I don't have enough FAITH ______to be an ATHEIST

with Dr. Frank Turek **PODCAST**

The Mission and Vision of Core Apologetics | with Dr. Ben Shaw

(October 31, 2023)

DAN:

Welcome everybody to midweek podcast for CrossExamined, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. I am director of CrossExamined, Dan Hodges. And with us today as a guest, we have Dr. Ben Shaw. And we're going to do a little bit of a background on Ben. You probably have or will see other podcasts with Ben on them. But I really wanted to get into his background. What makes him tick? How did he get to where he is? And then of course, we're going to introduce the ministry, believe it or not, coming out immediately and being staged. So, without too much more, Ben. Welcome.

BEN:

Thanks for having me. Appreciate it, excited to be here. Actually, I've known Dan for a number of years. And Dan, I was telling him recently. He's part of the cause for a book that's coming out next year called 'Trustworthy: 13 Arguments for the Reliability of the New Testament.' And he helped put it together without even realizing it. He invited Dr. Habermas to come speak at an event. And he allowed me to come along too. And I've studied with Habermas for over a decade. But you know, if you're going to hear Habermas speak, what his backup going to say that you want to hear? Well, I wasn't going to talk on the resurrection. I developed 13 arguments for the reliability, and now it's being turned into a book. So, that's part of Dan's efforts there.

DAN:

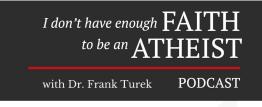
So, that's kind of like unintended consequences. Joseph obviously didn't know he was going to be sold into slavery and save the world from hunger. I had no clue. Thank you. I appreciate that.

BEN:

Yes. So, I say that to say, you don't know what your good works are going to do and how they're going to pay off down the line. So, it's important to keep working on those and doing those. And so, I do appreciate that. But regarding my background, I first heard the Sermon on the Mount because my babysitter took me to church. Her son was my best friend. And if I spent the night on Saturday, on Sunday, we were going to church. And so, I heard the sermon on the mount, and I heard Jesus speak about loving your enemies. Because anybody can love anybody who loves them. That doesn't take much. But to love your enemies is another whole level.

And that's what God does for us. Romans 5:8 says that. God demonstrates His own love for us, even that while we were sinners, Christ still died for us. So, I had recognized Christ as Lord. But I wasn't really discipled for a long time. I heard sermons occasionally. I went to a Christian middle school. I went to a public school, and then public high school, and then a Christian high school. But the only reason I went to the Christian high school was because they had a hockey team. I'm from South Florida. So, I started playing hockey because I worked at an ice rink, and I really wanted to meet a girl. I thought hockey would help.





I didn't know they had rinks in Florida.

BEN:

We have like a handful of rinks, and I just happened to work at one of them. And so, I was about 15 or so when I started playing hockey. And I practiced every day because I was really bad. One time, a guy hit me so hard. I've got a big nose as it is. But my nose came out of my cage. I got cut on my nose. And I was just like, oh my goodness. That was hard. Line change. I've got to get off the ice. And so, I just had to practice a lot to get good. And I did. I skipped prom. I did a bunch of things like that. Practiced Friday, Saturday nights. I was at the rink. Looking back, God used that a lot to keep me out of trouble too.

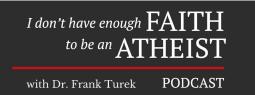
But I was still someone in Florida growing up surrounded by different worldviews. And I know what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount. I know what people said about Jesus and I was like, yeah. That doesn't match up with what I read about Him from the best sources. I saw Christians getting in trouble on TV, doing things they shouldn't be doing. Like they're not doing what Jesus said they should be doing. So, you know, I was trying to wrestle and reconcile those things. And growing up in South Florida is very diverse.

So, I kind of struggled with things for a while, but hockey was my thing. I can just focus there and put all those questions to the side. I didn't see anyone asking the question seriously, anyway. I was just kind of thinking them to myself. Who's Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? What's the Bible? How did these books even get together? I don't know. We'll just keep them in my mind, and I'm trying to get good at hockey. I ended up living in Connecticut for a while, in New England playing hockey. So, I did get better at hockey. And I realized that it snows up there. You've got to shovel snow before you want to start your car. This is a little different. And there weren't many good rinks. And there was surprising few number of colleges that had their own rink on campus.

So, I was like, you know, I might as well go back to Florida where it's warmer, I can have palm trees. Things are green all year round. And so, I ended up going back to Florida. I played for FAU for a year. And I was really miserable at college then. I was just going there doing my time playing hockey. And one of my friends suggested Liberty University. And I was like, well, if I want to learn about God, I can do that here. Even though I haven't for the past 20 something years, I could start doing it now, surely. God was like, no, no. I know better.

