

Principles to Keep in Mind When Evaluating COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories

(May 16, 2020)

Well, it's not Dr. Frank Turek, but it is J. Warner Wallace, sitting in for Dr. Frank Turek. I'm not a doctor. I'm just a detective. And I'm hoping to help you, today, process some stuff that I think has become incredibly pressing in culture. I've been talking with Frank about this. And so, if you're like me, someone has sent you, at some point in the last week, a video or article that describes a large overarching conspiracy involving the pandemic, involving our response to the pandemic, any number of things. I certainly have gotten my share. And so, Frank and I started talking about this, because when it comes to conspiracies, this is something that I might be able to help you with, only because I get to work conspiracies for a living, and have investigated a number of conspiracies, and have successfully filed these with the DA, and have even been able to prosecute those successfully. So, I'm just going to try to give you some insight into the nature of conspiracies, and what my response typically is, when somebody sends me one of these videos.

Now look, in my position, like Frank, I'm online a lot. And I get sent these videos by a number of people, who either read my books, or have followed me on the website, listen to the podcast, whatever. And they will call or write to me and say, Hey, Jim, what do you think of this thing? So, what I'm gonna do now, I'm gonna try today, in this show, to give you the most complete response I can give you with principles I hope you will keep in mind when you're evaluating these conspiracy theories. And I'm going to point people to this radio show in the future, both when they write to me, or if I want to respond. I'm just going to point people to this list of responses, to this list of principles, because I think this will be the most complete grouping of these principles. And we got a lot to cover today. But I think when we get done, you will also, hopefully, find this useful and be able to point others to these principles, or at least keep them in mind when you are sent in a video or an article claiming that there's a large overarching conspiracy occurring.

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So, let's just jump right into this. I'm going to give you my responses to these based on my investigative experience working these kinds of cases. And how this started, when I got the first email from somebody who said, hey, what do you make of this video? Well, you've probably seen the different videos that are out there. As a matter of fact, there's an article online at getreligion.org this week, a few days ago, which is entitled, 'Plandemic' news, et al: Why do so many religious believers quickly embrace conspiracies?

That's a very interesting question. I'll address it just a little bit at the very end. But it's a really interesting question. And the article is basically written by a woman named Julia Duin, who observes that most of the people who advanced these kinds of things to her are amongst her more conservative religious friends online. She's just making this observation anecdotally, but it's the premise then for her article. Why do so many religious believers quickly embrace conspiracies? Let me give you some principles that will help you think clearly about this, so that you may be more reasonable in your response.

So, here's the first principle; principle number one. Write it down if it's helpful. There's a difference between what is possible and what is reasonable. If you follow my work at all, you know that I sit on this issue a lot. I preach this issue a lot. Because anything and everything is possible. It's possible you're not even awake today. You've dreamed this entire day so far. It's possible the entire universe is nothing more than a computer simulation. But this does not make it reasonable. And the standard is not beyond a possible doubt, it is beyond a reasonable doubt. Reasonable doubts are the doubts that are grounded in evidence. Possible doubts are really a product of our imagination. And so, our standard in criminal trials is beyond a reasonable doubt, not beyond a possible doubt.

Now, look, when someone sends me a video of a conspiracy and ask me, is this possible, I'm going to say yeah, but that doesn't matter. What matters is, is it reasonable? And by the way, you're only going to discover something is reasonable, rather than just possible, by digging through the evidence as thoroughly as you can. Now, I'll tell you, this is going to be an overarching theme as I talk to you today about this. This requires some effort on our part to determine if this claim, whatever the claim may be, is simply in the realm of possible, or if it's based on enough evidence to rise to the level of reasonable.

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Now, I want to tell you something else later on, in my set of principles, and that is that you have to own the investigative process. You cannot trust others to tell you what the evidence means. So, someone presents three pieces of evidence to make their claim; X, Y, and Z. If you haven't gone out to verify X, Y, and Z, you cannot say anything about it yet, because you haven't verified what the claim is. Anyone can make a claim. All claims are possible. Not all are reasonable.

Here's my first point of advice to you. Stop posting stuff that's in the possible category. Only post stuff that's in the reasonable category. And by the way, you'd have to do a pretty decent investigation on your own before you could ever move something from possible to reasonable. That means that when someone sends you something, and you go, wow, and 15 seconds later you're posting it on Twitter, or Instagram, or Facebook, you haven't done any other work that has moved it from possible to reasonable. Don't post possible, only post investigated reasonable. And that means that's going to slow you down quite a bit, because until you've done that work, you can't be posting.

