

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 188

ETS Conference Interviews, Part 2

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In this second installment of ETS interviews, Mike chats with Carl Sanders and Ronn Johnson, two long-time friends. In the first part of the conversation with Carl and Ronn, we focused on their own response to “higher life” sanctification and reminisced about our academic and teaching experiences. In Part 2, Mike, Carl, and Ronn conduct a thought experiment to illustrate what biblical-theological geeks do at these meetings by asking Ronn to toss out a new view of the atonement he’s been thinking about and then probing it for strengths and weaknesses.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 188: ETS Conference Interviews, Part 2. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Pretty good! We're still here, we're still...

(Together): ...*in Rhode Island!* [laughter]

TS: That is correct!

MH: Haven't moved anywhere. Well, here in Part 2, we're going to have a discussion with two long-time friends of mine. Ronn Johnson's name will be familiar to people who follow the website/blog, and Carl Sanders. We interviewed Carl last year. We'll actually pick up a little bit with one thought from one of our interviews in Part 1, but I also want to just get into some fun stuff and give people an example of what Bible geeks do when they're together or the kinds of things they talk about and the way they talk about things. I think this will be both interesting and entertaining.

MH: With us back at ETS is Ronn Johnson. Ronn's name is going to be familiar, of course, for contributing some things on the blog. We've referred to Ronn before on the podcast. And Carl Sanders, who we interviewed last year. So Carl should be familiar to listeners. What you may not know... Maybe I've mentioned it before, but Carl and Ronn are related. What's the relationship?

RJ: Carl married my sister—my older sister, my much more mature sister.
[laughter]

CS: Right, because I am sort of old now, you know. So that's just how it is. But it's all right. Age is a good thing.

MH: I'd really like to just sort of chit-chat about our history together, but before we do that, we actually have to do something... I guess, substantive.

CS: Okay, we'll pretend it's something substantive, right? [laughter]

MH: You'll pretend you're interested!

CS: Exactly.

MH: That's good. You're good at that, Carl! [laughing]

CS: You have to be! That's part of being an academic, too, right? You sit in many sessions where you pretend you're interested.

MH: Okay, we just interviewed earlier Andy Naselli.

CS: I know who he is, yes.

MH: Ronn, do you know who he is?

RJ: No.

MH: Andy teaches for Bethlehem Baptist Seminary—John Piper's school—and he's an elder there. He's a New Testament guy. He has a book out called *No Quick Fix*. It's a critique of Keswick theology—the higher life theology, "let go and let God." I'm bringing that up because in the interview, he was articulating about what he's really shooting at, which is this notion (that he objects to) of having a category where Christians are only ever carnal or they never do anything. So he's objecting to this category—this Keswick theology. It has this category, then it has this other category where we have some sort of...

CS: Spiritual Christian...

MH: Spiritual experience, yeah...

RJ: You can just be carnal?

CS: The carnal Christian versus the spiritual Christian, or something like that.

MH: Right. So that, in turn, raises the question (and this could go a lot of different ways) of what do you do with that? What does it mean to have no fruit at all? Is that really even possible? I can think of examples where somebody accepts the gospel, they feel good about that, and then they go out and they get hit by a truck. Were they in sanctification there? I would say yep—they're still believers, even if you don't have opportunity to have fruit. I can think of other examples where you could have someone understand the gospel and embrace it, but they're never actually taught anything. That could either be where they don't have Christian friends or maybe it's somebody in some country where it's really hard, or having Christian fellowship can be threatening or evasive, depending on the context. So if they don't know a whole lot of anything, how could we expect fruit in that situation? So what I'm wondering is, how do you guys think about this category thing? Whether it's just Keswick theology or just more generally, can we have people who are really Christians... the key words are "who never bear fruit?" They never show any evidence of discipleship. How do you guys think about that?

5:00

RJ: I was just talking about this with a friend, so let me jump in first. I asked him over coffee, "What do you gain by this?" He's of the Grace Evangelical Society.

MH: Yeah, that came up in the interview.

RJ: They push so hard on assurance. My question to him was, "What do you gain out of this? Why, when Jesus said 'make disciples,' are you trying to convert and then worry about his conversion turning into discipleship? Why can't I argue for going for the jugular with discipleship right off the bat, thus never having to worry about a category to fill in that unknown space?" There must be some value to even asking the question. I'm not upset by the question, but I'm just wondering why have we developed... Well, I think I know why. But I'm challenging this development of thought where we can have Jesus say "make disciples," but we stop short and say, "Well, he's converted *but*..." What's between the "but" and the discipleship that we value?

CS: At least part of the context that I grew up with had a lot of this kind of idea. I think probably all of us have heard this kind of teaching in a number of contexts. I went to Dallas Seminary, which is one place where a lot of this kind of idea has floated around—not for everyone, but as a significant influence in the institution. For me, there are two dimensions. I'm always concerned about the concerns on both sides. On the one hand, I think I'm absolutely on board with the idea that

Scripture says there should be fruit. True conversion results in real fruit. There should be something there.

MH: *Something.*

CS: Yes. So in that sense, I'm totally with where Andy's going in the general category. But on the other hand, I'm also concerned about the other extreme, where we just become really over-focused in trying to evaluate people. The fruit isn't always as obvious as we would like or in categories we would be able to understand. My biblical example I always use when I talk about this with students is Lot. If you read Lot's story in the Old Testament, there's not a lot admirable... [laughing] Not a *lot*. I didn't intend that. But anyway, there's not much admirable about Lot's life. And yet, in the New Testament he's called "righteous Lot." And why is he called "righteous Lot?" Because his soul was vexed. Now, if you look at his actions, I don't see a lot there. (Well, I do see a lot, but not good stuff!) There was an internal thing going on. I agree that there should be fruit, but there's just a caution not to be too hyper on figuring out "I know what that fruit is." Because then you start developing these lists: "If you do these five things you're really converted, and if you don't, you're not." That's my tension there.

MH: We've all seen that because of our contexts and mutual history. We've all seen that sort of devolve into, "Well, I'm doing these things, so therefore..." People wouldn't use this kind of language (at least what I'm familiar with). But they say, "I do these things, so of course I'm a believer." Or "I deserve..." They would never use deserving or merit language, but since they have those things, it almost is like adding works to it. Because if you took them away, it's like, "Is God still happy with me? Am I still right with God?" It transforms the simplicity of the gospel into some sort of... there's a bit of a performance element there. I get concerned about that. But I'm with you, too, that if the standard is like, "never ever for one moment in time showing any kind of fruit that I could detect," how would I know, and how is that really possible? Is that a real category?

RJ: That's where I would return to the simple directive to "follow me." If I'm directed by Christ to follow him and then I'm asking myself if I'm showing evidence of following... I just think I'm getting off the beaten track of what Christ is asking me to do. I don't like the question, but I know it's being asked all the time. I just avoid it, myself.

CS: It is this conundrum. I've got good friends who are very active in the Grace Evangelical group...

MH: What was the answer you got when you would ask that question: "What do you gain by this?"

CS: That's a good question.

RJ: Assurance. If you follow the Grace material, supposedly, they keep pushing this issue of assurance. "Why would God not allow us to have total assurance?" And they refer to 1 John 5:20: "that you may *know*." My first retort is that we can only have the assurance that God allows. We can't invent assurance. I would argue, based on a lot of the conversations we've had over the years, that the assurance I see the Bible presenting is a God who doesn't lie, a God who keeps his promises, a God who is unlike the gods that my neighbor has—there's my assurance. If I am loyal to this God, I'm in. If I'm disloyal, look out below. That's basically the assurance.

MH: I think of David. David could be a hopeless screw-up in his life in so many ways, but he never crosses that line. He knows where the line is.

