

I don't have enough **FAITH**
to be an **ATHEIST**

with Dr. Frank Turek **PODCAST**

Why Believe? | with Dr. Neil Shenvi

(July 22, 2022)

Why should you believe in Christianity? Why should we even believe that God exists? Aren't there reasons not to believe in God, for example, evolution, or evil, or the hedonists? If God exists why don't you just show up and say, Here I am. I mean, that would make it a lot easier. Why do we even have apologists? What's the deal with that? And do miracles occur? Can they occur? What is the evidence for the resurrection? Is the gospel actually an argument for Christianity? Is that something we ought to expect if God does exist and he's a loving God?

Well, my guest today actually got saved at the University of California at Berkeley - Berserkeley, some say. He's a PhD there. He's worked as a research scientist at Yale University and Duke University, he's published over 30 peer review papers, and he actually gave that all up to homeschool his four children. He's been on the program before when we talked about critical theory. It's Dr. Neil Shenvi. Ladies and gentlemen, here he is. Neil, how are you?

Neil:

Doing great, Dr. Turek. Thank you so much. And you know, you asked: Do miracles happen? And yet you just announced one. I became a Christian at UC Berkeley, right. So, if God can do a miracle like that he can do anything.

Frank:

That's right. Well, Neil, you have a brand new book put out by Crossway. I have been read through it. It's excellent. And it's got some unique contributions to apologetics. The book is called *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity*. As I just mentioned, ladies and gentlemen, Neil has his PhD from Berkeley. Was that in Organic Chemistry?

Neil:

Well, in Theoretical Chemistry. So, when people hear chemistry, they think like Walter White, *Breaking Bad*. They think test tubes and Bunsen burners. I tell them, it's more like a show I

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haven't seen, which is the Big Bang Theory, or the movie, A Beautiful Mind. Your scrawling equations on whiteboards. That's the kind of chemistry I did, all theoretical.

Frank:

Now, give us a little bit about your background. We know you went to Berkeley but there's a lot more to the story than that. Kind of give our listeners a background as to where you're from and how you got to where you are.

Neil:

Sure. So, I grew up in a very loving but non-religious home. I went to Princeton as an undergraduate, and I would have described myself as spiritual but not religious. If you asked me: What are you? I would say, Well, you know, I guess I'm a Christian because I live in the US and I believe in God, and so it makes me a Christian, right. But I had really no understanding of basic Christian theology. I remember at one point while I was at Princeton, just musing on my own philosophical understanding of God. And I said, Christians believe in the Trinity. It's like the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. Who's the Holy Ghost? Oh, I bet you that was Jesus. After he rose from the dead, he became the Holy Ghost. And I consider myself a very intellectual person and yet I had not even a basic understanding of Christian theology. Anyway, so that's my background.

So, how did I become a Christian? Well, I met my future wife, Christina, at Princeton. We were both chemistry majors. And just knowing her I was amazed. She was funny, she was smart, she was beautiful, but she was so not self-centered, and she was so not self-conscious because for her, the biggest thing about her was not her intellect or her competence, or her beauty, it was just that she was a Christian. And that was very attractive, and also kind of threatening to me.

But we went into graduate school together at Berkeley. And I also at the time had been reading a bunch of CS Lewis. And so, I picked up a free copy of The Screwtape Letters and Mere Christianity at a book table at Princeton, and I thought this is great, free books, these suckers will just give me free books and I'll just take them and never see me again. But I love The Screwtape Letters. It just spoke to me I was like; This is amazing. How does he know what's going on in my head? How can he see all of the struggles, the temptations, the pride, the posing?

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And then finally I went to church with my future wife, Christina, and that's where I heard the gospel for the first time. And it was just the simple message that you are sinful and need a rescuer, a Savior. And another thing that happened there was I met very intelligent people. So, my quantum physics professor, as a first year graduate student, sang in the choir. And I realized these people around me, I was surrounded by professors and graduate students and postdocs who were still evangelical Christians. So, that forced me to evaluate, Well, am I taking Christianity seriously?

Frank:

And what was the point that you said, I am now a Christian? Was it some argument you read? Was it some objection that was overcome? Was it just a witness that your future wife was giving you? What was it that caused you to say, Yeah, I believe this is true?

Neil:

Sure. So, the thing is, it's interesting, if I had to credit one person with convincing me that Christianity at least made objective truth claims, it was Bart Ehrman. So, I'd taken a class at Princeton. Yeah, this is great. So, at Princeton as a non-Christian, I'd taken a class on origins of the New Testament and the origin of Christianity. And it was taught by John Gager, who's a secular person. We used Ehrman's textbook as our textbook. We read readings from the Jesus Seminar, which is a very liberal religious scholarship. And Elaine Pagels was actually a guest lecturer one day. She's a very famous scholar of the Gnostic Gospels.

