

Marc Roby: Today's podcast is a special session. It's our great pleasure to be able to interview Prof. Henry Schaefer III. Prof. Schaefer received his Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Physics from MIT and his PhD in the same area from Stanford University. He is currently the Graham Perdue Professor of Chemistry and the Director of the Center for Computational Quantum Chemistry at the University of Georgia. He is also one of the world's most highly accomplished and regarded physical chemists. He has over 1600 publications and it has been reported that he has been nominated for a Nobel prize five times. He has won so many awards and has given so many talks all over the world that it would be silly to even begin to list them.

But the most important thing about Prof. Schaefer, is that he is a Bible-believing Christian and unashamedly speaks of Christ wherever he goes. Before we begin I would like to point out that Dr. Schaefer has written an excellent book called, *Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?*, which is in its second edition. Dr. Spencer was able to interview Prof. Schaefer on Wednesday afternoon, October 3, 2018, prior to Schaefer giving a lecture at the University of California in Davis.

Dr. Spencer: Well, Professor Schaefer, it's a pleasure to have you as a guest on What Does the Word Say? And thank you for agreeing to do the interview.

Prof. Schaefer: Thank you, good to be here.

Dr. Spencer: I'd like to begin with a few questions just to let our listeners know a little bit more about you. So, you were born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but attended public schools in New York and California before graduating from High School in Grand Rapids. So, why did you move so much?

Prof. Schaefer: Well, my dad worked for the largest company in Grand Rapids, called American Seating Company. School seats, stadium seats, auditorium seats. And they just kept moving around until they got far enough up in the food chain in Grand Rapids. They stayed there for the rest of his career.

Dr. Spencer: Alrighty. And right at the moment you are a professor obviously working in quantum chemistry. So, how would you explain what you do for a living to someone who doesn't have much of a science background?

Prof. Schaefer: Quantum chemistry is chemistry without test tubes. Odorless chemistry. We use the equations of quantum mechanics to make predictions of all manner of things that experimentalists are either too cowardly to do, or just impossible. So, we try to guide real chemists using the computer.

Dr. Spencer: Alright, can you explain for somebody who is not in science what quantum mechanics is all about a little bit?

Prof. Schaefer: Well, quantum mechanics begins in 1926 with a series of papers by Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger in which he carried out in a mathematical way the idea that waves and particles are related. Particle behavior can be described in a wavelike manner and wavelike

things can be described in a particle-like manner. So, these equations go way back to 1926, probably the most important year in the history of modern physics.

Dr. Spencer: Alrighty. Were you raised in a Christian home?

Prof. Schaefer: No, I was not, I was raised in a loving home by parents that were concerned about me from my birth until the month they both died in 1988.

Dr. Spencer: They both died in the same month?

Prof. Schaefer: My mom died of a heart attack, and my dad had Alzheimer's, or something like it, and he died of a broken heart a week later.

Dr. Spencer: O my goodness, that's a terrible thing to go through. How old were you?

Prof. Schaefer: I was forty-three.

Dr. Spencer: Forty-three.

Prof. Schaefer: Yeah.

Dr. Spencer: Now in one of your writings, though, you say that the Jesus you knew in childhood was a well-intentioned infinitely tolerant person who laid down some simple moral rules, so if you weren't raised in a Christian home, did you go to church with friends, or how did you learn about Jesus?

Prof. Schaefer: My parents went to church, we went to the Episcopal Church.

Dr. Spencer: Okay.

Prof. Schaefer: Yeah, we went to church, but there wasn't too much about Jesus.

Dr. Spencer: Alright.

Prof. Schaefer: It was, if you wanted to be prominent in Grand Rapids, being a member of Grace Episcopal Church was a very good thing.

Dr. Spencer: Alright.

Prof. Schaefer: Gerald Ford, President of the United States, became president, he and my dad were best friends growing up. Neither one came from wealthy families, and Gerry was a member of Grace Episcopal Church, and if you wanted to get into the Kent Country Club, the most prestigious place in the county, it would be good to be a member of Grace Episcopal Church.