RJ: It's not behavior-oriented. That's the key. It's worship-oriented. That's where I think we're getting off the beaten track is when we say (not us, but others say)... The question is, "When were you converted? Give me a date and a time. When did you start growing?" I think you're starting to walk down a path that the Bible writer would say, "Boy, we didn't have these questions. We thought of the person's baptism, probably, as his day of conversion, in the sense that he declared Jesus as Lord." And then we have numerous times (whether it's Hebrews or other places) that say to stick with Christ. "Do not leave, do not leave." They weren't asking the question in the negative, like we do: "I don't see any growth; what do I do?" They were seeing people (1 John 2:19) walk away, and you could see that, but it wasn't behaviors only.

CS: Two more pieces, maybe. First is just that assurance has to do with our subjective awareness, not with reality. So there are people who are genuinely followers of Christ who don't have assurance, for various reasons. I think this focus on assurance shifts it to the subjective piece in an unhealthy way at some level. Similarly, just working up assurance... I'm not sure that's really the goal in the end. That focus on assurance, I think, is a little distorted and it maybe confuses or conflates a couple of categories. The other thing is (and I'm going to follow up on what Ronn said) about conversion. I do think this model is a little caught up in... I'm going to be in trouble here... a single-moment conversion model, rather than viewing conversion as it really is in most human experiences—more complex. It is stages and elements and you don't necessarily always know the moment you cross over. I mean, we like to think... Some of us have dramatic conversions where we can say, "Yesterday I wasn't, today I am." But there are lots of people who, if you look at their subjective experience, they say, "I was in here, but five years later I'm somewhere in the middle there..."

MH: "I'm here now, but I can't really tell you at what point the line was crossed."

CS: I think it's Gordon Smith, who has a book called *Beginning Well* on conversion. He says that conversion, at least ideally, has a number of elements:

faith and repentance, but also baptism and joining a community of faith. All of those things are the normal (like Ronn was talking about) discipleship thing.

MH: They contribute to getting you over here as opposed to some other place.

CS: And it's not this magic, "you have to check this list," because some people don't get all of them and are still right with God at the moment of death. They got hit by the bus or whatever. So it's not that there isn't a reality of becoming a child of God, but that in our subjective awareness of it—our realization of it—it's not always a precise moment.

RJ: I was talking to a Lutheran pastor once and this kind of conversation came up. He looked at me without any... He was angry with me for asking the question about when he got saved. He looked at me and said that when it came to "how do you know when you became a Christian" or "when did I become a Christian," he said, "When did you realize that your father loved you?" And that was his answer. In other words, it's gotta be a path, it's gotta be a progression, it's gotta be realization almost. It's a realization more than a decision.

CS: Particularly for those of us who grew up in the evangelical world (I see this a lot in Bible college students and you guys may have seen this as well), there are students who really struggle with this notion of "when did I become a Christian; am I really a Christian?" Because they couldn't pinpoint that moment. So they struggle with it and they pray and then "if I really didn't mean it, I'll pray again." And they'll go through this really stressful...

MH: Then they'll go out and fall into sin and say, "Well, I guess it didn't take."

15:00

CS: Rather than saying... For many people, particularly those who grew up in Christian homes, it's there, but subjectively we don't have a moment. We don't have a date. We want that date. I just don't see that as a biblical model or requirement, and I think that ties in with this idea that if we see it as a moment, then we can have this conversion or whatever. If we see it as more of a process, or at least having a process-experience from the human side...

RJ: Do I sign up for a journey? Am I willing to be on a journey with Christ? That's how I see my own conversion—right now, today. Am I willing to be on this journey with him? If the answer is yes, then I'm (to use an anachronistic term, really) a Christian. But back then, they probably wouldn't have called it that. They would have said, "He's a follower of Christ. He's a disciple. He's a member of the Body"

MH: I was just interested in what your take was because you have this... I don't know, maybe I'm just getting hit with a lot of this lately, just running into people. Maybe the content on the podcast (because we're in Hebrews now)... "Since I don't see this list of things, either in myself or somebody else, did I lose my

salvation? Maybe I never had it." And we take what should be this progress and we make our works part of what the gospel is. We take something simple, like Romans 5:8 (the one I keep going back to): "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Before we even had a single thought, before we carried one iota of what God thought about us, he still loves us. So why do we think we have to give God this disposition toward us now by doing certain things?

CS: It rips the joy out of salvation. Because salvation ought to be a joyful experience. It isn't always joyful. We have those moments of crisis or struggle or whatever, but there still ought to be this joyful thing at the root of it, rather than this fearful thing.

RJ: But fair enough that most of the questions I get on this are from parents wondering about their kids—especially their adult children. "How do I know that my 20 year-old is a Christian? When he was 8, he said this." I hear that all the time, or at least too much, I guess. It makes me nervous that we're trying to think about the other person's situation when it comes to discipleship, which is always dangerous territory.

MH: Well, on a lighter note. This is the point, Carl, where I'd love to segue to your memoir.

CS: Oh, oh, yes. My memoir!

MH: Are you still thinking about writing your memoir?

CS: It lurks in the background of my mind. I'm waiting for the right moment to produce my memoir! [laughter]

MH: I don't know if you want to give us the title of your memoir?

CS: Should I? [laughter] Ummmmm... I guess I can.

MH: Give us the story and then that'll lead to...

CS: All right. The story is that I was teaching and I had a student who came from a pretty rough background. He was dealing with some advising issues—courses he needed to take and whatever—and he was one of those guys... I really like him. He was a good kid, but he was all tatted up and had piercings and punk metal rock stuff. That was his background. He was telling me, "I used to just hate Christians. I hated Christianity. I just hated that. And then I became a Christian and suddenly I find myself at Bible college. And then I asked myself, 'How the *bleep* did I end up at Bible college?'" [laughter] So I thought of that, perhaps, as an interesting title for a book! What brought me here to this wonderful (on one level) but also weird world of the Bible college? I taught at Washington Bible College for ten years and I've taught at other colleges as adjunct before that, and

I had wonderful experiences and great students that I love. I still connect with many of them. It was wonderful. But boy, there were a lot of weird and strange and silly things that happened along the way, too. I think that happens in a lot of churches. People can empathize with those.

MH: For our listeners, we can all share one of our strange teaching moments or something like that. Do you remember, Ronn, in your Hermeneutics class where you modeled the exegetical process on the letter from your mom?

RJ: Oh, yeah! It was a teaching...

MH: It was one of my favorite moments. [laughter]

RJ: That was just a bunch of guys on the side.

MH: Yeah, I know, but I asked you to bring it into class, remember? I taught...

RJ: You're going to have to remind me of how that...

MH: It was a Hermeneutics class and...

20:00

RJ: Well, here's the background. I was taught that classical way of presenting a sermon is observation and tearing a text apart down to the level of trying to get behind the writer in every verb and every noun, so I decided (and this was just on a whim because I was so frustrated)... I took a letter from my mother—an actual letter—and it was about going to a garage sale, and just a nice paragraph of what moms talk about. I did an exegetical exposé of my mom's letter, down to the level... I put it somewhere, I forget. I went down to the level that I didn't know what in the world she meant.

MH: All the meaning was lost.

RJ: All the meaning is lost once you dig enough. "Garage sale" now becomes about garages and sales and you lose the sense of what it is. I guess I gave that to you and you used it in class, but that was just born out of total frustration.

MH: I just remembered in Hermeneutics just illustrating the point. The letter was short and we read it for the class. Honestly, it was kind of perfectly obvious what in the world your mom was talking about [laughing]. But then when you take every word of it and sort of explode it and you separate all the parts out and scrutinize each part, and then you get to the end of that, you've talked a lot about...

RJ: You've lost sight of the entire medium.

MH: Yeah, we learned about what vocabulary your mom uses and what patterns of speech mom uses, but you've just lost the whole thing!