So, this completely secular perspective, that class, among evangelicalism, was known as the faith buster, because it challenged Christian beliefs so dramatically. But what I learned as a non-Christian was that there are a few basic facts about historical Jesus that were accepted unanimously, like he existed, he had 12 disciples, he was baptized by John the Baptist, he got into religious disturbance, he had followers that were tax collectors and sinners. So, this is a historical figure, there's no doubt about that. They just assume that that's a canon of New Testament scholarship, he's a real person. And the general biography that we have in the Bibles is generally just as a real historical person.

So, when I went to Berkeley as a non-Christian, I at least had the solid, true belief that yeah, Jesus existed, and then it showed the religious stuff about him. I'm not sure about that. But he's

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a real person. So, then when I heard the gospel, that well, he was a real person, and you know historically he died on the cross. But what if he died for your sins? And what if he rose from the dead? That's an objective claim suddenly. And the real hurdle for me actually was getting past my arrogance because I just knew in my heart, Well, I'm better than these stupid Christians. I'm an intellectual, I'm a scholar, I'm getting a PhD, and all of these stupid, non-intellectual, uneducated Christians, they're backwards.

But then God brought me to a place where I was like, Oh, my gosh, if I become a Christian, I'm admitting basically that I'm like a child, I need to be led by the hand and brought to God, I don't know him anymore. And I remember one night in my apartment just saying to God, I don't even know anymore who you are. I was so confident that the God I imagined was a real God, I was so smart, but if this is true, then I have to start from square one. And I said, God, I don't know even if Jesus is your son, but if he is, I'll follow him. And I think that was the night I was regenerated; I was born again. It took a long time for me to get really solid theology and to understand more of what it meant to follow Jesus but that's the point I crossed from death to life. I just said to God, I'll follow you. I'll follow him. Right. And through the next few months, increased my knowledge of who he was, and what, you know what it meant to be a Christian. But yeah, that was the turning point.

Frank:

So, are you saying that a course at Princeton that you used Bart Ehrman's book for, inadvertently gave you the minimal facts that historians agree on regarding Jesus?

Neil:

The funny thing is, of course, they did not treat the resurrection. Okay, so they established that, okay, he's a real figure, he died on the cross. And then, of course, the religious subject of whether did he die for your sins? Ehrman is like, Well, that's a religious question. So, for me, I was like, well, that's not a historical question really. But then I had asked, shortly after becoming a Christian, Well, what about the resurrection, then? I believe it as a Christian, but historically, is there evidence for it?

And the funny thing is, then I immediately turned around and I used the tools we've learned in that class, and I said, Wait a minute. I know that historians may look at historical facts into any

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document. They ask things like, Is it multiply attested? Are there multiple independent sources that say this happened? I said, Wait a minute. Yes, it's in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul's letters. Is it embarrassing? Well, sure. The women discovered the empty tomb. So, I applied the very things I learned in that class to say the resurrection is historically credible, amazingly.

Frank:

Wow. We're talking to Neil Shenvi. His brand new book is *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity*. We're just getting into it, so don't go anywhere. You're listening to *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be An Atheist* with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. We're back in two minutes.

If you're low on the FM dial looking for National Public Radio go no further. We're actually going to tell you the truth here. That's our intent anyway. You're never going to hear this on NPR, even though the man I'm interviewing is certainly qualified to be there. He's a PhD in theoretical chemistry from the University of California at Berkeley. He became a Christian after going to both Princeton and Berkeley and he's explaining why, and he explains more in his new book *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity*. It's Dr. Neil Shenvi. By the way, if you type in Neil Shenvi Apologetics, you'll find his website.

Neil, just before the break, we were talking about this course you were taking that used Bart Ehrman's material, which inadvertently led you to believe in Christianity, in the resurrection. You mentioned the principle of embarrassment, multiple at a station (GO BACK AND LISTEN TO THIS AT 10:59), what else did you learn in that class that brought you to Christianity?

Neil:

The main things were just that the biblical gospels at least gave you a picture of a real person. Now again they would say, There's lots in there that's been made up, that's been fabricated, but the basic outline of Jesus' life was real. And then I went back and said, Well, wait a minute, what are the tools that we used to arrive at that conclusion and realized, if you apply those same tools to say the resurrection, you find that this is actually historically credible.

Another one would be, say early attestation. So, are the earliest documents saying that this thing happened? And of course, Mark's gospel is probably the earliest gospel written, Paul's

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letters are even earlier, and they're also the best sources for the resurrection of Jesus. So, by those tools that we learned in that class of historicity, I'm saying, wait a minute, the resurrection can be treated historically.

Frank:

Now, when you wrote your book, and this book just came out a month or two ago - it's called *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity*. How do you treat the issue of the resurrection in the book? What sort of arguments are you bringing to bear to say Jesus actually did rise from the dead?

