

**A TRIBUTE TO CHARLES CALDWELL RYRIE**  
*Tom's Perspectives*  
by Thomas Ice

*"The Bible is the greatest of all books;  
to study it is the noblest of all pursuits;  
to understand it, the highest of all goals."*  
—Dr. Charles Caldwell Ryrie

I will never forget the day I received my letter of acceptance as a student to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. That day was a dream come true! I wanted to attend Dallas Seminary because of the big three that were on their faculty. For me the big three were Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, Dr. John F. Walvoord, and Dr. Charles C. Ryrie. Dr. Ryrie was the last of the big three to enter into the presence of our Lord on February 16, 2016. They all lived into their 90s. Now there is a great reunion in heaven and we still have their tremendous influence left behind through the legacy of their lives and their writings.

When I first met Tim LaHaye at a Christian booksellers convention in Dallas in the early 90s, his burden was to start an organization that would attempt to continue the research, teaching, propagation, and defense of dispensational pretribulationism that these three men championed. We decided to hold our annual meetings in Dallas since it would make it easier for these men to attend. This December will be our 25<sup>th</sup> such meeting, all but one have met in Dallas. All of these men were at our early meetings and attended until their health began to decline.

**GIFTED MEN TO THE CHURCH**

Ephesians 4:8 says—upon Christ's ascension to heaven—He gave gifts to men. In context, the passage speaks of "gifted men" as the gifts to the Church. Certainly, Dr. Ryrie was one of those gifted men given by our Lord to the Church in our days. Born in Saint Louis on March 2, 1925, Ryrie grew-up across the Mississippi River in Alton, IL in a strong Christian family.<sup>2</sup> Charles became a believer at the early age of five years old. He was valedictorian of Alton High School and was an accomplished pianist.

While in college Ryrie heard Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and President of Dallas Theological Seminary speak in Pennsylvania while a junior at Haverford College. Ryrie meet with Chafer after the meeting and through this interaction Ryrie discerned that the Lord was leading him into the ministry so he entered Dallas Seminary and received the ThM degree in 1947, followed by a ThD in 1949. Ryrie earned a second doctorate at the University of Edinburgh (PhD) in 1953.

Ryrie taught for a few years on the faculty at Westmont College in California, returning to Dallas Seminary in 1953 to teach systematic theology. He served as the president of Philadelphia Bible College from 1958–1962 and then returned to teach systematic theology at Dallas Seminary and head up their doctoral studies until his retirement in 1983. After retirement Ryrie continued to live in Dallas and often travel throughout the world teaching the Bible and theology until his death.

**RYRIE'S GLOBAL IMPACT**

I entered Dallas Seminary as a student in May 1977 and remember the day when the first edition of *The Ryrie Study Bible* came out in October 1978. I went to the Seminary bookstore and bought a copy in the New American Standard translation. (It was

released originally in the NASB and the KJV.) I took it to a class I had with Dr. Ryrie and had him autograph it. I told him: "When I get to heaven I'll have God autograph the rest of it." He told our class that he often laid awake at night fearing that there might be a contradiction in his notes. There are over 10,000 notes in *The Ryrie Study Bible* so I could see how a single author could have a mistake or two in such a work. He also told us that he was concerned the publisher (Moody Press) would one day in the future come out with a red-letter edition of *The Ryrie Study Bible*, with the words of Christ in red letters. He did not like red-letter Bibles since he thought it implied that the words of Christ are more inspired than the rest of the Bible. Yes, they did come out with a red-letter edition when they revised and expanded a later edition. I still use my original *Ryrie Study Bible* as my only Bible to this day, even though I have contributed to two other study Bibles. *The Ryrie Study Bible* has sold over 2.5 million copies and is one of the most widely used study Bibles ever.

Dr. Ryrie came out with another widely used tool in his *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* in 1986, revised in 1999. I used it when I was a pastor to teach men systematic theology. I used it when I taught systematic theology as my textbook at Liberty University as well. *Basic Theology* has been used as a basic textbook in multitudes of colleges and seminaries for many decades. I still highly recommend it and do not know of a better book on the topic at that level today than Ryrie.

I have traveled to about 25 foreign countries over the years and have found just about everywhere I go *The Ryrie Study Bible* and *Basic Theology* has been translated into the native tongue of these non-English speaking countries. Ryrie's writings have had a tremendous global influence wherever Bible-believing Christianity has gone. I know from experience that both of these tools are having a great impact in countries like China and Brazil. I am amazed that in a country like China many of the underground church leaders have limited study tools if any, but many have received copies of these two Ryrie resources and they are having a great impact.