RJ: This is another memory I have. It was the same teacher, actually in seminary. I've probably told you this story. I had prepared several hours (five or six hours) for this sermon in my first-year preaching class, and I got a D+. I go back to my apartment, newly married, and I get a call from a fellow student. He says, "I heard you got a really bad great on a rebellious sermon!" Rebellious? Well, because I didn't follow the 1-2-3 and the alliterations and so forth. So I just made this deal for myself out of frustration. I set my egg timer on the kitchen stove to ten minutes and I studied for my next sermon, and when that timer went off, I stopped studying. And I got an A- on the sermon. I'll never forget that.

MH: It's just because you're gifted, Ronn!

CS: I have a parallel story from my seminary days. I was taking theology at the seminary I was at, and I was taking both years of theology at the same time (it was a weird scheduling glitch). So I had two classes going on at the same time. This teacher designs all the assignments we do on the same day for both classes. So I had two midterms on the same day, two 20-page theology papers due on the same day... it was just one of those things. So here's the reality: I had two topics. I really worked on the first one. I really researched it and thought it through. I think it was on the human constitution: body/soul/spirit and those kinds of things. The biblical focus is more on the unity of the human person and... I worked through all of this and thought I did a really good job. And the second one was the one where, "Okay, the paper's due tomorrow. We're going to spread a bunch of books on the kitchen table and I'm going to write a 20-page paper in one night." Maybe it was a day and a half, but that was the one I didn't have time for. So, basically, I just followed the teacher's outline from the class and plugged in the appropriate quotes and all the things students learn to do when they're good students. When I got them back, the one I really slaved over got an A, but the one I just cranked out (matching his notes) got "A—good job!" [laughter] That just taught me something about what the expectation was for the course. It was not about thinking creatively or really developing theologically, it was "reproduce what I gave you." I didn't really care about that...

RJ: [unintelligible] are surprised at these stories. They think seminary is full of creative thought, where people are in a circle and thinking beyond the teacher and so forth...

MH: ...sitting at the feet of the sage...

RJ: ...but it's not. We're busy people and you learn how the teacher thinks. Think like him or her, produce the answers, and you can get good grades.

25:00

CS: Some teachers are more like that than others, obviously. I try as the teacher to not be like that. I want to be fair. So when I teach a class and we cover a controversial topic (spiritual gifts or election or whatever) and I'm going to have students writing on both sides of that paper, I try to be meticulously fair. I may be even a little harsher on the people who agree with me [laughing] because I want them to do a better job. But you can write an A and disagree with me. It can be a good paper. I may put some comments on "did you think about this?", but I try very hard to do that. It's really hard to do that, and it takes more time and effort, as well.

MH: So what are some things that your students have done to you in class—stuff that you've run into that students have done to you?

RJ: It was a bad student who gave me a wonderful paper at the end of the summer. It was an independent study.

MH: Of course it was. [laughter] I think I know what's coming!

RJ: I got a journal in the mail and it was exactly the same paper as the student's. And so I called the student in and I pretended I didn't know. I said, "This is a wonderful paper. Thank you for your work. Here's an article that you probably should have referenced. It just came out, but it's very good and I'd like you to see it." So I pushed it across my desk to him just to see his reaction, and he was perfect. He looked at it and said, "Yeah, Prof Johnson, that's a good article." [laughter] And I looked at him and I just said, "What happened here?" Apparently, he had talked to this guy earlier in the summer before he had sent it to the journal and just copied it. So if I hadn't seen it coming around the back end, I never would have known. That takes a lot of nerve to...

MH: Did he learn a life-long lesson?

RJ: I don't know. [laughter] I know he graduated.

CS: I think we all have stories like that of various kinds of plagiarism. My funny ones are when they turn in something... I had a student once who turned in something and you could see the hyperlinks and things from the webpage they copied it from [laughing]. It's like, "They're not even good at this! At least be competent. I'm glad you aren't because it's easy to get you." But it happens way too often. At the beginning of every semester, I give this long talk: "Don't plagiarize. I will almost certainly catch you. These are horrible meetings. I hate them. You will *not* like them at all. Please don't do this. It's not that hard to footnote something..." and all that. And it still would happen. That's frustrating, to be sure.

MH: I taught at Western Washington for three years. It's a Division II school. I had a guy... I don't want to caricature student athletes too much, but [laughs]

that's what we were dealing with! He turned in a really poor paper one semester. It was a history class, and it was just terrible... thrown together probably in ten minutes. Kind of what you'd expect for the guy who's majoring in basket-weaving and has to take this class and whatever. So he fails this paper. I don't know what he got for the semester, but I had him for the next semester in a different class. At the end of the class, he turned in the *same paper*. He plagiarized himself! [laughter] There's no improvement here! It left such an impression on me that I had not forgotten about it. But it's like, "Really? You're turning in the same 'F' paper for a different class? Could you not, like, see that it's the same person?"

CS: Every once in a while, I have things like that where I can't prove... It's not necessarily a bad paper, but like they turn in a paper that has nothing to do with the assignment. But it seems to have something to do with another class that I know is in their curriculum. [laughter] I'm pretty confident I know what happens, but sometimes you just don't have the ability to chase it down. But I get quite suspicious about those moments when that kind of stuff happens. I shared this story earlier about a graduate-level student who turned in this paper [laughing]... It's just a short paper. It's 14-point font and extra-double spaced between paragraphs.

MH: Just so listeners know, this is a recent experience. [laughs]

CS: Fairly recent experience. It's a Masters-level class, no resources, nothing. So it was a crap paper. It was really bad. I felt like I was grading a junior high paper, because that's what you do in junior high—you make the font larger, you add headings where you don't need headings. Because you don't really need a heading in a two-page paper, but they put them in. [laughter] Every paragraph has a heading.

MH: You've gotta hit the page count!

30:00

CS: You've gotta hit the page count, right? I let the student kind of have it and I said, "This is unacceptable." And he says, "Oh, I'm just so busy. I'm just doing God's stuff." And it's like, "No, you're not! I'm sorry, you're just a bad student. You want credit for not doing any work." But, ah well. Some students want to learn and a lot don't, unfortunately. I wish they all did. I try to make it so it's possible for them to learn, but...

MH: It's not always successful.

CS: Not always successful, unfortunately.

MH: We could go on and on, I think. Other than your memoirs and some of your specific... One of my favorite stories is when you're all sitting there in coats and there's no heat in the classroom.

CS: We had some issues. We had problems with the heater.

MH: Folks, this is what happens at little Bible colleges! [laughter]

CS: Sometimes it does.

MH: You need to support them.

CS: Yeah, they really need help. So there wasn't heat in the classroom building, so students were all huddled in their coats and hats. It wasn't too bad, because I'm always a little warm-blooded anyway, so I kind of liked the cold room. But it was chilly. Some of the students were so great and had great attitudes: "Well, we're preparing for the mission field, so this is preparation for that."

MH: [laughing] "We're all going to Siberia..."

CS: That's a great attitude. If I were a parent, I wouldn't have been so happy. Let me tell you the dining hall one. You remember this one, right?

MH: Go ahead!

CS: There was an issue with the dining hall service company. They bailed on us.

MH: [laughing] Oops! Oliver Twist is coming to mind.

CS: It's lunchtime and they just grabbed the student workers and told them, "Prepare something for lunch." So everyone walks into the cafeteria, and there at the place where you get your lunch, here's what they were serving: *beets and couscous*. [laughter] That was it. That was the lunch menu at this college for that day. Beets and couscous. So you saw this steady stream of people walking in, looking at the thing, walking out and going to McDonald's or Burger King or whatever.

MH: If you like beets and couscous, that was your day!

