

A SPIRITUAL GIANT

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Rare are the opportunities that one has to sit under the instruction of a gifted professor and later to minister alongside him as a colleague. But, that has been my wonderful and rewarding privilege with Dr. Robert Thomas. Reflecting on a relationship that now spans almost three decades, four principles immediately come to my mind in regard to the life and ministry of this spiritual giant.

First, "Theology must always yield to textual integrity." His passion for precision and accuracy were early and often evidenced in my relationship with him. "If the Biblical text is truly God-breathed," he would remind us, "then one must zealously and tirelessly pursue its meaning." Regardless of what one might want the text to say, it must be allowed to say what God wants it to say, and thereby dictate one's theology.

Second, "Right must never bow to the accommodation of expediency." It was a principle by which he lived his scholastic life and which he required of his students, ever trying to inculcate it into their lives. Whether the issue smacked of theological compromise or the incorrect division of the word "knowledge" on the final draft of a thesis, the conviction of doing things right was always deeply ingrained and defended.

Third, "Family priorities should not be held hostage by ministry obligations." Glimpses of marital commitment and child-rearing principles in action, which occasionally invaded the classroom lecture, were reinforced and witnessed outside the halls of academia. He altered the time-honored agenda of a regional ETS meeting so he could attend a child's sporting engagement. He and his wife, Joan, graciously sacrificed a Sunday afternoon to have dinner with my wife and me in our student apartment. The integrity of his personal life not only lent credibility to his academic life but also, many years later, prompted this student-turned-colleague to seek his counsel in rearing my own sons.

Finally, "Depth of research need not scuttle lay-level understanding and applicability." When I was a student, Dr. Thomas agreed to give my Sunday School class a thirteen-week study on the book of Revelation. The practicality

and applicability of the study, especially when compared to his two-volume commentary, was astounding, both then and now.

My esteem for Dr. Thomas has grown continually. I count it an honor to serve the Lord together with him.