Neil:

So, I use an approach very similar to William Lane Craig's approach. The best explanation for all these facts, we have things like the death and burial of Jesus, we have the empty tomb, we have the experiences of the resurrection, Jesus, whatever actually happened. The disciples certainly believed they'd seen the resurrected Jesus. Then we have Paul's conversion. So, there's four basic facts we have, and I defend them. I say, Why could we conclude that these facts are actually historical? And I quote from non-Christian scholars saying, Yeah, we buy those facts. And then I ask, Well, what's the best explanation?

And one of the interesting things that I found as I researched this book, was the alternative explanations offered by atheists and non-Christians for those four facts are absolutely weird. My favorite one, which is extraordinary, is the idea that Jesus had an identical twin. And, you know, you hear that and you're like...and people will claim, Well, that explains why the tomb was empty, that somehow maybe his twin stole the body. Or it explains the appearances. The disciples saw the identical twin and they thought it was Jesus. And you think that's like an episode of *Twin Peaks*, or it's like a conspiracy theory. But not only do you have people like Greg Cavan, who is a former evangelical Christian, now an atheist, but in public he debated William Lane Craig on the resurrection and put forward the twin hypothesis. And then even stated on camera that it was a better explanation than any other atheistic explanation. Well, okay, if you think that then I gotta tell you, I'm leaning towards the resurrection even as an atheist. I'd be like, that's bad news.

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But then you're like, not only did he appeal to that, but Bart Ehrman ended up being against Craig. [He] offered two explanations for the evidence and one of them was this twin scenario. I'm thinking, this is madness. I'd say this, if you're an atheist I can see why you might say, Well, miracles are just so weird and so implausible. Okay, I'll grant you that on your worldview, but you have to grant me the fact that an identical twin conspiracy theory that involves the twin pretending to be Jesus - as Cavan says, putting makeup on his hands to simulate the nail marks - that, to me, is implausible. At least like a toss-up between: Did Jesus rise from the dead supernaturally or did he have an identical evil twin who impersonated him? Then at one point Caven even throws this out there. He says, The other explanation is the ET explanation. He doesn't elaborate, but I'm thinking he must say there's a possibility that aliens impersonated Jesus. And I'm like, alright, I think we're done here.

Frank:

You talk about in the book, *Why Believe*, this sort of methodological naturalism. And there are people out there on the atheistic side who just have ruled out miracles before they look at the evidence. What do you say to somebody, Neil, who says, Well, anything's more probable than a miracle. The twin theory, the hallucination theory, that's more probable than a miracle. What would you say?

Neil:

So, I'd say a number of things. First of all, when they say that they're often working on an antiquated view of physics. So, they often have this billiard ball model of Newtonian physics, where everything in the universe is like a giant clock. You wind it up, the Big Bang, and then just kind of runs and things happen deterministically. Well, that's a [unintelligible] view of science. And this is actually my field. So, I have a PhD in Theoretical Chemistry, I specialized in quantum mechanics, and modern physics does not think that way. According to the laws of quantum physics, the universe is sort of, it's very weird. And the bottom line is that miracles might be improbable, highly improbable, but they're not impossible. They don't violate the laws of nature because the laws of nature themselves are not necessarily deterministic. It's complicated. But that's one thing I'd say is that if you're working from this clockwork universe model, you just need to be updated a little bit.

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The other thing I'd say is that Christians don't believe that miracles happen regularly. That's the whole point. Miracles are unusual. They're signs of God's power. They wouldn't be meaningful if they happened all the time. So, we don't really expect to see them everywhere. CS Lewis says they happen at the great ganglia of history, at these major turning points. Well, what's one of those obvious turning points? Well, if Jesus was, in fact, God's Son, then his death and resurrection are the turning point of all history. So, we expect to see a miracle there.

And then finally, I point out also that we said, Well, how do I know that Jesus would be raised from the dead? Why didn't God raise other people from the dead? And again, if you say, It's implausible because of billions of people that have died, how could you say only Jesus was raised from the dead? That's like a one in a billion, or one in 10 billion chance, given how many people are not resurrected. Well, then I point out when you say that you're making assumptions about God's purposes, and character, and existence.

So, I give an example, imagine that, I go up on the roof of my house, and I'm dropping a bowling ball. I drop a bowling ball and it takes one second to fall to the ground. I time it, I do it a million times, a billion times. My friends are watching me and every time it takes exactly one second to fall to the ground. Then I tell my friend next to me, Now I'm gonna drop the ball. This time it's gonna take ten seconds to reach the ground. And my friend looks at me and is like, No, it's not. That would violate the laws of physics. You've shown that a billion times it's gonna take one second. I say no, no, no, it's not. Watch. So, I drop the bowling ball and I catch it and I hold it for nine seconds and let go. And he said, Well, you cheated. You intervened in the natural course of events. And I said, Yeah, of course I did because the laws of nature are what happened when no one intervenes in them but if God's outside of nature, then he can intervene.