CS: It was Christmas if you like beets and couscous! To this day, many of the people who were there that day, all you have to do to get them laughing is just say "beets and couscous." It's like a secret code. "You're in the club." These kinds of things happen. I'm not trying to be overly negative. Like I say, wonderful...

MH: So we're not going to talk about "Give us your gold?"

CS: Cash for gold? No, we're not going to talk about the cash-for-gold fundraising campaign. That was not a good thing, either, but that's...

MH: Too easy to identify the school? [laughing]

CS: Yeah, it might be. I'm probably already in trouble. But I've got chapter titles: "Cash for Gold," "Beets and Couscous..." These are some of my chapter titles. There are clusters of stories. Again, there are many wonderful and self-sacrificing people, but the school was struggling financially near the end and essentially went under at the end, like a number of schools have done—not that recently and not that long ago. So when you're trying to prop something up at the end and trying to make it go, people believe in what they're doing. They believe in teaching the Bible and working with students and all that. It's amazing what people will put up with—the abuse that they'll allow themselves to be subjected to for something like that. I want to be respectful and honor that heart of sacrifice and service. That was there. The students who really wanted to learn... I still remember talking to one of the alumni, who I still have a good relationship with.

MH: Even after this story?

CS: After a number of these stories, yes! He told me that a friend asked him about going to this school. He said, "We went there and we had great Bible teaching, great friends, it was a wonderful experience. No, you should not go there." Just because of all these administrative kinds of things. And I could understand that, but it wasn't the most encouraging word to hear. We struggled to do the best we could. I think we did a good job in many ways, but unfortunately, it was not enough to make it long-term.

MH: If you're ever in the Northwest, I'll have to remember this. We'll have you over and have beets and couscous, just to see your face.

CS: Boy, that would be special, Mike. [laughter] I would thank you so much for that. We haven't had that in quite a while.

35:00 **MH:** I'm sure. So what are you guys doing these days. We should get a little bit of an update. Carl, we'll start with you. What are you teaching? Classes? Full load?

CS: I'm teaching mostly courses on theology of culture. A couple different things. One that deals with technology...

MH: Are you going to the nanotech/transhumanism paper tomorrow?

CS: I'm not sure. I'm still working my way through the program. But there's a lot of interesting stuff, where we think about how we engage culture. A lot of seminaries, in particular, focus a lot on biblical teaching and exposition, and that's good. But most of the time of the people in the church is spent outside the church walls, so helping them figure out how to live in their careers, how to engage the world around them (their neighborhood), how to process media, how to think wisely about technology... I don't think we're going back, and I don't

advocate for that. I'm not giving up my smartphone. But the smartphone has changed the world. Carl Trueman, I think, recently had an article, where he said the real reformer wasn't Luther—it was Henry Ford, because the car turned the church into a commuter-thing and basically made it a commodity. So you can drive to the church you like. That transformed American Christianity. Yet we don't think of the way technology shapes these things. I say this in class all the time: "Amish don't have cars, not because cars are evil, but because cars destroy community."

MH: Yeah, I can see that.

CS: If you at least can begin to process how technology works that way... Again, I'm not giving up my car, but I can begin to think, "Are there ways I can work against that or compensate for that or think of alternative ways to build community."

RJ: I was listening to a Jewish author talking about how for American Judaism, the car—the idea of being allowed... the rabbis decided they could drive to Sabbath services... When that decision was made somewhere in Cincinnati back in the mid-'60's or whatever, it changed Judaism across the country because now people are driving to synagogue instead of everyone walking to their local one. He made a big point that it was a huge reformation within Judaism.

MH: Interesting.

CS: So just think about things like that. Again, that's just one illustration, but it kind of helps students engage this stuff more intelligently and thoughtfully so they can actually have an impact in their churches and help their parishioners relate to the world and engage the world better. Of my teaching, that's probably my biggest focus over the last couple of years. Aside from my side-project on biblical language pedagogy (which is totally disconnected to that)... There you go. Things happen.

MH: Ronn, what's the latest with you?

RJ: I'm an instructional designer at United Health Group, and I have two very active Bible studies that I prepare every week, with about a dozen people sitting in a circle talking. One of them is composed of mainly non-churched younger disenchanting Christians. They're all unmarried and they've been coming to this house church for about seven years. It's just a delightful group. Boy, are they willing to sit and just open up and talk about their thoughts and not get preached to! I'm noticing that.

MH: You were telling me about this last night. A good number of people in our audience are going to know that you were pastoring in a traditional sense and you're not now, but since you've been in that context (the house church thing), do

you have any thoughts on that? Your exposure to it... pros/cons, things you still wonder about...

40:00

RJ: The way we do it is very open-ended. In a sermon that I used to prepare for a church (15-some years of that), it's always 32 minutes and it ends with a bow-tie at the top. You have to apply this text to a hundred different people in 75 different ways. To me, that wasn't matching my personality. What we do now in these two Bible studies I'm involved in is we just read the Bible in a circle, stop and talk about it, and admit where we don't understand and dig in where we do. The honesty of being able just to talk back... I've often wondered in the earliest Church, if it was set up like the synagogue... I don't believe the synagogue had a sermon portion to it. Coming from the same Jewish author I was just talking about, the American synagogue started a homily or a sermon because they were jealous of the American church system—the Protestant churches that had this homily idea of a 15-minute, uninterrupted soliloquy. This Jewish author was saying that we as Jews had never thought of that—of actually having a prepared soliloquy by one person. We've always been "talk it out." And so I put that back into the first century, shall we say, and I think we would do better... Well, let's back up. Is there a place for a half hour sermon? Sure. But I think on a daily or week-to-week basis... Well, let's get back to the question of following Christ versus making a conversion statement. Following Christ, to me, means you're engaged in this process. Well, what better way to be engaged than to have a back-and-forth conversation with your "pastor," whoever that person is—whether it's a Bible study leader or whatever? This is what is filling in for their church now, is just talking about Scripture. We go from 6:30 to 10:00, so what is that? Three and a half hours of pretty engaging conversation... very honest.

MH: Do you have a meal or finger-food or...?

RJ: We eat. Someone always brings food, or the person whose house we're at provides some. But we sit and talk and eat. Food is always part of a good theological conversation.

CS: I think it's interesting—this idea of a more dialogical thing. It's culturally becoming a... I don't know if it's a necessity, but it's something that makes more sense. I mentioned it in the paper I did earlier today—this secular book called *The End of Power*. He's just talking about how, just because of things like social media and technology and all sorts of things, there's this idea of the top-down model where someone is controlling things. It's a lot harder to do because people can bypass you. You may think you control your church, but someone goes and posts something on Facebook. [laughter] It's gone!

MH: So much for that!

CS: That's one of those ways technology has contributed... it's not the only thing, but it's one of the big drives.

RJ: Anyone can Tweet!

CS: Just having ways to do that at our church... In the last year or two, the pastor has tried... We do it most Sundays (not every Sunday). Most Sundays when the sermon is done, we try to have time for questions, where people can ask questions. I've preached several times in the last couple months, so you stop ten or fifteen minutes before the end of the service and you say, "Okay, questions!" And people ask you, "Well, what did you mean when you said this?" or "How would you apply this?" or "What about this? This doesn't make sense with this particular experience." And I think that's a very healthy thing because it helps people to be engaged. If a person asks a question, more than likely five or ten other people have the same question lurking in their minds but are afraid to ask it. So I think creating the culture we're much more open to that, I think is a good thing.

RJ: On a practical note, we have someone in our group who is actually looking around the room while I'm talking, and she'll call on someone who hasn't talked in an hour and say, "Mary, what do you think?" That's a good way to... Not just the person, like me, who's speaking or talking or running it, but someone's on the lookout to get so-and-so engaged whenever she wants to. That's been really helpful.