#### **RYRIE'S WRITING MINISTRY**

Ryrie wrote 60 books during his long life. He wrote commentaries on books of the Bible and many books on theology. His writings deal with many of the issues and topics a believer might encounter while living the Christian life. Perhaps his most insightful and influential book was *Dispensationalism Today* that came out in 1965. This book was the standard book on the topic of dispensationalism for friend and foe alike and still is today. Ryrie did a masterful job of demonstrating that dispensations were taught in the Bible and showing that the New Testament itself revealed the basic ideas of what has come to be known as the theology of dispensationalism. Ryrie formulated the well-known three essentials of dispensationalism as 1) "Consistently literal or plain interpretation is indicative of a dispensational approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures."<sup>4</sup> 2) "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church."<sup>5</sup> 3) "The basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well."<sup>6</sup>

This is why I am a dispensationalist, because I believe the entire Bible should always be interpreted by a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Thus, dispensationalism does not start with a pre-understanding of dispensationalism; instead it simply employs the accepted Protestant hermeneutic of inductive exegesis of Scripture. The result of this literal interpretive approach results in a theology that distinguishes between God's plan for Israel from His plan for the Church as aspects of His single plan for history (Eph.

3:10). The results of such a theology means that the Triune God is glorified in every way possible since the purpose of history is the glory of God on display (Rom. 11:36). Dr. Ryrie was able to analyze and articulate these great truths better than anyone thus far in Church history.

Another great book that impacted me by Ryrie is *Balancing the Christian Life*. The title is taken from Ephesians 4:1, which says, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." The Greek word translated "worthy" in this verse means "to equalize or balance a scale." Dr. Ryrie notes that Paul is admonishing the Ephesian church to equalize or balance their Christian walk in a way that is equal to or consistent with who they are in Christ, which is taught in the three previous chapters of Ephesians. *Balancing the Christian Life* book is still one of the best ever on the Christian life.

### CONCLUSION

I recall in a class with Dr. Ryrie where he defined love as "desiring God's will for someone." When you think through the implications of such a statement you realize the insightful understanding of God's love in his statement. Such a statement is evident of someone who has looked at this issue through the lens of God's Word. He had many such insights that not only came as a result of knowing the Scriptures but also as a result of one who was devoutly living the Christian life. Dr. Ryrie was known as one who engaged in personal evangelism whenever he could. He also was extremely generous with his money, giving away millions to help support the work of the ministry, especially for world missions.

I read the article posted on the Dallas Seminary website about Dr. Ryrie's passing and enjoyed reading the posts at the end of the article by many of his former students and others who were impacted by his godly example. One post by a former student really caught my attention. Pate Cate, who had been a missionary for decades in Arab Muslim countries, had the following memory of Dr. Ryrie:

It is not what you hear, it is what you can't forget that counts. I can still remember Dr. Ryrie's two points on behalf of missions to our incoming class in September of 1964. "Our spiritual gifts are not geographically determined. If you have the gift of teaching in Dallas you would have it in Delhi. If you have the gift of pastoring in Texas you would have it in Tajikistan. And the Holy Spirit does not normally work in a vacuum. If we don't know about a country or ministry probably the Holy Spirit will not guide us there. So it is our responsibility to learn all we can about the world and needs of the world."

I am pleased to say that the Pre-Trib Research Center presented Dr. Ryrie with the "John F. Walvoord Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Prophetic Studies" at our December 2015 Pre-Trib Study Group Conference. Our organization believed he was extremely deserving of this recognition. We thank God He gave Dr. Ryrie as a gift to the church. He will be greatly missed down here on planet earth! Maranatha!

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. v.

<sup>2</sup> I have relied upon an article by Sandra Glahn, "Dr. Charles C. Ryrie (1925–2016)" on the Dallas Theological Seminary website: <http://www.dts.edu/read/dr-charles-c-ryrie-1925-2016-tribute/>.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965). Ryrie revised and enlarged the book in 1995 and again in 2007 changing the title to simply *Dispensationalism*. The revisions were to deal with so-called “progressive dispensationalism,” which Ryrie believed was no longer a legitimate form of dispensationalism.

<sup>4</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 47.