And one last thing. Imagine that I'm about to drop the ball, but I let go of it and then just at that moment my daughter walks out right below me and the ball is gonna hit her. Now if you pause right there, freeze time, and ask my friend, now, what's the probability that Neil will catch the ball this time? And he'd say, 100%. Because given my character, given my love for my daughter, I'm absolutely going to save her. I'm going to intervene in that one instance. So, in the same way, if Jesus was who He claimed to be, there's not like a one in a billion chance that God would raise him from the dead, there's a 100% chance because God is doing something unique with Jesus, showing people that he is in fact, the Messiah.

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Frank:

I want you to comment on this. I'm reading from your book, Neil, bottom of page 79. This is from Neil Shenvi's book, *Why Believe?* You write this. "Doesn't it strike us as a bit remarkable that the one miracle which..." [according to Antony Flew, who was a skeptic for many years] "...which is the best attested in any religion in all of history happens to be associated with a figure who also had the moral character and impact of Jesus? How do we explain this coincidence? Unpack that further for us Neil.

Neil:

That's right. I got this argument from Tim Keller, because he says, imagine you lined up all of these figures in history, like the people that changed history. So, you list people like Hitler, Buddha, Genghis Khan, but then Jesus would be on that list. He clearly changed history. There's no question about that.

Frank:

More than anyone. Yeah.

Neil:

More than anyone. Yeah, he's number one, he's number two, number three, whatever, he's on that list. Let's say then you make a list of people that claim to be God. Well, you have crackpots, you have people like Jim Jones, or I list some other random cult leaders. But you got Jesus on that list too. So, then you're like, that's odd. There's one person on both lists. He actually made these claims, which I show in my book that he actually made those claims, and then also, he changed history. And then, independently, we have this evidence that he actually rose from the dead. That Antony Flew, and other non-Christians and atheists who say, actually, the evidence there is kind of it's weird. So, even if they don't believe it, they're like, it's not nothing. Again, you're asking me to swallow a pretty enormous set of coincidences and I think the more natural explanation is: What if he actually is who he claimed to be?

Frank:

Yeah, and the fact that this guy has, as you say, the most attested miracle claim in the history of the world associated with him. And he is the most influential human being in history. You would

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say, Well, how is this guy the most influential human being in history? Something dramatic must have happened. Go ahead, Neil.

Neil:

Not just influential but look at how he influenced history. Right? He wasn't a king, he wasn't a military leader, he was an itinerant preacher. When he died, I mean, all his followers left him, but he had maybe a few dozen, 100 followers. And then more than that, and there is now this rapid turnaround, where he's now worshipped as God by 2 billion people. And then if you look at his actual teachings, even today, you have atheists like Dawkins and Sam Harris, saying, Yeah, his teaching, or whoever wrote his teaching - we don't believe he existed - but whoever wrote his teachings, they're relevant today. You have him inspiring movements for freedom and for equal rights throughout history. So, there are all of these things that line up and it really gets more and more uncomfortable to say it's all one big coincidence.

Frank:

When we come back, I'm going to ask Neil about some arguments against the Christian faith against theism, like evil, evolution, divine hiddenness. Before I do, I want to mention that this weekend, July 23 and 24, I'll be at Calvary Chapel Port St. Lucie. I'll be speaking at all the services there. In the morning services we're going to talk about If God, Why Evil? And then in the afternoon session, we're going to be talking about Should You Follow Your Heart? We'll be taking a lot of questions as well. Then across the state in Tampa, my friend Charlie Kirk is running his biggest event of the year. It's the Student Action Summit. And there are going to be some amazing people there. You can go to his website at TPUSA.com. So, if you're near Tampa, you may want to check that out, especially if you're a young person. Check it all out. We're back here with Dr. Neil Shenvi just two minutes. Don't go anywhere.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with my friend, Dr. Neil Shenvi. I'm Frank Turek. Neil's just written a great new book called, Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity. Before I start asking you about these objections to God, Neil, give us the overall reason for the book and the outline of the book, just so people know what they're getting.

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Neil:

Sure. So, I like to pitch this book as it's like Tim Keller's Reason for God for STEM majors. That science, technology, engineering, mathematics majors. I talked to readers, to people who have read the book, they said, We can tell you're a scientist because you think through things so systematically. It's not emotionless. I talk about the gospel and how it's moving and it's important, but it's very systematic. And I think it brings out my scientific training and then the purpose. I wanted to write a book that was accessible that people, you know, high school students who were motivated could read it, college students, people that hadn't been to college. There's no jargon, it's not technical. But I wanted a book that people that are in college could give to their professors and not feel like they were embarrassed or just didn't fit with the professors. I'll give you a reason, and this is not at all meant to disparage the book. I really like J. Warner Wallace's Cold Case Christianity. It's a great, really cool book. I thought it was really helpful. But it has hand drawn illustrations in it. And if I had handed that to one of my professors at Princeton, or at Berkeley, they would have just immediately opened it, Oh, it's got pictures in it. I mean, give me a break.

Frank:

They would dismiss it, even though the quality of it is great. Yeah, I get it.

