

## Five Funniest Memories I Have of Dr. Charles Ryrie

My friend and mentor Dr. Charles Ryrie passed away recently at the age of 90. His mind was still sharp, and I received a note from him just a few months ago and he seemed fine. He enclosed a generous check to our ministry asked me to call him. It was on my "to do" list, but had not gotten to it. I feel a tremendous loss. During my years studying at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), he was the prof who showed the most personal interest in me. Some saw him as a brilliant, but introverted and impersonal man, who preferred his books and solitude over relationships. But that's because they did not *really* know him. Yes, he may have been a quieter, more humble Christian leader than you are used to, but don't be fooled. His interest in people, his evangelistic zeal, and his incredible sense of humor were mainstays in his personality and character. I want to celebrate his life by mentioning five memories I have of him that, even today, make me laugh out loud:



### 1. Doctrine of Election in Three Easy Words

Before the bell rung for the beginning of class, eighty of us or so were all anxiously sitting around babbling about what profundities Dr. Ryrie was going to pour forth on that day's topic: Predestination and Election. Each class we would tackle a different major doctrine and we were sure *today* would be the mother of all lectures! The great Charles Ryrie was going to bring the heat and wow us all with his deep and intricate enlightenments of this oh so controversial subject. Finally the bell sounded, Dr. Ryrie strolled in, we all turned and sat up straight, anticipating an impassioned session where we would surely be scraping the proverbial "Milky Way" of theology. After asking a student to give the obligatory opening prayer, he instantly looked up at us and stated: "Today's topic is predestination and election. *God chose us*. You got a problem with that?" That was it. No other explanation. A long and awkward silence ensued as we stared at him, then at each other, and back to him. No one dared ask a question or attempt to improve on his three word description of the doctrine. After about a full 30 seconds where not a soul even breathed, he finally broke into a smile and said, "Ok...what questions do you have?" The dam broke loose for 90 minutes of the most fascinating discussions ever with one of the world's great theological minds.

### 2. The Exploding Mug Trick

As we got to know each other, I started inviting him to come over to the SMU campus each July to meet with a large group of college students from campuses around the South we had invited to participate in a Kaleo Summer Training Project, equipping them for life and ministry. There, in the fraternity house we were renting for the summer, the legendary Charles Ryrie would sit in front of the crowd of eager collegians and spend a couple of hours answering *any* biblical question *any* student had. It was awesome. One day, facing about 100 students, Dr. Ryrie called to me to get him a glass of water. I scurried to the kitchen, accidentally choosing a glass mug that had just come out of the washer and was still very hot. I filled it with ice and water and handed it to him. As he lifted it to his mouth to drink, it exploded, and all he was holding was the handle! The crowd roared with laughter, and he stared me down as if I had planned a practical joke on him--and then he laughed too. He was a kind and generous man. I will never forget him. Even this morning, I'm *still* meeting with groups of college students, *still* using my Ryrie Study Bible. A treasure.

### 3. Me Enlightening Dr. Ryrie about the Glory of God

Along with the likes of Norman Geisler, Dwight Pentecost, Stanley Toussaint, and the deeply convicting Howard Hendricks, Dr. Ryrie's classes and books helped form my belief system. As a budding self-proclaimed theologian, I couldn't figure out *why* it was that *God* wanted glory for Himself. Didn't that seem prideful or self-serving? I wrestled with that for months until I finally arrived at a plausible solution. Who better to test my ground-breaking theory with than my professor turned friend, Dr. Ryrie? So, I dialed him up (pre cell phone of course) at his home one evening and excitedly informed him I had uncovered the *true* motive God had in wanting us to give *Him* glory. I went on and on, pontificating about the Father's love and holiness, Him wanting us to know and experience that, and how it would be to *our* benefit to reflect the glory of God, etc, etc, etc...After my long-winded sermonette to the (almost!) omniscient Charles Caldwell Ryrie, I fully expected a thorough rebuttal, or at least an intensely insightful correction or two. Instead all I got was, "Hmmm. Sounds good to me!" What? That's it? That's *all* you got? Yep. He did not feel the need to re-align the neophyte thinking of a naïve student who was on the cusp of discovering great truths about God and His Word. I could tell he was completely secure in the fact that the Scriptures were "living and active and sharper than any two edged sword", and they *alone* were fully adequate for "teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness." I hung up the phone and laughed out loud, astonished at the simplicity and humility of my genius professor.

### 4. The "Wittenburg Door" Study Bible

The most irreverent but hilarious journal of the 1980's was "The Wittenburg Door" magazine, dedicated to spoofing and sarcastically poking fun at *all* things Christian—especially prominent leaders. One month "The Door" editors published an issue to mock the new-fangled "Study Bibles" that were starting to crop up in book stores everywhere. Of course they couldn't

resist singling out the wildly popular Ryrie Study Bible (RSB), put forth by the bespectacled seminary professor who seemed to have a carefully structured outline, map, chart, or dispensation for everything! In the middle of the magazine, there was actually a pop-up section showing the vast array of miniature "features" included in the RSB. There was a coffee shop, a hot tub, a ladder to get you from bookshelf to bookshelf, actual trips to the Holy Land, even a zoo where you could find and talk to the various creatures listed in Revelation! After class one day, I showed Dr. Ryrie the issue. As he unfolded the foot high RSB parody that sprang up from the publication, and started to review the ridiculous "features", we both started laughing almost to the point of tears. It was a delightful moment, and I observed that day, that although here was a man with a *very* serious mission in life, he had learned *not* take himself too seriously!

#### 5. The Day I Made His Jaw Drop

As a student, Dr. Ryrie periodically invited me over for dinner with his family, and ask to run errands together. I would seek his advice on things, and certainly considered it an incredible privilege to spend time with him—especially in light of the dismal college and seminary GPA I was hoping he would *never* ask me about! During my senior year at DTS, I began getting to know a young lady who worked at the seminary, and was almost sure I wanted to marry. When I finally found the courage to propose (and she said yes!), one of the first people I wanted to share the news with was Dr. Ryrie. We rushed over to his house that cold January afternoon and knocked on his door. When he appeared, I exclaimed, "Dr. Ryrie, I want you to meet Carol, my fiancée. We're engaged to be married!" But instead of excitement and affirmation, we were met with a gasp, and an "eyes bulging" look of shock. He quickly came to his senses, invited us in for tea, and politely inquired of our courtship. As I think back to that scenario, it occurred to me that each time Dr. Ryrie invited me over for dinner, his daughter in college happened to be back in town, and he would seat me next to her. Now, I can never be sure if there were any ulterior motives for those well-timed dinner requests, but I don't recall getting any more invites to dine with the family after that! Well, I'm sure each of Dr. Ryrie's children have found a mate that *far* outstrips anything I could have ever offered, but I have to confess, I've allowed my mind to wander a time or two over the years, as to what it would be like to be Charles Ryrie's son in law!

Since his passing, I have reflected on fresh lessons I need to learn from this great man who is now in the arms of the precious Savior he would speak of with IHOP waiters and lap pool lifeguards. First, I should have called Dr. Ryrie in the last couple of months and told him again how much he meant to me. It's hard for me to learn there's a *reason* the Lord prompts us to reach out to someone. If He does...do it! Secondly, don't put anyone on a pedestal. Even the most influential and famous people want and need real, day to day, friends—and that could be you! Lastly, the highest compliment you can pay anyone is simply to *enjoy* them. Yes, we are commanded to love others, but we don't have to *like* them! So make that choice, while you have opportunity, relish those around you, laugh with them, and build lifelong memories. The funny ones are the best!

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