I want you to stop posting anything you haven't personally vetted. So, if someone's being interviewed on a video, have you investigated who that person is? Who's being interviewed? Have you done as much research as you can online to discover what is the personal history of that person being interviewed? Have you done as much research as you can to see who is the person doing the interview? If you haven't, you can't post it. It's only in the possible range, it's not in the reasonable range yet. You haven't even discovered if it's evidentially reasonable yet.

I was watching one of these videos and I'm watching some B-roll. They're talking about an arrest that was made and they're showing a SWAT team making an arrest. To the best of my knowledge, that is not from the actual arrest. That is a SWAT team making an arrest at a different location. They grabbed it, as we call B-roll. It's just there to explain, as you're talking, but it's not evidence. It's not actually a video from the actual event, as far as I can tell. If that's the case, I'm already suspicious. I just want you to take the time. Have you chased down every claim? If they've got a video, for example, they're citing some newsreel. Have they edited the newsreel? Have you gone back and found the entire newsreel so you can source it? If you haven't sourced this stuff, personally, why would you share it with anybody? I think we've got

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to be very careful. That's the first principle; understand the difference between possible and reasonable.

One real quick second principle, before we move to a break, and that is that remember, there are only three motives for any misbehavior. Only three motives; sex, money, power. That's it. There's no fourth motive. I've worked enough homicides, burglaries, robberies, sex crimes, larceny, whatever it is. I've worked those cases. They're only driven by three motives. There are only three motors for any sin, only three motors for any misbehavior. It's sexual desire, it's financial greed, and the pursuit of power. If somebody has something to gain in one of those three areas, I think it's fair for you to be suspicious. If you don't have anything to gain in those three areas, then that's different. This is why I trust what the apostles were telling me about Jesus. They had nothing to gain in those three areas and it cost them their lives. I actually feel much more confident about them. But if someone has to gain, by producing a video, financial gain, or by making a claim, because look, all of us are authors...aren't we just trying to advance the cause of our books? Or is it a matter of having a huge response? How many times do these conspiracy theories get shared online? That's a power issue. That's authority, power, fame. Those are all things that are nuanced diversions of the pursuit of power.

So, before you start sharing some things, ask yourself, boy, does the person who actually created this thing have anything to gain in those three areas? If they have, I might want to pause before I just bite and just assume what they're saying is true. First principle; difference between possible and reasonable. The second principle; understand what drives misbehavior. And if you think there's a lane that somebody might gain, hesitate before you share it.

We'll come back. I'll give you a couple more principles that will help you to evaluate these conspiracy theories in light of the pandemic. I'll be right back here at CrossExamined radio.

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All right, J. Warner Wallace back with you here at CrossExamined radio, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. The best title of any apologetics books ever written, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, with Frank Turek. I'm sitting in for Frank today, as he's away from the microphone. And I'm trying to give you some principles that you can use to evaluate these COVID-19 conspiracy theories that we are hearing all over the place. By the way, these will also help you evaluate any historic conspiracy theory, any historical claim that a large group is involved conspiring together to accomplish something. We know there's a ton of these out there, right? I mean, they're fun. I get it.

When I'm speaking at events, I will often ask people to raise their hand if they enjoy reading books, fiction books involving conspiracy theories. Or just reading what they think are non-fiction books involving conspiracy theories. And probably most of the audience will always raise their hand, at which time I tell them they're all a bunch of idiots, okay. Because you got to be a knucklehead if you think that these are easy to pull off. They are not easy to pull off. And so, what I want to do in this second segment... remember I told you the first two principles. Remember that possible is not the same as reasonable. That's number one. Number two, there are three motives behind any misbehavior; sex, money, power. If you think someone is gaining something, in one of those three things, I would be hesitant to start inviting that it's actually true. It may be true, because look, those also can be good motives. Sex, money, and power can drive us toward good things, but they can also drive us toward bad things. And what we typically do is take those desires, and the human heart, and we twist them to do something evil.

But let's go to Principle number three. And I think if you are familiar with my work, you know that I talk about conspiracy theories in the five things, the five attributes of conspiracies that are necessary in order to be successful. Remember, if you think you are aware of a successful conspiracy from the past, it wasn't by definition successful, because successful conspiracies are never uncovered. Is it possible to pull off a conspiracy successfully? Yeah. But when it happens, it typically involves these five attributes of successful conspiracies. Why this is going to be helpful, I hope, is it because if you lack these five attributes, then you probably don't have what you think is a conspiracy. It's something other than that.