Neil:

Yeah, of course. So, my point is, I wanted to write a book, it has footnotes, it looks like, and it is, it's well researched. I interact heavily with top atheists, scholars, philosophers. Not just like the new Atheists like Dawkins, and Dennett, and Hitchens, and Sam Harris, but also with people like Bart Ehrman, Paula Fredrickson, Anthony Flew. So, I interact with people that are making the best case for atheism or against Christianity. So, a college student could give this to their non-Christian professor, their non-Christian friends, and not feel like they're going to come across as non-intellectual.

Frank:

Right. Good. Well, let's talk about some of the objections to theism that God exists. And we can't cover this in a lot of detail, but you have a chapter on this. Let's talk about the objection from the problem of evil. If there's a good God, Neil, why does He allow evil to occur?

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Neil:

Right. And one response is to ask: If there's a good God then why does He allow brussel sprouts to exist? Because, you know, I really don't like brussel sprouts, and so how could a good God allow something that I don't like. And you say, wait a minute, whoa, wait, that makes no sense. God's not here to make you like what he creates. I say, Oh, that's a good point. That argument only works if brussel sprouts are objectively bad, objectively evil, right. But my point is, when an atheist poses that question: How could a good God exist if evil exists? I say, What do you mean? Do you mean, a subjective preference that you don't like what's out there? No, no, I mean objective evil. Oh, excellent. Because one of the premises of the moral argument, which I treat in the previous chapter, is that objective good and evil exists. And if objective good and evil exists, then I argue in the last chapter that you need God to ground those objective moral facts.

So, they're almost doing some of your work for you. So, when you pose that external problem of evil, then you're admitting that yes, in fact, good and evil objectively exists, and therefore we have to ground those quantities quality. So, that's one [unintelligible] answer. I give many different answers, but one other answer that I give is, Well, logically, evil allows two goods that would not be logically possible if evil did not exist. If sin did not exist, then God could not show his mercy in forgiving sinners, then he couldn't show his justice and punishing sin. So, even the existence of evil, which is objectively evil, it allows for God to show His love and his holiness. And so, we exist for God's glory in the end. So, it's a way, even though it is evil, obviously, but it can still further God's purposes for the universe, which is displaying his supreme love and holiness.

Frank:

We're talking to Dr. Neil Shenvi. His brand new book is *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity*. Second objection to God you have in the book is evolution. What do you say about that?

Neil:

So yeah, again, there's a whole section on this. Briefly, I say the main point of contention between Christians and say secular atheists over evolution is in the question of whether random mutation and natural selection alone can produce all the things we see in life on Earth. And I argue that for both philosophical and scientific reasons, we don't have to accept that final

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idea that random evolution, therefore rules out God's intervention, his guidance of evolution, that's how we did it. And here's when I'm just defeating that claim. And philosophically, I point out that "random events" are still guided by a sovereign God.

So, I did a really fun experiment with a bunch of kids a month ago. I had them all basically flip a coin and whoever got the most heads, I called them up to the stage, and I said, Hey, this coin is your own coin. Is it random? They're like, Yeah, it's random. I keep flipping it, and someone got 10 heads and like, okay, so you come up: Was that random? Like, yeah, totally random. And I handed the kid a \$10 bill and they were like, Whoa. You know teenagers, they're like, Woah, that's a lot. I said, that was random, right? He was like, yeah, absolutely. Was God sovereign over that? And they all went, Whoa. Because they realize things that look completely random - they swore up and down they were random - and yet they realize if God is sovereign, He's sovereign over all of those natural processes that look completely random to us. So, you can't say if these mutations look random, therefore, God's not involved, God's not sovereign, God's on guiding the process.

The other point I make... There's a Duke molecular biology student and I said, Here's a question, I'm just curious. Take all the evidence we have for evolution, take all that stuff you think is evidence for evolution, it's evidence of non-guided random evolution, take all that happens. He said, Yeah, okay. Fossil record, all these genetics things, okay. I'm a biologist, so I just said, imagine that some atheists believe that aliens brought the first life form to Earth. Yeah, people like Richard Dawkins speculating that maybe it was aliens. And so, I said, just hypothetically, imagine the aliens - I don't believe that's true - but let's just say aliens brought the first life form and aliens stuck around to conduct this long term, multi-billion year experiment on life where every few 1000 years, they grabbed a bunch of species, they put them in a big, gigantic pen, and they intentionally bred them like a farmer does to produce new traits. Because Darwin himself said, the analogy to natural selection is breeding. We breed animals all the time to have more wool, or a longer neck, whatever. We pick a trait, we exaggerate it.