CS: Honestly, what I'm describing at our church isn't nearly as intense as what you're doing, Ronn. But I think it still reflects that same sense of more openness— to say we don't know everything and we may not have addressed everything that you need to (or want to) know about here. So let's kind of create space for that. I think that's a good thing. Those kinds of models, like where Ronn is at, that's a natural part of that.

RJ: And I can tell you that I study a lot more for these two Bible studies than I ever did for a sermon, because I have to be prepared to go off the beaten track on so many different levels. Plus, it just pulls in all these things I've been doing over the years, too. You never stay on one topic very long because the questions start coming from every angle.

MH: Well, thanks you guys, for the chat. A little bit of fun, a little bit of theology. That's been our experience. We've know each other for how long? Good grief...

RJ: Thirty years.

MH: At least thirty.

CS: Something like that.

RJ: We've all been married thirty-some years, right?

MH: Yeah. I hit thirty this year.

RJ: Thirty-one for us.

CS: I'm the old man. [laughter] We're at thirty-six.

MH: Well, thanks a lot.

Both: You're welcome.

45:00

MH: Well, we're back at ETS and are here, essentially, for Part 2 with Ronn Johnson and Carl Sanders. Now, I had asked Ronn to give us a verbal thought experiment. In some ways, this will sort of model what we often do at these meetings, where one of us will have some idea percolating and we just sort of throw it out and it's something half-baked, but it's good to sort of just get it out there and have it take a pounding a little bit. Or a little bit of a massage, where we hear something and we say, "Yeah, you're just spot-on." That usually doesn't happen. [laughter] It's a good exercise.

RJ: No, but I'm interested to hear your reactions. To your audience, you've never heard me say this before. In fact, nobody has.

MH: This will be new for all of us, so we're playing without a net here.

CS: We're used to it. Ronn is good at this. He's had many of these over the years!

RJ: "Thinking aloud" has never been a problem. Like I said, it does get you fired at times. [laughter]

MH: [laughing] We promise we won't fire you!

RJ: You can't fire me now, just so you know. My boss doesn't care at United Health what my theology is. [laughter]

I was listening to Podcast #63 awhile back. It was your introductory thoughts on Leviticus, and you had mentioned the concept of sacred space. Now, I had thought about that, but your podcast made me start to put some dots together. So I'm just going to throw out some thoughts to you and see what you think of them. I'm big on theological experimentation, in the sense of an engineer standing on the shoulders of someone that has come before, and yet being willing to reconsider and say, "Have we thought about this?" And then to test-

drive those ideas and see where they either fall apart or they work better than ever before. If the engine runs better than it did before, then maybe there's something to it. So here's where I'm currently test-driving what I'll call "sacred space." I'm wondering to myself, even as I go through this, how many theological questions/problems/issues it *solves* and where to stop the experiment. So starting with, let's say, Leviticus and sacred space... I forget how much you said here, Mike, but here's how I take it.

MH: So do I, so we're okay. [laughter]

RJ: The question being asked in Leviticus, if not much of the Old Testament, is not... Growing up, we had this picture where you're standing on one cliff. You've got heaven on the other and you've got hell in between, and then, of course, across that is laid the cross. The way to get saved is to use Jesus to walk across and get to heaven. I would recommend that the picture of the Old Testament is not how to get across, but how to get *in*—the idea of moving toward a sacred space... let's say the Holy of Holies—one man and one time of year. There are different levels of this, of course, but whether it be the atoning moment of a sacrifice or the work of a priest, daubing blood here and there... But the question on the mind of the Old Testament person—even the righteous person—was not how to get across, but how to get *In* or *toward* or how to approach an otherwise dangerous deity like Yahweh. With that in mind, I'm wondering where that ever stops. So let's play it out. Let's jump all the way to Acts 15 and the New Testament epistles. Isn't it true (here comes the experiment) that the question for Paul and Peter was not how to get people into the family of Abraham. That was settled through faith. But the question was how to get people at the same table (Acts 15 and on). Cornelius was a sacred space question: "This man is a Gentile. He's unclean." How to solve his cleanliness really runs much of Acts. If not, think of Paul's letters. Are they not driving... For example, his collection of the Gentile offerings to take to Jerusalem. It seems that he's nervous (he says this at one point) that they would accept that money, which would have been Gentile money—unclean money—and his concern was that they wouldn't accept it. I'm just thinking of various texts here, where Paul is trying to tell the Gentile in so many ways what Peter told Cornelius, through God's help—that his question of being able to approach the God of Israel is solved. It's done. There's no more nervousness. There shouldn't be, anyway, on the part of a Gentile. And here's the question, then: When did that happen? The sheet story of Acts 10 comes into play, but could that not be telling the story after it actually happened, thus recalling the death of Christ? That what Jesus did in atoning on the cross was a sacred space issue? Period.

MH: Are you asking when Gentiles became aware of this or when Jews became aware of it? Or is this a metaphysical thing?

RJ: That's where I would back up and I would say Ruth, Rahab, Naaman... You have pictures of Gentile inclusion all the way through the Old Testament. Isaiah

49—the idea that the nations will come. So you do have portents of it. You do have pictures of it happening, so that when Peter is confronted by the dream/vision, the reader, even (besides Peter), would have known what the answer should have been. But Peter, of course, in his obstinacy, has to answer it three times. Does that answer your question?

50:00

MH: I'm wondering one specific thing, but I'm going to hold onto it until...

CS: I'm thinking of the metaphysical part of it. I think of the portrayal of the rending of the veil.

RJ: Three times in three Gospels.

CS: And particularly, I think, Mark's Gospel. I'm not as familiar with the other ones, but I remember working through Mark a long time ago. In Mark's Gospel, you've got a Gentile centurion right there. "Truly this man was the Son of God." And then you have the women who were disciples who used to follow Jesus, but have been kind of invisible until suddenly they're visible there.

RJ: I think it's all through Mark.

CS: I do, too, but in the opening of the veil, it suddenly says, "This place is open to everyone." In a sense, as Mark is telling the account, he's positioning the characters in his narrative in such a way that he's saying, "Now the veil is broken. It's not just Jews—it's Gentiles, it's women, it's the excluded." And that's part of what's the narrative purpose.

MH: So you're arguing that the positioning of characters like women, which would have been sort of a peripheral class, and Gentiles... that this is deliberate and it has something to do with the torn-veil imagery.

CS: I think so. I think that's the way Mark lays that out. At least that's the way I've read that story. So that would be... If that's the case, I would say that's maybe the metaphysical moment, in a sense. The crucifixion and the rest of the work of Christ associated with it... That's kind of the dynamic moment, when that's there. Now, the understanding of it takes some time, and processing what this means... I'm intrigued, at least a little bit by that.

RJ: As my pastor said (and he's going through Acts) in just one of his sermons, "If you have been told 'no' all your life, how big would the 'yes' have to be?" Here's my suspicion, my theory: the atonement itself is the 'yes' to the Gentile. In other words, the Jew knows what atonement is. He had it in Torah all his life. The Gentile never had it. It was never available to them. So when Jesus dies (Hebrews 13:12), "He died outside the camp; let us, therefore, go to him as outside the camp." The picture there seems to be that he didn't die on an altar in front of the temple, where you would have expected it. He died *out there*. The

"out there," then is used by the writer to say, "there it is!" There's our Gentile atonement that we've been waiting for. That's my thought experiment. Is that enough? Is atonement relegated just to sacred space a big enough reason for Christ to die? I think in our current Western model, we would say no, and we run toward all sorts of atonement theories, as though we've gotta have this big... Well, we have to have meaning far beyond sacred space. But if sacred space is important to that world—enough that Peter would not allow Cornelius at the same table and Paul was commissioned by Jesus three times in Acts (it's clear)... He's going to go to a Gentile audience. Is sacred space a big enough issue to run the engine of the epistles, of Acts, even of Jesus' atonement (going back into Mark itself)? And when he would walk around and he would say, "Be cleansed." What is he doing? Then he says, "Go to the temple and show them." To me, that's a sacred space issue once again. Forgiveness of sins... We often think in the judicial sense of going to heaven because I'm forgiven. I don't see it that way. Go back to Leviticus. When they were forgiven of sins, it was for a sacred space moment or solution. It wasn't for a moral one.