Dr. Spencer: That's interesting. Well then, how did you become a Christian?

Prof. Schaefer: Well, it's ... as with many, it's a long story, it began at age 17 when I started to think seriously about things, and it ended, that lost stage of my life ended ... well, it began to end just as I completed my PhD at Stanford University, but it really didn't happen until about four years later, when I was a young professor at the University of California at Berkeley. So, a lot

took place, God was trying to get my attention for a long, long time and as is always the case, he got it.

Dr. Spencer: He doesn't miss, does he?

Prof. Schaefer: Right.

Dr. Spencer: Was there any particular event that precipitated your coming to Christ or just...?

Prof. Schaefer: Well, four years before I became a Christian I began to think about the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ, and after about three years of that I decided that not only is the resurrection true, but it is one of the best attested facts in all of ancient history, and then there was another year to kind of get things together before I received Christ into my life.

Dr. Spencer: Alright. Now you and your wife went through the terrible experience of having a baby die of SIDS. Can you explain how your faith helped you get through that period?

Prof. Schaefer: Yeah, this was in 1979, and we had not been Christians for too long, December 9, 1979, and this was a stage in my life when I was trying to become famous. I had a very nice offer from the University of Texas, an endowed Chair and an institute that was going to be started just for me and so I was spending about half the time in Texas and half the time in Berkeley, and being paid half a salary by both, and went to church on a Sunday morning, December 9, and got back to my office, instead of just staying in a hotel, and my wife called me and told me that our son Pierre had died. So, it was the hardest thing I've been through yet.

Dr. Spencer: And how did your faith help with that, do you think, in terms of coping with it?

Prof. Schaefer: Well, I would say that neither Kären nor I ever felt any anger toward God, you know, we were far enough along that we understood that all things work for good for those who love Christ, so we knew good things were coming, and we were surrounded by Christian friends at that point. We'd been in Berkeley for, yeah... So, I was in Texas, our son died in California, so I hurried back, and we were just...I was met at the airport by a dozen people, all of whom we loved, and taken back to the house, and they just watched over us for quite a few days.

Dr. Spencer: Okay. Well, do you have a favorite book of the Bible or a favorite verse, and why?

Prof. Schaefer: 1 John 5:13:

Dr. Spencer: Okay. Which says?

Prof. Schaefer: These things have I written, that you may know that you have eternal life, you that believe in the name of the Son of God. That verse was a significant part of my becoming a Christian. I was actually leading a Bible study of some high school kids at a Lutheran church, even though I wasn't a Christian. And I knew I didn't know much about the Bible, but I had been reading a chapter in the Bible since I was 17 years old, but I didn't know much. But I knew that a lot of these youngsters, we probably had 15 high school kids in that class, several of them were Christians. So, we'd get to a passage and if I wasn't quite sure what it meant, I would ask them, the students, what do you think this means? Somebody would always have a good answer, and went back home with my wife Kären, and we looked at the verse together, and said, you know it

looks like you can know you're going to heaven if you believe in Jesus Christ. And it wasn't more than a day after that that I realized that I was going to heaven. Now I can't tell you when, that might have happened some time before that, but that was the point at which I was cognizant that I had become a Christian.

Dr. Spencer: Well, and of course, it sounds like the church you were in ... I seem to remember the last time you were here, you said something about the main requirement for being a leader of a youth group was that you had a Suburban?

Prof. Schaefer: We had a brand new bright red Chevrolet Suburban, and there were no rules about seatbelts, we could put twenty-five kids into that Suburban and take them wherever they wanted to go.

Dr. Spencer: That's sort of a lamentable comment about the state of the church, isn't it?

Prof. Schaefer: Well, that's why we were chosen by the pastor, he saw the car in the parking lot.

Dr. Spencer: Alright. And so you wrote at one point, also, you said that, unlike the childhood Jesus you knew that was this infinitely tolerant person you found out that the Jesus described in the pages of the New Testament is a little less tolerant.