So, imagine these aliens every 1000 years gathers some animals and depends, and they breed them until they have some new trait, until maybe they'd even insert special genes through futuristic alien technology and genetic engineering. So, that's clearly now the aliens are doing guided evolution. They're literally breeding new species. Question: Is there anything in the

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actual evidence we have right now, fossil records, genes, all this stuff, that would rule out that guided process? And he thought, and he's like, no. My point is, so what you're saying is, we can't really rule out guidance, even scientifically, as long as it's aliens. He's like, well, no. I said, Okay, wait. So, if you can't know that aliens weren't involved, how can you think God wasn't involved? So yeah, there's a scientific objection pointing out - I'm not saying it's aliens, obviously. I'm just saying, Look, if you're gonna claim the evidence rules out design, even scientifically, I think it just doesn't. And I'm not a biologist. I'm just I'm a mere theoretical chemist. I'm raising this possibility.

Frank:

Well, as you know, the interesting aspect of breeding is that even intelligent breeders run into genetic limits, right? They can take a dog, or series of dogs, and breed them as small as a chihuahua, as large as a Great Dane, but they can't break the genesis of dogs. It seems to me if we're using all of our intelligence and can't break the Genesis, why do we think a non-intelligent process can do it?

Neil:

Well, the aliens might have inserted genes because they're futuristic. [laughing]

Frank:

Oh, okay.

Neil:

I'm pointing out that like, the evidence that we have can't rule any of this stuff out. And so, then you can't say, Well, they evidence just shows, it's not guided. I'm like, Well, I don't think it does.

Frank:

I haven't read the whole book yet, and again, the book is called Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity. Do you deal in this book at all, Neil, with the origin of natural laws themselves, the forces of nature? Do you ask that question and how to atheists respond? Because they just assume that these laws exist and do all the work for them. But the question is: Where do the laws come from? Where does the universe come from? Where does the fine-

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tuned universe come from, including the fine-tuning of the laws of nature? Do you deal with that at all?

Neil:

Yeah, so I point to, again, the fine-tuning of the fundamental constants of physics. I cite Barnes and Lewis's excellent book *A Fortunate Universe*. They're both cosmologists, and so, they've done a lot of work on fine-tuning. But then I also actually point deeper and say, What about, as you alluded to, the mathematical structure of the universe? Why do we have laws at all? And what's more, why is it that human beings can even understand those laws? Like my cat, you know, can't understand the laws of nature, but human beings uniquely can? So, under what worldview, atheism or say Christianity, under which of those two worldviews is it more natural to expect that one, the universe has a law like structure...? It's not chaotic, that just things just happen by magic. They are actual beautiful laws that describe all of nature. And that human beings are somehow uniquely positioned and capable of understanding those laws.

Well, it makes perfect sense if God is supremely intelligent and rational, and he designed a rational, intelligent universe governed by laws, and if he made us in His image. Human beings are uniquely then equipped to understand his universe. So, that makes sense on Christianity, but on atheism, that's sort of weird. Why are things chaotic? I could imagine a chaotic universe, I could imagine a universe where the laws change from planet to planet, or from time period to time period - Monday's laws and Tuesday's laws are different. I can imagine that, the type of universe we live in, and also I could imagine us just not being smart enough to understand the laws of mathematics. So, I give some plausible explanations. Atheists might posit like, Oh, well, we evolved this way, and I show why these are insufficient and really, the better explanation is that the universe looks this way, and we can understand it because we were made in God's image.

Frank:

Yeah, the rational intelligibility of the universe, I think, is a great argument for theism. And friends, as you know, when we're arguing for God, or any aspect of Christianity, we're normally arguing from effect to cause. So, if we have a creation, that's the effect; we're reasoning back to a cause, a creator. If we have design, that's the effect; we're reasoning back to a cause, a designer. If we have a moral law written on our hearts, that's the effect; we're reasoning back

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to a cause, a moral lawgiver. If we have the capacity to rationally understand the universe and we see these laws of nature out there, and the laws of reason, if that's the effect, we ought to reason back to a mind.

In fact, it was Philip Johnson, I don't know if you've read much of Philip Johnson, Neil. Phillip passed on a couple of years ago. He was really one of the founders of the modern intelligent design movement when he first wrote the book, Darwin on Trial. He was an attorney at Berkeley.

Neil:

At Berkely. Yeah, I remember.

Frank:

Did you run into him at all because he was...

Neil:

I think I saw him speak one time. Like he was already fairly old when I was there. But yeah.

Frank:

He famously said that, that he was a skeptic in one set of beliefs, he was a true believer in another set of beliefs. So, you know, if you're a skeptic of Christianity, you probably believe in evolution, quantum vacuums, and some other way of explaining why the universe is the way it is. And then he said something else really profound. We'll have to bring it up after the break because we're running out of time here. My name is Frank Turek, and my guest is Neil Shenvi. His new book you need to get is called Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity. We're back in two minutes, don't go anywhere.