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So, here are the five principles, five attributes rather, of a successful conspiracy. Number one, it has the smallest possible number of co-conspirators. Because it's a lot easier for two people to tell a lie, and keep a secret, than it is for 22, or 222, or some huge sector of the federal government, or some huge sector of the federal government, plus the CDC and a bunch of other agencies involved in public health. The number of people matter, and the smaller number of people, the more successful you're going to be. It's just human nature, right? Especially when we are in an information age in which everyone has access to global platforms. It's one thing to keep a conspiracy 35 years ago, when, if you didn't have access to print media, or to the news media, you couldn't even get your story out. But now, anyone can get the story out.

Here's the second attribute of successful conspiracies. It's held for the shortest possible period of time. So, if it's a crime that it only takes two weeks to unwrap it, that's a lot better chance you're going to be successful with that kind of conspiracy than you would if it's a two year plan. That's why the best conspiracy is committed by two people, and as soon as this committed, one kills the other. That's great. You only had two people to begin with, and now one of them is dead. So, now you got a really good chance of pulling this off, because you're the only person, in your head, who knows the truth.

Third thing you need is excellent communication between co-conspirators, because if you get separated, and one of you guys gets jammed up by the police, or jammed up by your parents, or whoever it is you're trying to lie to, you want to be able to tell the other what it is you said. And your stories have to line up. And that's why the first thing we do as detectives, we separate co-conspirators. And we start to get into the weeds and all the details of their story, because we know the more details we get into, the less chance they have had of aligning their stories beforehand. So, we're able to see the lies. So, that's the third thing.

Fourth attribute of successful conspiracies; they usually involve people who have a deep emotional relationship, usually familial. A mom is not going to rat off her son. Sons do rat off their moms, but not as often, right, as you would a stranger. And so, if you've got deep relationships with each other, then there's a good chance you will not rat on each other. So, that's the fourth principle.

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The last principle is, try to avoid pressure all together. If no one's asking questions, if it's not so public, if it's in this little niche category of culture where no one's in your neighborhood, or a little niche in your city where no one's really paying attention over there, you got a good chance of pulling off a conspiracy.

So, this is why, for example, those five things, knowing that's how I work conspiracies, is all you do as an investigator is you unwrap, you unwind those five things. If somebody has three of them in their pocket, a group has three that they've mastered, you try to work the other two. But what you're trying to do is, you're trying to unwind those five attributes of a successful conspiracy, so it can be exposed. That's one of the reasons why, when I first encountered the claim, or I knew that I had this claim in my head for a lot of years as an atheist, that the story of the resurrection was nothing more than a conspiracy on the part of the disciples. When you realize how big that group actually is, Paul says there are 500 in Acts 15, most of them were still alive that had seen the risen Christ. There's 120 in the upper room when they replace Judas. Look, there's too many people involved. They have to hold it for too long. They can't communicate back and forth. They're not all family members and they're under intense persecution. Is it possible? I always say it's possible. Anything and everything is possible. But like I said before, it's not reasonable. And so, I just don't think you can hold to that theory of the resurrection as being nothing more than a lie, a conspiratorial lie.

The same thing though happens here. If you think it's going to involve vast sectors of the government for many years to make this successful, and, by the way, you're doing it in the most public of stages, okay, it's possible. You know, but evaluate it and ask yourself the question, are the five attributes of a successful conspiracy available for this? Now, that's my third principle; understand the five attributes of successful conspiracies.

But let me give you a fourth principle that's kind of related. And that is that, time is your friend when you're working conspiracies, right. Because remember, the second attribute is that, the shorter that the conspiracy is being held, the more likely it is to be successful. I worked cold cases for most of my career. Those are just unsolved murders from the past. If you're not familiar with my work, I've been on Dateline more than any other detective in the country. So, you can see some of my work. You can find more of it at coldcasechristianity.com. But my point

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is, I learned early on as a cold case detective that time can help you. You might think, oh, well that's actually gonna hurt you, right? You got a 30 year old homicide, the more time that goes, by the harder it is to work. Well, in some sense, that's true.

But here's what's great about it. Time can be your friend, in the sense that, maybe somebody didn't want to talk 30 years ago, because they were married to the suspect or they were married to the suspects best friend. But now 30 years later, they're no longer married to that person and they're actually willing to tell you more than they were willing to tell you 30 years ago. Time can actually produce some distance between, and some people are more willing to talk as a result of time.