Prof. Schaefer: Yes, yes, yeah, he's certainly all-loving, all-perfect, but he demands fidelity from his people.

Dr. Spencer: And holy living.

Prof. Schaefer: Yep.

Dr. Spencer: We are called to holy life. Alright, well, let's move to something a little bit more along the lines of science here. We live at an amazing time in history, I think, anyway. We've learned so much in the last 150 years, both biblical archaeology confirming many of the details of the Bible, and then in terms of science, we know so much more, about the complexity of the origin of life, and also about the origin of the universe, that I think it is simply intellectually untenable to be an atheist. Do you agree with that?

Prof. Schaefer: Intellectually untenable...I would almost agree with that.

Dr. Spencer: Alright.

Prof. Schaefer: I think there is good evidence for the existence of God. I don't think it comes to proof, certainly not mathematical proof, but I think there is very good evidence.

Dr. Spencer: Alright. What would you say is the best evidence?

Prof. Schaefer: I'd say the best evidence is the comprehensibility of the universe, why things make sense, why one can use mathematical physics to understand so many things, why the universe makes sense rather than nonsense. I would say that's what I would put up at the top of the list.

Dr. Spencer: I know you've taught a number of times before about the history of science, and of course there is this mistaken idea out there that originated back in the 1800's that there was warfare between science and Christianity, which is not really true.

Prof. Schaefer: Right.

Dr. Spencer: And you've spoken a lot about that.

Prof. Schaefer: You'll hear a little bit about that tonight.

Dr. Spencer: Right, alright. And the origin of science coming from sort of a Christian worldview. Why do you think that is, what do you think is the main reason that science was mostly continuously and steadily developed in a Christian society?

Prof. Schaefer: A number of reasons. I don't want to take too long on them because your listeners should get my book *Science and Christianity* because it goes through a bunch of these reasons in great detail. One can argue that science might have developed in the absence of the Christian faith of its founders, but in fact it never did. It never did. There were moments, certainly there were moments, in science where persons of other philosophies made progress, but they weren't continuous. The most striking example I know is that of the famous observatory in Istanbul, the Galata Observatory. Now this is contemporary with Tycho Brahe who had this amazing observatory in the West and discovered all sorts of things. Tycho Brahe, and you may have heard of him as the guy who had a gold nose. He lost his nose in a duel as a youth and he had a gold nose, and of course his body was dug up many, many times by people looking for his gold nose, but I'm not even sure the gold nose was buried with him. But anyway, he made revolutionary advances. The Galata Observatory was completed and within just a few days it was burned, it was razed to the ground by a mob instigated by the local Muslim leader. Now something like that could happen anywhere, due to any religion. But the point is, it was another, goodness sakes, 300 years before a major observatory was constructed in the Middle East. So there really was an inability to go forward with science. So that's a part of it, I would say.

Dr. Spencer: Alrighty. Well, as someone who's thought deeply about the structure of nature and also as a Bible-believing Christian, I'm curious what you think about the origin of consciousness and volition.

Prof. Schaefer: I think the honest answer is not very much. I mean, these are tough, tough subjects. I mean, I don't think it makes any sense other than a belief in the sovereign God of the universe. You know, to argue how this happened. This is complicated. We are talking chemistry. This is remarkably complicated. The idea that it just happened seems pretty improbable to me.

Dr. Spencer: How has being a Christian impacted your work as a scientist?

Prof. Schaefer: It certainly gives me a greater appreciation for science. The idea that, which has struck me a number of times, when you find something really new, and you look at it, and you ponder it a bit, and you say, wow, so that's how God did it. And that's a special feeling. That's a very special feeling. Yeah.

Dr. Spencer: Yeah, it's always amazing when you get to learn more about God, isn't it, whether it's from the book of nature or the book of God's word. And I think this is a good place to take a short break, so let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We'd love to hear from you.