage his credibility.

The way Prof Geisler reported it back to us is that the army of ACLU lawyers finally found something they believed would take him down and make him look like a religious nut. They asked: "Do you believe in UFO's, Dr. Geisler?"

"That has nothing to do with this case" he replied.

"You're under oath, Dr. Geisler. Yes or No?"

He begrudgingly answered, "Yes".

"Do you believe UFO's are Satanic manifestations?" they asked.

"Again, that has nothing to do with this case."

"Yes or No, Dr. Geisler?"

"Yes" he admitted.

"No more questions, your Honor" the ACLU lawyers concluded, and promptly took their case to the court of public opinion. Dr. Geisler showed us headlines from major newspapers all over the country about the trial and it seemed the only thing reporters focused on was "Seminary Professor Believes the Devil is Behind UFO's". Needless to say, he was made out to be a lunatic, the law was overturned, and the Evolutionists chalked up a victory. I was proud of my prof, though, being willing to be the lone warrior in the arena, wielding the sword of truth, logic, and fairness. In my mind, he was a winner from beginning to end.

5. Multiplier of Ministers

One afternoon our "Gang of Five", who sat at the back of the auditorium to drum up questions to trip up the prof, decided we were going to take him out for lunch—maybe as a peace offering of sorts. To be honest, we weren't sure if he would be welcoming toward us—or resentful. As we walked and talked, I nervously asked, "Dr. Geisler, do you feel like we are attacking you when we fire our questions at you in class?" He stopped, broke out into a big smile, and said, "Oh definitely not. I just sense in you men a tremendous thirst for knowledge." We were stunned. We had been showing off our arrogance and pettiness toward him in class, but he responded to our immaturity with grace and love, always believing the best about us.

As we peppered the Prof with questions about his life and family and ministry, he told us of humorous encounter. When a woman learned he had left the pastoring of a church of 900 to be a professor instead, she asked him, "What caused you to leave the ministry?" His reply was insightful: "Leave the ministry? Mam, this new role of professor allows me, not just to pastor the 1,000+ students in my seminary, but to train them to go out to start and pastor churches all over the world. I am multiplying myself a thousand fold. So, as you can see, Mam, I have never left the ministry!"

Dr. Geisler was ever the developer of men and women to think and believe and communicate in deeper, more biblical ways. His teaching, training, and writings have left behind an incredible wake of tens of thousands of Christian leaders across the planet who have taken his beautiful balance of grace and truth and applied it to building up the Kingdom of God. He had an unstoppable drive and passion and work ethic. Retirement was not even in his vocabulary, determined to use his final breath to defend and advance the gospel. Only in eternity will we know the true measure of his influence. To the great man we called "Stormin' Norman" (behind his back of course!), we will miss you!