MH: Right. It was to make them fit for sacred space—to decontaminate sacred space or protect it from defilement.

55:00

RJ: In Mark, Jesus is eating with sinners and they're upset about it, and Jesus says, "Well, I didn't come for the righteous, I came for the sinner." To me, that would solve... The question of sanctification, even—of purification, of cleansing... Jesus isn't actually going out and metaphysically doing it, he is showing what has already come true in the character of Yahweh in all of these stories leading up to the messiah coming. So John 1:17... The Torah brings us the law, but Jesus brings us grace and truth—grace and truth, in the sense of a kind of favor that the Gentile needed that they didn't have under Torah—and the kind of truth-telling or promise-keeping (as that word usually is used)... that there's a promise being brought to the Gentiles. Again, what I'm saying is that the Gentile could be right with God before Jesus came. We know that. But did They know that? Did the Gentile know that they could approach the God of Israel without Jesus if he had never shown up? If Jesus had never come, would the Gentile know that they're accepted? And it seems that no, they wouldn't have, without what Jesus did and without Paul explaining what Jesus did, whether in his death or even the resurrection. Being the "Lord of all" (Acts 10), he is now solving priestly actions for all people, not just the Jew.

CS: I think there are some interesting things here. Certainly, because of the people we are, we don't think in the same kind of geographical way that biblical writers and early readers did.

RJ: Think of where Jesus does his work!

CS: In Galilee. Galilee is a different place than Jerusalem, and the journey to Jerusalem is such a big deal in the Gospels, and all that. So there's certainly something there that's worth...

MH: Historically, Galilee had a lot of Gentiles.

CS: Yes. So there's certainly some interesting things to explore here. On at least one level, I'd probably push back. This happens a lot of times when you have an idea you're playing with. Maybe you're trying to push it too far? To make it the exclusive... I'm kind of a kaleidoscope guy on atonement.

MH: Yeah, I am, too. I don't need to pick one.

CS: I think the atonement has multiple...

RJ: Let me challenge you back...

CS: I think because in the biblical text, there are different ways of describing the atonement that seem to describe different things. This could be another one that I think could be a useful thing.

MH: It relates to sacred space. Fine. Well, who occupies the sacred space? Well, that would be God. So you have this reconciliation sort of thing going on.

RJ: Read 2 Corinthians 5. It's right there. You've got the ministry of reconciliation, but notice what comes after that: you still have to respond. See, the difference in this view of atonement, now, would be that the atonement causes the question to be asked. It doesn't solve it for anyone. It just means now the Gentile is allowed in. The wall is down (Colossians 2). But now you've got to make a choice: what are you going to do with this God? And so, to me, the atonement question is solved in this sense. You don't have to worry about universal or limited. That's 16th century. You can just leave that and go back to the text... [laughter]

CS: Let's just dispense with history!

RJ: ...and say, "What does the atonement actually do?" It makes everyone have to answer the question, "What will you do with Yahweh?"

MH: He knows I'm not going to fight him too much on that.

CS: Yeah, you're happy on that one, Mike!

RJ: I was going to say on this one... The three Synoptics are written after Paul, right? They're written late. Just walk it through again in your head. All three Synoptics are aiming for the Passion Week. They get to that moment. Jesus finally dies, and they've had 20-30 years to think about it. They all say the same

thing in the next verse. What happens when Jesus dies? The veil is torn. I'm just saying that if you've had all this time to think about it and you have all the options of atonement ready and waiting to go, and you're given this narrative, and you've aimed all your life to say one thing that Jesus does... Why did they choose a sacred space analogy or picture? I think this works for me.

MH: What is the mystery, then? Was it a mystery only to Jews, then? That the Gentiles could be full heirs of Abraham?

RJ: Full heirs without proselytization. I think that's new.

MH: So the scales are on the Jews' eyes there. They're the ones to whom the mystery is hidden. So that would be a historical thing, it wouldn't be a metaphysical thing, if that's the case.

RJ: That's the beauty of it. You can go back through David's lineage and see a Ruth and a Rahab who got in. I love Rahab's statement in Joshua 2:11: "Your God (Yahweh) is the God of heaven and earth." And then she even says, "Will you promise me on your God's name/character that you'll save me alive?" I mean, she's making this go beyond sacred space. I think she's trampling over it, frankly, saying, "I'm going to depend on the character of your deity for my well-being and the well-being of my family, whether or not I have sacred space to worry about." I think there's all these little moments where you see people... Daniel praying to the west without a temple. He's understanding before it's actually happening that sacred space is solved, because of the character of the God he's dealing with.

1:00:00

CS: Yeah, there's a lot of interesting things that are running through my mind right now. One is just that I struggle with exactly how to explain Gentiles in the Old Testament—not that they can't be saved (if we can use modern theological verbiage), but there does seem to be something that happens in the New Testament that changes their status, in terms of the way God's people are organized or something.

MH: Do you think that's Hellenism?

CS: I don't know. You can go back to Cornelius because you were talking about the Cornelius story. Cornelius, when you look at how he's described in Acts 10, he's described as a Gentile who fears God a couple times. And he prays to God and God hears his prayers. He's not really an unbeliever.

RJ: Not at all.

CS: He's a Gentile believer.

RJ: And Peter wants nothing to do with him. [laughing] I find that amazing!

CS: When Peter preaches to him, this is not a conversion story (to go back to our last conversation). It's not really a conversion story, it's an inclusion story.

RJ: Exactly.

CS: Which is quite different than the way it's normally preached or taught, by the way.

MH: Like in *Unseen Realm*, I have this chapter that I think is called "Infiltration," where you have the reclaiming of the nations, starting with Acts 2, and it's an incomplete but deliberate play on the nations of Genesis 10 that were disinherited. But then as you keep going through Acts, all these other little places are picked off. The order is significant because you start out with significant places that are connected to Jews and their inheritance in the Old Testament: you've got Samaria, [unintelligible] (which is like a throwaway place), you've got Damascus... as if to make the point, "Okay, Jew first, and then we'll get to the Gentile." But all of these places that are significant to the inheritance of the seed of Abraham, the gospel goes to those places. As soon as all the Jewish stuff is gobbled up (or at least included in the list), then you get the Cornelius episode, you get the conversion of Paul, you get all these things. And then it shifts to just Gentile territory. And Paul is like, "I've got to get to Tarshish because it's the last thing on the list—the westernmost point." So it's intriguing to me for those kinds of things when we're talking about sacred space, because it's reconciliation and it's really about access to God in the place where God is. So you have the access, you've got...

RJ: And then you've got the Church being called a temple. So at every little village around every corner, now Paul could say to a Gentile, "You can approach the God of Israel through that house over there. Go into that house and talk to those priests (who are, by the way, Jesus of Nazareth followers)."

CS: One other interesting thing in Acts (just to follow up on what you were saying, Mike)... "And then we came to Rome." The end of Acts. And Rome is the center of power—the end of the universe, if you will, in a sense. I just think of the old *Foundation* series from Asimov, you know—"all roads lead to Trantor." Everything goes to Rome, right? This is the place. And so now the whole world has been claimed, in a sense—in terms of the geography of...

MH: Except for Spain, because he writes to the Romans and says, "Can't wait to see you guys, but I'm only going to be there for a little while."