As a matter of fact, one of the things I do when I work investigations of cold cases is, I ask myself the question, okay, where in this investigation can time help me? I know it's already hurting me in just the age of the thing. But how can it help me? And sometimes it's just a matter of technology, right. That you have technology available to you 30 years later that you didn't have 30 years ago. But time it can be your friend. And when it comes to conspiracy theories that you're considering, and people are sending to you on social media, remember that time is your friend. Even if this thing they're suggesting is true, well time will tell us if it's true. Because the more now that this thing is out there, because now it's very public, it's going to end up getting vetted by whoever wants to vet it. All the truth is going to come out over time.

Why would you or I post this in five minutes after reading it when we know that the wiser thing to do is to let time do what it does to investigations. Time is our friend. Let's just pause on this. We have to be patient, okay. I get that we're in an immediate culture. The biggest change I see in our culture today is not the access to information. It's that it's on demand. It's immediate. But you don't have to do that when it comes to conspiracy theories. You can wait. Time is your friend.

Let me give you a fifth principle that's kind of related to the first two in this segment here, the five attributes of successful conspiracies, and also the fact that time is your friend. And that is that, any early proclamation, or decision, or verdict you make on one of these, ruins your credibility pretty much forever. This happened to me. I was telling Frank about this, where I had a case where I was on an investigative team. I was at my very first homicide. My team was so

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much more senior to me that the senior guy on my team was 15 years more senior on the job than I was. That's a big gap in experience. And I remember walking in, looking at the evidence in the crime scene, a half an hour or hour into it I said, man, I think it's going to be "X", and I gave my decision on my prospects on who the suspect ought to be.

I was flat out wrong. It took about another week or two for us to unwrap how wrong I was. But do you think that my team, four other investigators and a sergeant, ever let me forget that? No. As a matter of fact, I didn't regain credibility on my team, until all those guys had retired off the team. And I was then the senior guy on the team. There was nobody left who remembered what an idiot I was, in proclaiming within a half an hour, that I thought I knew who the suspect was. An early proclamation simply ruins your credibility. And it's awfully hard to get that back. So, I don't want to be the one who is reposting conspiracy theories that later on may cause me to lose all credibility with people who trust me for this kind of thing.

That's an important thing I want to talk about. I may have to push a little bit here on this time. We got a couple of minutes before the break. Trusted authority is key in the information age. And one of the reasons why we're struggling right now is because we don't know who to trust. All information has been weaponized. It's been politicized. So, if someone says to you that their goal is to, let's say, open the country, you assume that they're on the right and don't care about people, and all they care about is money. And if someone says to you, you need to wear your mask and stay locked in, you assume they're on the left, and all they care is about allowing the government to control them.

Really? Look, it's possible that we could be better motivated than that. We could have better motives than that. But we don't trust each other. We don't trust any authority on either side. Okay. I understand why you might not trust authority. Now is the time to slow things down and do your own investigation. To be patient. Not to open your mouth too early. Because why would you trust? I get it...I understand why. And this is also true for Gen Z. This generation that's growing up with this technology, don't even know which of these websites, all of which look equally authoritative, which should we trust. Well, the skeptic in me, as a detective says, trust no one until you have done your homework. And that takes time. And if you can't land it with your own homework, then you can't talk about it. So, I just back off. Time is your friend. Early proclamations ruin your credibility. And it's hard to find a trusted authority. We don't

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want people to fail to see us as a trusted authority. So, there's no point. That's like the old principle, right? Better to keep quiet and appear to be foolish than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

So, let's just keep those principles in mind. We'll take a break. When I come back, I'll give you another set of principles that I think will really help you to evaluate these conspiracy theories, right here at CrossExamined radio.

Friends, Frank Turek here. I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist is a listener supported radio program and podcast. So, if you like what you hear here, would you consider donating to crossexamined.org? 100% of your donations go to ministry, zero percent to buildings. We're completely virtual. So, if you can help us out, we greatly appreciate it. Thank you so much.

J. Warner Wallace sitting in for Frank Turek, who is away from the microphone, on CrossExamined radio, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. I want to share with you, continue sharing with you, from my cold case detective experience. Having worked conspiracies, I'm continuing to share with you some principles that will help you to evaluate these conspiracy theories that are landing on our inbox, that are landing on our social media pages, involving the COVID-19. All these different conspiracies about how it started, when it started, who's involved, what the overarching plot of this is. We talked about several things. The difference between possible and reasonable. Keep that in mind. The three motives that are behind any misbehavior, giving you five attributes of a successful conspiracy, and this principle that time is your friend and that any early proclamation will ruin your credibility.

