

December 14, 2006

It's hard to believe that it's now been over twenty years ago that I came to NTS as a student. It was a life changing experience as I encountered new ideas that turned my limited view of the Christian faith upside down and set it on a much firmer foundation. But it wasn't just the ideas I encountered that changed me and made me into the person that I've subsequently become. It was the professors I encountered at NTS whose commitment to scholarship, the Church, and to the Lord Jesus Christ shaped me in ways that functioned as the very grace of God in my life. And no one was more a channel of God's grace to me than Ken.

I have some wonderful memories of Ken beginning with his frequent invitations to me to join him in a game of table tennis. I'd always called it ping pong until he corrected me about the game's true name. The first time we played, I served first and was up 5-0. At that point, he said, "Ahem...I wasn't going to say anything but you do know, don't you, that in table tennis the ball must leave your hand a full six inches when you serve." "But, ahem..." he continued, "If you can't serve it that way, go ahead and keep serving the way you are." I had to admit that I had no idea of the official rules of table tennis but told him I'd do my best to play by the rules. So the next time I served, all I could do was hit my serves about a foot and a half high on his side of the table. He summarily slammed them all back to my side and beat me soundly. It was the first of many games I played with Ken and I remember them as wonderful breaks from the rigors of work and school. I even got to the point where I'd beat him occasionally.

I only had one class with Ken, namely, Doctrine of Holiness. I'll never forget Ken's microphone with what must have been a 100 foot cord. I remember him lecturing and seeing a former student out in the hall that he hadn't seen for year. At that point, he simply lectured all the way to the door and right out into the hall whereupon he had a fairly long conversation with the student, all of which was broadcast back to the speaker so that we could all listen in. It was during this class that I got to know Ken better than I had before and grew to appreciate him more and more. Although I had significant disagreements with him about the subject matter of the course, he was always affirming and gentle in the midst of them. During that course, I wrote a paper that seriously questioned the way he made arguments for his position on a particular issue. He responded, not by becoming defensive, but by almost raving about the quality of my work and giving me one of his famous A+++++ (I really can't remember how many plusses there were, but there were a lot).

During that year he also took me out to eat and talked to me at length about God's call in my life as a scholar. No one encouraged my scholarship more than Ken. In fact, after I left NTS I didn't see Ken for about ten years until I saw him at a conference in California. The first thing he said to me was, "You know I quoted you in my systematic theology." He was referring to that paper that I'd written in his class years before. (In fact, the next two times I saw him over the next few years he said the same thing to me.) He didn't say that to call attention to his own work in theology. He said it to build me up and encourage me. It was a perfect exhibition of Ken's character as a

genuine Christian man who always acted for the good of others rather than himself. While I wasn't always convinced by Ken's scholarly articulation of the nature of holiness, I give thanks to God that I was given the opportunity to see genuine holiness lived out in the life of J. Kenneth Grider.

May God grant you his peace and comfort as you grieve his loss.

Andy Johnson