School shootings, pandemics, genocide, rape, and murder. Why does God allow such evils ladies and gentlemen? And did the God of the Old Testament actually do evil himself? You'll get answers to those questions, and even your own questions, when you enroll in the course run by Dr. Clay Jones called Why Does God Allow Evil? It just started; you're not going to miss anything if you sign up over the weekend. The first zoom session with Dr. Jones is next week. So, go to

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Let me go back to my friend, Dr. Neil Shenvi. His brand new book is Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity. I was talking about Philip Johnson there just before the break. Let me complete the thought on him, Neil, then I'm going to ask you about the divine hiddenness question. Philip Johnson wrote a book called Reason in the Balance where he points out that if materialism is true, then reason's gone with it. Because if we're just molecular machines, and we're just moist robots, then we can't even reason. And of course, CS Lewis talked about that before him. But he said, It makes the most sense that our mind is made in the image of the great mind. That's why we can actually do science. That's why we can actually understand the world around us outside of our skull. We can know what's going on out there and God has given us this apparatus so we could know, not only the universe, but know him. We could look at all the effects that he has created, and we can reason back to a cause. And your book points that out as well.

But let me ask you that divine hiddenness question. We don't often talk about this issue. You know, if God is out there, and he wants people to believe and be saved, and he loves us, he's got an infinite love, don't you think he'd be a little bit more overt? What do you say to that?

Neil:

Sure. And I say, I grant the fact that if God wanted to, he could do all kinds of miracles, do whatever he wanted. Make you levitate you know, make an angel appear in Times Square twice a day and say God exists. So, I say, Wait a minute, that's true, he could do that. Why doesn't he? And the answer is because our problem is not ultimately a lack of evidence. There is evidence. I think I show it throughout the book, there's evidence. But there could be more evidence, sure, but that assumes the problem is a lack of evidence. Or as I point out, biblically speaking, the real problem is our false loves. We don't really want there to be a god like the God of the Bible. Because why? Because we want to be our own lords and saviors.

And so, if God just appeared to you and said, Here I am and do what I say, if you actually look at what that would entail from the Bible's commands about how we ought to be living our lives, we recoil from that kind of God. It's our hearts that need to be changed, not just our brains. So,

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if God changed our minds about whether he exists, we still might loathe him. So, then the question becomes: How can I change my heart, my affections? And that's why, leading to the final section of my book, which is the argument from the gospel, I argue that the gospel is the way that God changes the human heart, to make us open to him and to make us respond to His invitation.

Frank:

Well, you actually talk about that in the last section of the book. You say it's an argument from the gospel, it's a little bit less well known. So, how do you explain that argument? What is that the argument from the gospel?

Neil:

Right. So, I make the case that the Gospel itself, the message that Jesus came to die for your sins and then rise from the dead for your justification. That message is evidence that Christianity is objectively true, which sounds weird. Here's an illustration. As I'm playing pickup basketball, in the middle of the game I collapse, people run over, one guy says, Oh, you sprained your ankle, I'll go grab an ace bandage. Another guy says, I'll get you some Advil. They're talking about the best way to treat me. But a woman rushes up and says, I'm a doctor, I saw what happened and you need to get to the hospital right away. Call 911. Your life is in danger. And everyone's incredulous. They say, lady, you're being extremely hysterical. This is ridiculous. And she leans down to me, and she says, I'm gonna tell you two things. You can't feel your legs and you can't move. And the crowd is just going crazy like she is overreacting. And I tell them, No, call an ambulance right now and get me to the hospital.

Now, why do I do that? And the answer is because I know two things the crowd does not know. I know that I can't feel my legs and I know that I can't move. And I say to myself, I reason I think, now nobody else knew that and everyone else assumed I just sprained my ankle. And so, she uniquely among all the people in the crowd somehow knew what no one else knew. So, the rational explanation is, she must be actually a doctor. She must be uniquely equipped to treat me. That explains her unique knowledge of me. So, in the same way, I argue if any religion identifies two deep fundamental truths about your condition that you are immediately aware of, and it's unique in those claims, then the best explanation is it is a uniquely true religion.

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And then in the next three chapters I explain that actually Christianity makes two unique claims that were radically sinful. We are radical moral failures. And then two, we need a rescue. Not just moral improvement, not just a little boost, we need someone to come in from the outside and free us from our sin and forgive our sin. And Christianity is unique in those claims. So, I walk through a book by Stephen Prothero, who's not a Christian. It's called God is Not One. And in that book, he goes through all the main religions of the world and says, Christianity is in fact unique in making those claims. You are radically sinful, need a Savior. And I go through the evidence and say, Look, human beings are radically sinful. Talk about genocide, and rape, and murder, and just all the horrendous things that come out of our heart. We are deeply broken people.

And then second, we need rescue. We don't just need, you know, self-help books and more positive attitude in order to obey God's law. That's not enough, because we don't obey God's law. So, I go through the case that we need not just better government, better schools, better and more money, a turn to traditional values. Those things might be great, but they're not going to fix our main problem. We need a Savior. And then if that's all true, then Christianity is the only religion that gets those two things right, and therefore, the best explanation is it's true.

Frank:

Did you say there was a third thing?