We're now at principles six. Principle six. Now look, I will just tell you that human nature alone, especially from a biblical worldview, tells me something, and my investigations have proved it to me. And that is, that our human nature is, how can I say it nicely, we are lazy. In other words, if we can get something quickly, with the less effort, we will. Rather than say I'm gonna take the long way around and spend a lot of effort to get the same thing. And for that reason, I know that opportunistic is always a better explanation than diabolical. Hear what I just said. Opportunistic is always a better explanation, in criminal investigations, than diabolical.

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Look, we're not all like Bond villains, okay, where we have this diabolical plot to overthrow the world and we have been working secretly with some nefarious organization to undermine the good guys, okay. I get that we love these kinds of ideas, but the reality of it is, most of us are not Bond villains. And every time I've tried to out clever the bad guy, I'm thinking to myself, okay, so how did he do this. I'm trying to reconstruct the crime, trying to reconstruct his movement before the crime, reconstruct his movement as he's fleeing from the crime. I have a tendency to give the suspect more credit than he or she is worth. Because in the end, we default to the easiest, quickest, thing that involves the least amount of commitment and the least amount of effort. And so, that's why, when I see that someone is acting at the end of a bunch of chaos, it's more than likely, that that person just stepped up and saw the chaos and said, how can I be opportunistic and gain something from this, rather than he's involved, or she's involved with 15 more people to start the chaos.

A lot of times what we see at the end here, we've got this, okay, something bad has happened. We've got a pandemic. At the end, right now where we are at this date in time, relative to our experience of the pandemic, a lot of stuff's already happened, and people will now seize on opportunities for advantage. Seize on opportunities for personal gain in one of those three areas we talked about; sex, money, or power. And this does not mean that people have been involved with all kinds of people prior, okay. This does not mean that. Because a lot more than likely, what simply happened is that somebody has taken an opportunity to gain something at the end of a bunch of chaos. The simpler explanation is always better than the complex explanation. Does that make sense?

This is why it's really important for us to keep that in mind as we evaluate any of this stuff; is that simpler is always more reasonable and more likely than complex because people are opportunistic. This is true for all suspects. If you leave your front door open, there's a good chance someone is going to say...it doesn't mean he worked a day in advance to get you to leave the front door open. People just seize on opportunities.

And by the way, I'm gonna throw this in. It wasn't going to be in my list of principles to give. This is an extra one. This is free. It's not going to cost you any more to get this. But anyone can make an evidential case for anything. The question is whether it's a good case or not, or there's their most reasonable inference, and what are they hiding from you. But don't think for a

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second that I couldn't make a case that there's a plot that caused me to leave my front door open so this guy, at the end of all that nonsense, ends up walking through my front door. You could probably find some way to make a case for that. It doesn't mean that it's true. Even if I can make a case...oh I see this, I see that. Really? It's still, more than likely, just somebody at the end of chaos, being opportunistic. Rather than somebody involved in an overarching plot involving thousands to cause the chaos to begin with. I'm just going to give it as a principle, if it kind of helps you to back down a little bit from some of these.

Here's principle seven. Be careful with information. We're in an information age. I get it. But it can be your friend, or it can be your enemy. Information can be your friend, or it can be your enemy. And by the way, defense attorneys know this. This is going to be hard for me to kind of express to you, but I just want you to see how I'm thinking about it as a detective. Yeah, information can help me, because somebody can tell me something that actually solves the case. But also, there's a lot of information that's superfluous, that just clutters the issue. And defense attorneys look for that. And so, I do my best to uncover all the information, for example, about witnesses. Because defense attorneys they find out, well your witness, 10 years before he saw this crime, he was arrested for drunk driving. Did you know that? And he lied to the police at the time and said he wasn't drinking. Now that's a piece of information that he's gonna want to bring out in trial, as the defense attorney, and I going to have to kind of deal with it. Well, does the fact that he lied as a teenager about being drunk to a police officer disqualify qualify him as a reliable witness 10 years later, when he saw this crime? You know, the jury's gonna decide that.

But what defense attorneys want to do is bring up every little piece of information, in order to get you to not see the forest for the trees. Focus on this little piece of data. Don't see the overarching evidence set. Look, there's an overarching evidence set even related to this virus, right. I read that you can very easily pin on one piece of information that would seem to distort the overarching information. I'll give you an example of this. This may be an aside, but I was reading the New York Times in the opinion section. Mara Gaye wrote an article and she's a columnist there. She's a member of the editorial board. And her article called, I Wish I Could Do Something for You, My Doctor Said. And it's her as a 30ish year old, who had a bout with coronavirus that dang near killed her and has left her still reeling. And so, her argument is, hey,

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30 year olds get this...as a matter of fact, the subline here is...young, healthy people like me are getting very, very sick from the disease caused by the coronavirus.