CS: [laughing] I know, but it's kind of symbolically claimed, in a sense.

MH: Right. If there's a capital of the world, it's this place.

CS: It is, again, that geography stuff that we kind of pass off as kind of indifferent to the story. It's *not* indifferent, because they view the world as the place that God is claiming. It's his Kingdom that he's gradually taking. He's turning the whole world into sacred space in a sense, right?

MH: This is kind of a wild-card, but the Church at Rome... We don't know who started it. There's no indication in the New Testament who started it. We know that Aquila and Priscilla come from that because of the expulsion of Claudius, but they're Jews who somehow either started this thing or were included in it. What's the exact relationship there? But it just seems to sort of happen independent of what's going on in Jerusalem before Paul even does his thing. So it's almost like... You could say, "Okay, that's a derivative of Acts 2 in some way. Somebody is converted and goes back." But we're not told. You could have that kind of thing happening all over the world, where essentially the Spirit is acting to create this set of circumstances.

CS: And at Pentecost you have these Jews from all these other places that hear, and some of them go back and seed these various locations with the presence now of this inaugurated Kingdom, in a sense.

1:05:00

RJ: And I would recommend when you follow through on the "sanctified by faith in him" or "sanctified by faith" or "sanctified through Jesus." Take that word "sanctified" as a sacred space indicator—a momentary cleanse or they're purified so they can approach God. It seems to be like when the Spirit comes in Acts 8 and 10, then it's re-described in Acts 11. Their point is, the Spirit came, thus showing that they're cleansed. And they're cleansed by faith in Christ.

MH: If that temple was defiled and wasn't fit for occupation by the Spirit, the Spirit wouldn't have showed up.

CS: And you have both the corporate temple (the Church) and the individual temple (the believer). You've got both...

RJ: And you can do this on a Logos word search. Type in "sanctification" and look at the Greek use of it. It's a one-time punctiliar moment in the life of the Church, where repeatedly someone is sanctified. Especially when you come to Gentile stories, it's the Spirit showing up in a visible manifestation, specifically saying, "You guys are okay." They're already *saved*. Acts 19...

MH: I agree. It calls those people believers. It says they're believers, but the fact that they can believe and that they do belong has to be validated, so you've gotta send Peter and John up there to check it out. Like, what's going on? And it immediately validates what's going on here because it links it back to the Acts experience.

RJ: As my pastor said, too (I found this more humorous than the audience), "People were getting saved in Acts, but then they were showing up for church." [laughter] And then it was causing all sorts of trouble. I think that's exactly how Peter saw it.

CS: There are some modern analogues to that, by the way...

MH: Another wild-card here... I've done some reading in Second Temple sources about the veil (for instance, Josephus and, if memory serves me, a little bit of Philo). They did not look at the veil the way we sort of suspect, as this... Let me approach it a different way. I've run into some New Testament guys who will use certain things said in Second Temple sources to argue that the tearing of the veil was not about access, but it was like the eruption of chaos when you kill the messiah. It presents this disorder out of order—so looking at it more abstractly. Even if that's the case, I don't think that's a problem, because it's not like Second Temple Jews ever thought the same way about anything! So you could have a segment over here looking at it this way, and then you could have what's going on in the New Testament be another perspective.

CS: It could even be polyvalent in a sense, right? It could be viewed as doing multiple things, and you're just highlighting one in the Gospels.

RJ: Your different atonement theories... couldn't they all, in a sense, come back to this issue of sacred space? So you could have the Christus Victor...

MH: Okay, he's trying to do the Theory of Everything now! [laughs]

CS: This is like Erickson's theology, where there's all these interesting models out there. We're going to squeeze them all into penal substitution. I just tell my students, "You can judge how well he does that. I'm not so sure he's very effective, but he's trying."

MH: Carl and I are two kaleidoscope guys here, so...

RJ: Give me all the kaleidoscope images and I can get it back to sacred space, probably. Case in point: the Colossians 2 wall coming down. There you go.

CS: You've got the triumph motif—victory over Satan.

RJ: Well, I guess, how would that... I'm stumped right now on that one, but I'll have to think about it.

CS: And maybe you can do it. I'm not saying you can't. I'm just saying I tend to be suspicious.

MH: Let me play Mr. Abstraction here. Satan is the lord of the earth. It's not just *eret*/underworld, but...

RJ: Unclean spirits...

MH: Right. He can be said to be the lord of everyone because all humans die, which includes Gentiles. And so you could theorize—you could postulate—that since this was a primeval enemy, specifically of Adam and Eve... And if you're thinking of Adam and Eve to being prototypical or archetypal to Israel, you could, in theory, as a Jew, have tunnel vision here. But it's really wider than tunnel vision—the Adam/Israel parallel includes all people, which is all the nations. See there? I gave you a few...

CS: Gave you a lifeline, Ronn! [laughter] Call him up for a lifeline!

RJ: This is a work in progress.

1:10:00

CS: I think there are some interesting things here. For me, I think I could pretty quickly make this just another aspect of my kaleidoscope, and that doesn't cause me much difficulty at all.

MH: Doesn't cause you much stress. [laughs]

CS: No, because I always tell my students, "If the atonement is really what we say it is and Jesus is really who we say he was, his death is not easily captured in a single, limited, finite idea. We shouldn't be surprised that it just overflows in surprising ways. We can look at it from different perspectives and see elements of that that we wouldn't see otherwise." So I find that useful to me, but...

MH: Is there a pre-Johnson theory of the atonement that is about reconciliation—that has reconciliation as a primary focus?

RJ: Of Jew/Gentile? Not really.

CS: I can't really think of one...

MH: I can't think of one, either, but I figured if there was one, Carl, you would know it.

CS: I can't think of anything...

MH: Because if there was, that just sort of sucks the air out of what he's doing. We'll take all that data and throw it into our... Thanks, Ronn! [laughs]

CS: There could be, but if you go through the normal six or seven traditional models, it's not the primary feature of any of them.

RJ: One of the weaknesses of my view that I've noticed or that I have to continue to work on is the "we" language in Paul, where he's going to use the first person plural to describe his situation pre-Christ. But I think in Galatians he's trying to bring in the Galatian Gentiles into that storyline so he can say "we." Or Galatians 4, "We were under..." He uses "we" for being under the tutelage of the powers. I can't imagine that's Jews. Let's try Romans 5:8. "While we (Gentiles/Rome) were yet without strength (classic definition of a Gentile), Christ died for the ungodly—the non-Jew." In other words, could Romans 5:8-10 even be a statement of Gentile atonement right there?

MH: If Paul is writing, he hasn't let the Jews classify themselves as the "godly" versus the ungodly Gentiles.

RJ: Well, that's how they saw themselves.

MH: In other words, as they're hearing that...

RJ: Again, if he's talking to Rome, it's getting into the hands of a majority of Gentiles, isn't it?

MH: Yeah.

RJ: So as they're reading this as a Gentile, how would it sound to them that "when we were yet without strength"—"when we were weak," literally—and that's a classic definition of the Gentile—Christ died for... Why did he say "ungodly?" Why didn't he say "all of us?" I think there's a possibility. He's trying to get the Gentile to see Christ's death as atoning for his lack of purification.

MH: Couldn't you just say he uses "ungodly" because he's just written Romans 3, that everyone's under condemnation? All have sinned.

RJ: To me (again, this is just my little problem)...

CS: [laughs] We all have problems! We all think they're little.

RJ: By the time you come out of the Old Testament, you already have placeholders for "godly" and "ungodly"—the righteous and the wicked. Psalm 1: God knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly will perish. You've got these pre-Christ categories of whether you're godly or not. So could Paul use those in Romans after Romans 3 to also still claim...