Neil:

It was if a religion is unique, it makes any claims, then it's probably true. Christianity makes unique claims. Are they true? Yes, both claims, the claim that you're a sinner is true, the claim that you need a savior is true. There are four premises and then one conclusion. But each of those I argue for in the book.

Frank:

What would you say to somebody who said, Well, no, I know I'm a sinner, but I can make it up by doing good deeds? How would you respond?

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Neil:

Yeah, so I have a whole section on that insight. I point out like does the human law work that way? Imagine that I get brought to court for murdering a six year old girl in cold blood. So, I get up in front of the judge and he says, Well, you confessed to the crime, we have you on video, we have your fingerprints on the murder weapon, and so you're clearly guilty. What do you have to say for yourself? And I say, Well, Your Honor, I did, in fact, murder that young girl but on the other hand, I recycle, I pay my taxes, I volunteer, I actually volunteer at the nursery at my church where I met that little girl, so I think in light of all those things that I do that are good, that should offset this one act of murder. Murder is only like .03% of what I actually spend my time doing, so really you should let me go. And so, after that little speech would I be declared innocent? No.

Frank:

Yeah, probably in San Francisco or New York they might let you go, Neil. [laughing]

Neil:

But to sane people, I've actually brought down even more wrath and guilt on myself, because I've shown that I have no idea what I have done. I have no remorse, I have no proper perspective, and I deserve 10 times greater punishment than I did before the speech. And so, we think we're going to walk into God's courtroom and make that little speech to him after a lifetime of sin. That's insane. And the final thing I say is also, Christianity offers not just forgiveness, but cleansing. When we become Christians, God gives us a new heart. And so, the analogy I make is, the Bible uses the language of slavery, but I think a good modern adaptation would be addiction. We are sin addicts, and we need not just forgiveness, but we need to be put in rehab.

And God will do that for us. Christianity alone, again, offers us new hearts that then desire new things. And just forgiving someone, yeah, I forgive a drug addict - Oh, you're forgiven. You're not gonna go to jail for breaking the law - they'd probably be grateful. But if they're in their right mind, they'd say, Can I please get into a program because I don't want to live like this? Well, [with] Christianity Jesus offers us both, a double cure, saved from wrath and make us pure both.

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Frank:

But how do we deal... I know Hitchens brought this objection up, you know, you can't make us sick and tell us to be well. In other words, yes, I know I have a sin nature, but God gave us this and now he's holding us on account that we do have this sin nature, when he's the one that really made us this way. So, you can't say to people, I made you sick, but be well. How do you respond?

Neil:

One thing I'd say is the Bible always lays the blame of sin at our feet. It never says, Oh, it's God's fault. It's like, how dare you talk back to God. And but here's the more practical thing. When I'm actually committing a sin, no one's holding a gun to my head. Timeout, pause Neill, what are you doing right now? Do you want that? I'm like, Yeah, I want it. That's why I'm doing it. If I didn't want it, I wouldn't do it. So, the idea is like we're constrained to do bad things by the system, or by the government, or by my social location. No, it's us. It's our hearts that do that. And he said, Well, the thing is, if you say, Well, I still don't think it's fair, well God's like, stop here. It's not fair. Fine. Take my forgiveness. You're like, what? No. I don't get it then. He's offering you, if you really feel like you hate sin and don't want it anymore, you can be forgiven and cleansed right now. But you're the one saying no.

Frank:

Now, Neil, where can people find out more about you? And where can they get the book, Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity? I know that they get it on Amazon. Anywhere else? Go ahead.

Neil:

So yeah, Amazon, Crossway. As a publisher, you can buy it there. You can find me on Twitter, @NeilShenvi. I am on Twitter too much. I'm doing it less these days. If you Google Neil Shenvi, you'll find my website. I think I'm like the only Neil Shenvi in the world right now, so it's not hard to find me. My email is there. Happy to talk to you if you have any questions. But yeah, that I think the best way is on Twitter. Yeah.

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Frank:

What are they going to find on your website? Because you, in addition to Christian apologetics, you also deal with some of these cultural issues.

Neil:

Yeah, so I've recently spent a lot of time dealing with issues of race, class, and gender, critical theory, critical race theory, queer theory. And so, I've mainly been reviewing books. I've just been reading extensively popular authors, scholarly authors, and reviewing these books from a Christian perspective. But actually, that's my next book. I'm actually writing it right now with Dr. Pat Sawyer. I'm writing a book on a critical theory in Christianity, which will come out whenever...not sure when.

Frank:

That's Neil Shenvi ladies and gentlemen. The new book *Why Believe?: A Reasoned Approach to Christianity*. Thanks so much, Neil.

Neil:

Thank you, Frank.

Frank:

And friends, don't forget I will be in Port St. Lucie this week. Charlie Kirk's event is on the other side of the state. Check that out at TP USA. Next week. I'll be in Cincinnati, Ohio for CIA and speaking on Sunday out there. So, check our website for more at CrossExamined.org. See you here next week, Lord willing, God bless.

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