There is no doubt that her story is compelling and that there are people who will experience exactly what she has experienced. I'm not here to judge whether that's true or not. I'll take her on her word that everything she experienced is true. But that's a single piece of data. If you look at the actual COVID-19 data from the New York City Health Department, it talks about how many people are hospitalized based on age. And I'm looking at that right now. The website is the NYC health site. It's nyc.gov site. And if you look at the number of people in her age group...now, unfortunately they only categorize 18 to 44, which is useless to me. I need to know how many are in their 20s, how many in their 30s, how many in their 40s. But even if you include people who are 44 years of age, the hospitalization and death rate is incredibly low. I mean, it's next to nothing compared to the other groups, based on the data coming out of the city in which she is writing this article.

So again, I want to hear her story. But information, if it's not in the context of the overall circumstantial case, with all the 150 pieces of evidence related to my suspect, all it becomes is a distraction. It's not representative of how strong my case is. It's just the thing that can sometimes take us on a rabbit trail. Conspiracy theories, when they land on your inbox, and you're looking at them, could often just be another piece of information that is not in context with the overarching body of data that's out there. You have to be careful with information, especially when it comes to you unvetted by way of a video in which somebody has something to gain, like we've already discussed, and in which it firmly falls into the category of possible, rather than reasonable.

Let me give you an eighth principle. Be wary of experts. Be wary of experts. Look, I work in criminal trials, where I will bring in scientific experts to present to the jury to interpret a piece of evidence that otherwise could be tricky. Maybe it's a DNA expert, or a serology expert, or it's a material evidence expert. Maybe it's somebody with gunshot residue, or something like that. You know, it could be a number of experts I might bring in and they will offer their expertise and their opinion. It's called expert opinion.

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Meanwhile, the defense is going to bring in a different expert, who's probably better paid than my guy who just came out of the county, right. He's just a county employee. The defense has got money and so they're gonna hire the best expert in the country. And that expert is going to look at the exact same evidence, the exact same evidence, yet render a completely opposite opinion. Two experts, looking at the exact same data, yet coming to two separate inferences from the data. There's a difference between facts, the data, and inferences you make from facts. Do not confuse these two things. They are different. And what comes to an inference is all kinds of things. You might see the data, like I see the data, but your desires, your wants, your tastes, the way you're wired, your personal history, your family. These things cause you to assess facts differently than I would assess facts. And so, two separate people can come to two completely different inferences.

So, here's how I use experts, even when I read them, or they're offered to me, by way of a conspiracy theory on a video. I use experts, in the information age, online, print media, whatever, to collect data, not inferences. To collect data, not inferences. What I mean is, they're gonna say, well, so Dr. So and So, like in the conspiracy video, Dr. So and So said, X. Okay, that's the data. Now they're going to infer something from that. I'm not going to follow their inference; I'm simply going to go back now. They've given me a pointer. They've said that there's actual video out there that this doctor is saying this. I'm going to go get that video, and watch it in its entirety, not as it's been clipped, but in its entirety. Because I'm using videos that are any kind of experts, I'm using them to point me to data.

If someone says, the data in New York City describes this. Really? I guess there's data in New York City. I'm going to go find that data. I'm not going to allow the expert to tell me what his or her inferences are from the data. I'm going to go back to the data. But that means you and I are going to have to work a lot harder than ever before. That means that every news story, every video of a conspiracy, is not the end of your investigation. It's just the beginning of your personal investigation. And if you're just using and trusting as some authority, something that's sent to you, look, I've said it before when you work criminal trials, or criminal investigations. If you are skeptical of everyone, and assume everyone is a stinking liar, you got a better chance of solving the case, than if you assume everyone is telling you the truth. Have a little discernment and skepticism, even when somebody you trust sends you something and you don't even know how it's sourced. Let that be the place where you begin to collect data, not inferences, and

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that's where the work begins. It begins then. Your own personal investigation begins when that thing lands in your inbox. Let's be more discerning. It takes more time, but it's worth it.

Take a break. I'm going to come back. I'm going to give you a last principle here and then I'm going to give you two principles to move forward with coronavirus right after the break here at CrossExamined radio.

Ad: Hi friends. Frank Turek. You can only have two things. Either you can have hope, or you can have despair. Every day during this coronavirus season at 11:30am (ET)/10:30am (CT), we will be live online with a new live stream called, Hope One. It's at crossexamined.org. Go to crossexamined.org and we're going to give you hope every weekday, Monday through Friday, 11:30am (ET)/10:30am (CT). I hope you can join me.