MH: You're not saying that an Old Testament Israelite would think all his fellow Israelites are righteous?

RJ: Oh, no, no. But could... Ephesians 4... He's talking again to Ephesus people, who are probably Gentile. And Ephesians 4 is talking about "we were dead in sin, but now we are..." Could that "dead in sin" be talking to the Gentile pre-atonement? That because of Christ's atonement, we are now part of that... Think visually of not getting across a divide, but walking into a temple, where I have to account for myself to that deity in that place now because I have nothing keeping me away from it, because of what Christ has done. I'm presenting atonement as causing the question, not solving anything.

CS: One thing you might explore... I'm thinking of the stuff Beale has done (and others) with the earth becoming an eschatological temple and things like that, which is sacred space kind of language. So that would be some stuff that might connect with this. I'm not quite sure how it fits exactly, but I'm just trying to think of other things that...

RJ: Yeah, and follow through on Hebrews 4: "brought to God" and "approach God." There's a lot of "approach" language coming up after you see Christ dying.

MH: Is he really writing to Gentiles, though?

RJ: In Hebrews, you mean?

MH: Yeah, I wouldn't exclude Gentile readers there, but...

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RJ: To me, when you read Hebrews 9, where it talks about things as though... No, duh. There was a thing called a temple. It had a this. It had a that. To me, if I'm a Jew, I'm saying, "Hello? Do you think I don't know...?"

MH: I would say the audience is mixed.

RJ: How about at the end—13:12. "He died outside the camp. Let us go to there." It's as though it's trying to say, "I know he didn't die the way a sacrifice should have died, but that's okay." To me, it's helping the Gentile feel welcome to a religion that has for centuries said, "You're not part of us."

MH: I wouldn't dispute that. Before we wrap up here, let's go back to where you said your view is that the atonement... trying to remember how you just said it... "prompted the question." It prompts the question, but the solution is still the event.

RJ: It's faith.

MH: It's the cross event.

RJ: No. I'm going to stick my neck out and say the cross does not save people. The cross presents the question of "what are you going to do with this Lord of the

Universe?" The cross is the means to the lordship of Jesus. As you read Jesus talk about going to the cross, he always includes resurrection. He never stops at the cross.

MH: Right. The way people talk about the cross tends to be the crucifixion only, as opposed to the whole thing. Yeah. That's fair, because you've got to have a resurrection before you can have an ascension. You've got to have the ascension to be reigning... The whole complex is important.

RJ: That was my traditional reason why I got in trouble with my atonement theory. I argued that if you're going to see penal substitution as the solution...

MH: ... then that's tied only to that one part?

RJ: Then he doesn't need to resurrect. I mean, it's nice that he did.

MH: I see what your criticism is there.

RJ: If you've solved the wrath of God on Friday night at 6:00, then I would argue that if you follow this view... I get this picture in my mind of Jesus pushing a Gentile into the Holy Place saying, "Okay, you've got to make a decision. There's nothing stopping you." Acts 10:45, because of this now, everyone who can...

MH: To me, that's kind of catchy. Jesus didn't solve the problem by dying at 6:00 on Friday.

CS: When I talk about the work of Christ, I always talk about the fact that one of the problems with penal substitution... I'm not willing to necessarily discard it as one of my kaleidoscope elements.

MH: Right, this is why we're kaleidoscope guys!

CS: We can just grab everything. We don't have to make any...

MH: There's your Theory of Everything, Ronn—the kaleidoscope! [laughter]

CS: It certainly is true. What's the resurrection? Penal substitution doesn't answer that. It doesn't talk about the transformative elements of the gospel—that it actually changes us into new people and empowers us to live this new kind of life.

MH: You can't have any of that...

CS: It doesn't deal with the cosmic dimensions of redemption. It's not just about humans—it's about all of creation being restored. So all of those things, I don't think the death... it's not sufficient to explain all of those things, so we have to

have a bigger picture of the work of Christ. I try make... Like in my one class, one of the discussion questions is always, "When is the last time you heard a sermon on the ascension?" And it's like, "Uuuuhhhh.... I've never heard a sermon on the ascension!" [laughter]

MH: It's "what's that?" [laughter]

CS: And it's like, "Guess what? Read the New Testament! That's a big part—resurrection and ascension are *huge* things." So there is something that's missing there, and that's one reason I'm not willing to commit just to that single model. I think you have to have more. But I'm not quite willing to abandon it entirely. It captures something, I think. Some insight.

MH: You can certainly abandon the emphasis or the way it's talked about.

RJ: Certainly, as the exclusive model. I don't do that. But if you have this kaleidoscope or this collection of... I think Scott McKnight uses the "bag of golf clubs" imagery. [laughter]

MH: That just doesn't sound as good as "kaleidoscope."

CS: It's in his book, *A People Called Atonement*. Read his book. Yeah, we have a bag of golf clubs. So which is the best golf club? He says it depends on what you're talking about doing. If you're pitching in a sand trap, it's different than putting on the green or driving. So he says all these theories (or at least a number of the theories—not all theories)...

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MH: So Ronn, you're letting go of the fastball...

RJ: I would love to do penal substitution with you sometime because, to me, I've got 31 reasons why I just can't buy it. [laughter]

CS: Thirty-one! That's a very precise number!

RJ: It destroys... It's come down for me to where I actually am opposed to it because of theological problems. I just can't go there anymore.

MH: There's something in Ronn's childhood there. [laughter]

CS: That could be, but anyway, I still love you, Ronn. [laughter]

MH: If you had gone to where Carl taught, it would be the beets and the couscous.

RJ: Yes, right. Well, I have this picture in my mind of my son on our bed. He has sinned against me, and I say, "Go get Kirby."

MH: [laughing] Go get Kirby! Kirby's in trouble.

RJ: My dog. In other words, if I'm satisfied by the death of not the person who did it, but someone else, what does that say about my character? We've got to talk about that! To me, that's a discussion point. Does any judge do that today? If you sin and then you say, "Can my brother serve my sentence?" and I say, "Hey, all I need is *somebody*." That's says something about me, more than you. At least I want my penal substitution friends to talk about that and say, "Start with the Old Testament. How do you come up with a judicial/sacrificial system (wherever you wanna go) that allows that by the time you get to the New Testament, someone can say, 'Oh yeah, Jesus died in my place!'" Wait, wait, wait... back up. Where did we come up with this whole version of a God that would be satisfied this way?

MH: You're assuming that... Well, I don't want to say you're assuming. It would seem that there's only one possible sacrifice that could accomplish all of the things that are wrapped up in resolving this problem. In other words...

RJ: Are you saying I have that view?

MH: No, I'm saying... Kirby will do here. Let's say that Kirby was the only way—the only sacrifice that could possibly be made to really restore the relationship between you and your son, and we'll throw in everybody else here. In other words, there's only one of those, so yeah—Kirby is the only thing that's going to...

CS: And plus, it is a little different. If we're going to push the Kirby thing... Kirby volunteers [cross-talk and laughter].

RJ: Okay, well that's all that I'm asking for is a conversation about the actual path to get to that point, but that's another subject. I was going to say one more thing about...

MH: About Kirby?

RJ: No, no, no. [laughter] About the atonement. But, oh well.

MH: We started doing the Kirby thing and you lost it!

CS: That's right.

MH: All right, well, this was fun. Thanks a lot, you guys!

RJ: Thank you.

CS: Thanks

TS: All right, Mike. I feel like I just got through with peeking behind the curtain to see how you theologians think out loud amongst yourselves and watching it happen in real time. That was interesting for me.

MH: Yeah, I guess it's the way the sausage is made, I don't know.

TS: Yep. I got to see that.

MH: But either way, it was good because we are in...

TS: Rhode Island!

MH: Rhode Island, yes. [laughter]

TS: Well, good deal. I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.