So, a couple of weeks go by my friend goes, you know, they have a hockey team with a rink on campus at Liberty? And that was my reaction. I was like, are you kidding me? Why didn't you lead with this weeks ago? I looked at the rink that night. I shot the coach an email two weeks before the semester started. I dropped out at FAU, and I was going to Liberty. And so, I ended up at Liberty. And I was like, okay. There's a different feel at this university for one. That was 2006. That was Falwell senior's last year. So, I was there at the very end. I had someone also





ask me if I knew who Falwell was and if I still wanted to go there. I had no idea who Falwell was, but my response was their ice rink is amazing. Do I need to show you some pictures? Because that's why I'm going. And as I'm there, I'm taking classes. So, I'm starting to ask and see that people take these questions seriously about God, and Jesus, and the Bible. And I'm like, oh, wow. This is great. Okay. And I'm going through the halls with the goalie on our team. And we see this guy, he's the old hockey coach. He says hey, this is Gary Habermas. He used to help coach the hockey team. I'm like, oh, hey, that's cool. You know, you're the old school guys. We're the new school. So, we must be better. We're new school. Now I don't think that because the new school guys are thinking they're the top cheese.

But anyway, so I met him. I go, that's cool. And then I ended up taking a class on Christian evidences, because I still had a whole bunch of questions. And I wanted to be law enforcement and help people. But I didn't know how to help people. Like, how was I going to help them? And they've got a lot of problems. Some people have heavy problems, but God can help them. So, I've got to learn more about God so I can tell them about God. And I took a class called Christian Evidences, and I found out Habermas was a leading expert on the resurrection, and we had to read his book. And it was 'The Case for the Resurrection,' which I think is one of the best books on the topic. It just covers a breadth of material and a simple hockey guy like me could pick it up and figure it out. Right? Like, okay. I get this. This is easy to follow.

DAN:

Even with a broken nose.

BEN:

That's right. It doesn't matter. Even if my teeth are kind of jacked up a little bit in some areas, you know? We can figure this out. So, I was like, man. I have a lot more questions than I realized. So, I was a business undergrad, got a marketing degree. And I ended up getting a Master of Arts and Religious Studies. Because I'm also from South Florida. So, I wonder, how's Christianity different from these other worldviews around me? How do I even assess different worldviews? The resurrection also plays a central part in a lot of that as well. So, I ended up doing my master's thesis on Jesus's resurrection, the historical evidence for it. So, just looking at the historicity of it.

And Habermas, he wasn't on my committee or anything, but he sat in on my dissertation defense. I mean, he asked one of the two toughest questions. And I was like, oh. That was a good question. How can I smooth this out? And I was like, okay. I've got to keep studying more and more. So, I ended up becoming his research assistant in the PhD program. And I studied with him for...I started with him around 2012 or so. I graduated in 2020 with my PhD, and he actually was a member on my committee. And I look back and go, I want to say he was on my committee because...

DAN:

He asked you the same question.







BEN:

I asked him. I go, hey, can you be on my committee? And he said, oh, yes, Ben. You're a brilliant scholar. I just want to be on the cutting edge work, and I know that's what you're going to be doing. That's not what he said. He's like, Ben, if I'm going to be doing it anyway, I might as well get credit for it. So, I'm just like, well, that's scary. As long as you're on it, I don't really care. You know, I just want I want to make sure. You know, he's been studying it longer than I've been alive. And what's really cool about him, he's very interdisciplinarian.

His degree from Michigan State is philosophy and history of religion. So, he's got the philosophical training and historical training. And I like that too, that integrated approach. I don't like when disciplines just sit in their own silos. They've got to bridge and get with one another. And so, I really liked that. My dissertation actually reflects that. Its philosophy, history, and theology. And I also had Michael Licona on my dissertation committee too.

DAN:

Great, another great scholar.

BEN:

Really good to have both of those guys on there, and another gentleman, Ed Cleaver was on there. He's a church historian. We had a little bit of everybody on there. A New Testament church historian and a philosopher. Well, whatever Habermas is, however you want to categorize him. So, I kept working with him though, past that, because he started his M.O. about a year or so after I became his research assistant.

DAN:

M.O.?

BEN:

His magnum opus. So, I said he's been studying it longer than I've been alive. He's trying to put all those thoughts into a four volume work.

DAN:

I heard 5000 pages?

BEN:

Roughly, 1000 pages per volume. The manuscript pages were probably exceeding the 5000 mark. It is massive, because what it looks like when you type it up on your computer versus when they publish it, they've got to format it and do some crazy stuff. Just say 1000 pages per volume is just an easy way to remember it. And that's 50 years of research put into book form. So, you can, you know, have that research on your shelf when it's done. Lord willing, when it's done.



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DAN:

That would be akin to asking Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to teach you piano. I mean, I know of no one that has the depth and breadth of knowledge and research on resurrection that's alive today than Gary Habermas, whom I also count as a dear friend, he and his wife. So, for you to be able to learn under him, have him be on your dissertation defense, that's fantastic. You're going to be carrying the torch. But you also have branched out into your own.