J. Warner Wallace back with you sitting in. I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, CrossExamined radio. Sitting in for Frank Turek, who is away from the microphone this week, and has asked me to come in and kind of share with you my investigative experience. Frank and I are constantly talking about conspiracy theories. And you know, because he knows I've kind of looked at some of these. And he's looking for places where maybe I could show him something that he hasn't seen.

You know, a lot of times when you're working old cold cases, it's all the old clichés. You know, you're looking for what's kind of hiding in plain sight. Well, that's true, because a lot of these things have got evidence that has been sitting there for 30 years, and someone missed it for 30 years. And you come along and you try to see what's been hiding in plain sight all along. It's reading between the lines. And I mean that in the sense that I look at the transcripts of all the interviews, and I'm trying to basically hear the words that he's not saying, or she's not saying, but they're hidden in there. She's giving me clues, or he's giving me clues, based on other uses of words, that can kind of tell me what it is that they are saying, even though they're not saying it. That's the stuff you're looking for in these kinds of cases. And that's what I'm trying to look for every time someone sends me a video, or sends me an article, describing some new conspiracy theory.

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So, I've given you some principles that I hope will help you to discern the difference between what's possible and reasonable. Anything's possible, not everything is reasonable. The three motives that drive misbehavior, including conspiracy theories online, and those are sex, money, or the pursuit of power. And sometimes, just the number of likes, and the number of views, every time they pull that video down from YouTube and it pops up someplace else, it's getting, you know, millions of views. All that does, by the way, is just motivate people to try to find it again, and then share it even more when they do find it's over here now.

Principle three, you know, the five attributes of a successful conspiracy. The fourth principle is that time is your friend. Wait, don't be so impatient when you share these things with people, because time will usually tell you if it's true. The fifth principle. You say something early and you affirm something early, you're ruining your credibility. Sixth, human nature tells us that opportunistic is always better more likely as an explanation than diabolical. Seven; be careful with information. Eight; be wary of experts.

Now we are at the end. And I want to give you a sad truth, principle number nine. And that is this. Some people, regardless of what you say, what you do, or how this works out, are always going to cling to this conspiracy theory. They're always going to affirm these things. They are going to want to advance them over time. This is how they're wired. This is why, when we select juries for criminal trials, we have a voir dire process, and we are asking the questions that we hope will help us to see which jurors are just not going to move. They're so inclined in one direction or the other, they're either pro prosecution or pro defense, that they will never be able to judge anything fairly, any set of evidences fairly. And you can see this. There are always a bunch of these. Maybe, you know, half the room, that you would excuse rather than put on a jury, because you know that their bias is impenetrable. There's no way that they're going to surrender their preconceived notions to listen fairly to the evidence, and that's okay. I mean, they just are not going to be usable on a jury.

So, this is going to happen. You're going to find people who are unreasonable. And your inclination is to want to engage those people and kind of like, you know, beat him with a stick. You can't do that. I want us to respond to ideas, rather than to respond to people. And I try to do this in my own work, is that, yeah, somebody can be really harsh and they're challenging a claim that you're making, or they're trying to convince you that this conspiracy is true. And they

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can sometimes be a little bit biting. It's really easy to, kind of, respond to bad character, which just kind of lowers our character, typically. But what I'd rather do is just respond to the idea and not the person.

As a matter of fact, I have not shared with you today, aside from an article, which conspiracy theories and which videos...I'm not going to talk about the people involved in these. I'm not going to get specific to the people I trust or don't trust, who might be sharing these. I just want to deal with the ideas. I don't need to vilify the people in order to vilify the ideas. We are called to hate bad ideas, evil ideas, but we are not called to hate people who hold bad ideas. We're called to love the people who hold bad ideas. You know, God hates evil. That's one thing. We're to hate evil. But we're not to hate the people who hold bad ideas. You know, we're here to one, to persuade them, hopefully. But I'm going to stay focused on the ideas. That's the ninth principle; stay focused on the ideas.

Now, as we turn the corner here, I've got a few minutes left here before this show is over today. I want to just help you to move forward. These are not principles in dealing with conspiracy theories, so much as they are, just some ideas about how we move forward in the face of coronavirus. I read to you in the beginning, at least the title, of this get religion article about, 'Plandemic' news, et al: Why do so many religious believers quickly embrace conspiracies? My first piece of advice moving forward is for the church. I just told you this is from May 12 at getreligion.org. You can find the article, you can kind of see what this writer, Julia Duin, has to say about why she thinks that religious folks, such as ourselves, are quick to embrace conspiracies.

