

A Tribute to Roy Fish

Heaven has just hosted a grand reception. Roy Fish received “a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11, NIV).

Fish, long-time evangelism professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, profoundly influenced me as a mentor, consultant, and friend. I place him in the Top Five of men who have impacted my life and ministry.

Fish was synonymous with “evangelism” throughout the Southern Baptist Convention and beyond. In fact, the School of Evangelism and Missions at Southwestern is now named in his honor. He faithfully devoted himself to training pastors and church leaders within his denomination for half a century. Yet, although he knew (and respected) my charismatic beliefs and background, he never displayed any sectarianism toward me. Nor did he exhibit such in his classes or his demeanor. Rather, he portrayed a broad, warm evangelicalism.

He was the best soul-winner I ever knew. He taught and modeled winsome personal evangelism. Roy Fish was aptly named. “Come follow Me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matt. 4:19, NIV). Fish was equally committed to discipling believers to become mature followers of Christ. And once again he exhibited for us what it looks like to be a wholly devoted follower of Christ. He loved Jesus supremely and longed to see Him known and loved by people everywhere.

As a third generation Pentecostal, I wondered if I might feel out of place when I first stepped onto the Southwestern Baptist Seminary campus as a 27-year-old student. But within the first week I knew I was in the right place ... thanks to Roy Fish. Providentially, I was in a small prayer meeting with him and a handful of other young preachers. The Holy Spirit met with us in that faculty lounge in an awesome way. Young

Baptist preachers were prostrate on the floor, weeping before the Lord in full surrender. And there was Dr. Fish in the middle of it all, hands raised in worship, thanking God for His gracious visitation.

Later that first week, I attended my first class under Fish. He stood up, walked around to the front of his professor's desk and put holy fear in each of us. "Sometime during your seminary experience you will be tempted to cheat," he told us with piercing eyes. "If you do – sell cars, sell clothes, do something else but GET OUT of the ministry!"

I must share with you one more memory. One day in his lecture Fish came under a special anointing as he challenged us to get the gospel to a world in need of Christ. As soon as class was dismissed, I shot out the door and raced across the street to our seminary apartment. I threw myself across our couch, travailing for souls as tears gushed from my eyes. Jonathan (then five years old) ran to me and said, "Dad, what's wrong?" Through my tears I replied, "Nothing is wrong, son. In fact, everything is right." I knew I had tapped into God's heart.

I graduated from Southwestern in 1980. Every year since I've driven back to Fort Worth and Fish and I have enjoyed an annual lunch together. Just last week I thought, "It's about time for this year's lunch with Fish."

That meal will be postponed. We will meet at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb—along with the throngs who will be there because of his passion for souls. "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Dan. 12:3, NIV).