I will say this to you. I think the time is now for us to become a much more thoughtful church. And I'll be honest, I'm not surprised that in many places within the church in America, and globally, that that we are encouraged to embrace the truth of Christianity without even looking at any evidence for it. I was struck, not too long ago, by Peter Boghossian, who is a philosopher out of, I think, University of Portland, who wrote a book to help people to deconvert Christians to atheism, if they weren't there before, to atheism. If they were, back to atheism. And he argued that you don't need to share evidence with Christians, because Christians don't make decisions based on evidence. They usually make decisions based on personal experience. You

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need, instead, to help them understand why it's important to not make decisions based on emotion, or experience, but to make decisions based on evidence.

Well, I actually think as a Christian, that's how I made my decision about Jesus. I made my decision based on the evidence. I'm one of those few people you might meet who actually tell you that it was the evidence for Christianity that persuaded me to even look seriously at what the Bible said about me, let alone Jesus. But I will tell you that, if we aren't the kind of church, the kind of group...and every church is different, so you'll just speak for your own church. If we aren't the kind of group that assesses evidence to make decisions, even about God, even about Christianity, then why would you expect us to be the kind of group that assesses things, evidentially, when they're presented to us? I think we could create a culture within the church in which we actually do assess facts to make decisions. And that's what we have to do here is to assess facts to make decisions.

But I don't know that we have a culture in the church that makes that a high priority. And when I ask people around the country, "why are you a Christian?", the most popular answer is, "because I was raised in the church". The second most popular answer is, "because I had an experience that demonstrated for me that Christianity is true. A prayer was answered. I had an experience with the Holy Spirit." Something that's experiential, often emotional, that confirmed for them that Christianity is true. By the way, those are the same two reasons why my Mormon family says they're Mormon. They had an experience of the Holy Spirit to confirm that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, the Book of Mormon is true, or they were just raised in a ward. That's all I've ever known. You don't believe those two answers make Mormonism true. Why would you believe those two answers will Christianity true? They don't. We can do better than that. This is what Frank and I have been spending our entire ministry trying to do. So, I think we need a shift as we be a thoughtful, evidential church, we will be far more likely to be thoughtful and evidential about all kinds of other claims, including conspiracy theories.

Here's my second piece of advice for [unintelligible]. I've got three minutes to make it. Police work often is what I call the art of changing. Changing something. You get called as a patrol unit to a call and you get there and there's some commotion. There's maybe a domestic violence call, or there is maybe a loud noise, a party is going on. So, you're called to this scene to kind of deal with it. Trainees need to know this. This is your training as a police officer. We get there,

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our goal is to change something, so that we won't get called to come back here in 15 minutes. If we don't change anything, we just come and say, oh, that's nice, and we walk away, guess what. Something bad's gonna happen, we're going to get called back in 15 minutes.

Instead, what we're going to go is, we're going to land there, we're going to say, okay, what's going on? What is the one or two things I can change that will solve the problem, so I'm not called back here in 30 minutes? Maybe somebody needs to go to jail. Maybe it's just some advice needs to be given, and if it's listened to, you're good. Something's got to change, though in that mess, that chaos, or you're going to get called back. Look, same thing is happening here. We've got a situation facing us as a country. So, if we don't change anything, and we saw that right. So, we locked things down. We locked things down to slow the growth of the curve, to flatten the curve.

Now, what we hope is, that we now have something, either in our way of thinking with how many respirators and masks we have available, we have changed something so that now we can reopen, and we won't be called back in 30 minutes with the same thing. If we don't change something, then yeah, it's going to repeat itself. And I do think that some of the things that have changed for us are simply going to be that, we now understand what social distancing and mass are going to do, how we're going to have to reopen, how more careful we're going to have to be about contagion. And I hope that we, as a country, ramped up our use of our availability of masks and respirators, so we have changed something, so now we can actually leave the call, and they're not going to call us again in 15 minutes. That is the goal. It's the art of change. Can you change something?

So, as I look forward, I gotta ask, okay, do you think we've changed enough so that I'm not going to get into that debate? That's something you'll probably can talk about here with Frank in the future. But I just want you to know that responding to a crisis is like responding to a call. It's all about the art of change.

To hear more from me on any number of these topics, including the Christian topics, you can find me at coldcasechristianity.com. And I've got a Kid's Academy for your kids, eight to twelve, at casemakersacademy.com. So, I hope these nine principles will help you to better evaluate

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conspiracy theories when people actually introduce you to them online. Let's be patient. Let's take our time. Let's consider motive. Let's be wise and thoughtful.

Until next time, this is J. Warner Wallace sitting in for Frank Turek, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, at CrossExamined radio. See you next time.

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