BEN:

Yes. So, he's skilled and talented in ways that I'm not. And I joke with him, and I'll say, you know, the same way Michael Phelps is built for water, his brain is just built for academics, because it goes in, and it just doesn't come out. And he can recall it and change gears so quick. And, you know, I can swim, right? But he is just, his arms are, you know, seven feet long, and he's just going distances. And so okay, he sees things. This is another difference. He came up in the 50's to 80's. Things were really skeptical.

I mean, if you took the empty tomb in the 70's, you were super conservative. And so, now it's not like that. And so, he grew up and his mind still thinks, you know, how do these skeptics think? Where I'm like, I start taking all these accepted facts for granted because scholarship has moved to the right more. And so, now I'm able to approach things from a different perspective. I don't want to say more proactively, but a little more...

DAN:

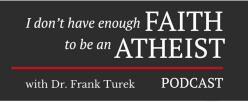
Less entrenched in the actual foundational defense of everything and more on the straightforward.

BEN:

Let's take this to work now. Like, let's get it to work. And I'm very interdisciplinary, too. So, I just have different interdisciplinary interests, which help too because we're different. And I'm not Habermas, which is good. Because God's equipped each of us differently. So, that's one of the things we've reflected on is how he has been equipped and how have I been equipped? How do I integrate and use his arguments? So, for example, I love the minimal facts. Having those facts listed is real simple, easy for me to grasp. And he loves the timeline argument. And the timeline is part of the minimal facts argument. But the timeline is just a single presentation in and of itself, and the minimal facts are there.

And so, we go back and forth, which one's better? And he loves the timeline. I'm like, yeah, but I think the minimal facts have the edge. And it's just difference of personalities. But studying with him, learning how he thinks, we debate. We dialogue. We have a lot of overlap in how we think and just our thought processes. So, when we hear an argument, how do we assess it? We try to look at it from like 10 different views at once. In class he'll say, you know, anyone who gets a PhD is obsessive-compulsive without the d at the end, without the disorder, because we're productive. We want to think, okay, how would...? Okay, I know how you would answer. How would this guy answer and so on?





I should mention what the four volumes are. Volume 1 is 1000 pages just on the evidences, 1,072 pages. It's coming out in January 2024. So, that's coming out real soon. We worked really hard on that. And his wife will tell you, she heard us debating on editing. Because we'd sit at his kitchen table. And he'd be like, why do you have this comment?

Because I read the chapters before and then said, hey, what about this? What about this? And she would hear us, and she'd be like, get back on topic. Or, you know, she'd say something to us. She's like, Gary, you need to listen to him or something. Gary, he's always right. Since he's not here to defend himself, I'll put that part in there. [Laughter] So yeah, so that's Volume 1. Volume 2, about 1000 pages as well, alternative theories. I don't know of a longer work of the 1000 pages on Jesus' resurrection period. Volume 2 is just on naturalistic theories or alternative theories, because not all of them are naturalistic.

DAN:

And to be fair, and to be a good scholar, one must see both sides of the argument. And you both are such erudite scholars and thinkers to be able to edit and contribute to his work.

BEN:

So, what's interesting is, Habermas is also known for talking about doubt. He's got books on dealing with doubt. And he talks about factual, emotional, and volitional doubt. And when I was in my undergrad, or maybe my master's. I can't exactly remember when. But it was after I read his resurrection book and had some questions on the resurrection itself. And I'm like, hey, what about this, this, and this? And there's no pain in my questions. They were just regular questions. And he goes, yeah, but Paul. Paul, Paul, Paul. You can't explain him with anything you just said. I was like, it's a good point. Okay. Moving on.

So, I assimilated that because it was right. Like, I couldn't account for Paul with those theories. So, those were factual doubts. And so, those alternative theories, it's legitimate to go okay, like, you have this other possibility. How do I address it? So, he does that in 1000 pages. And then Volume 3 is where are scholars at? It's not a narrative. It's an outline. Here's what Alison thinks on this. Here's what Crossan thinks on this, Jesus's death. What are some good arguments? Multiple attestation. Who thinks that? Here's some guys.

So, I've worked on that for about a decade. I did about a chunk of that. He had a chunk prior to me. I had to combine all that. And you can imagine what a 1975 type document would have looked like, combining it with a 2020 document and all the formatting issues. And he types with two fingers. And there was a code. Because he didn't have easy footnotes to do. He just put Borg number three. And then you had to go to another sheet, find Borg, what's source number three? That's the page number. So, all those footnotes, it's time consuming.



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DAN:

Yeah, that's about like training to be an architect by looking at the Brady Bunch's house, you know, as compared to a South Florida mansion. So, that's good.

BEN:

Yeah. Trying to sort it all out. Yeah. So, that was that. And then Volume 4 is pastoral and practical. Because again, it's not an event that just happened in the past that doesn't mean anything now.

DAN:

Right? What does it mean?

BEN:

Yes. Acts 17:30-31, Paul says, repent now because Jesus is coming as judge. And we know this because Jesus rose from the dead. And then 1 Corinthians 15:58. I love how N.T. Wright says, you know, it says just kick your feet up and wait for Jesus to return, right? No, be steadfast in your good works, because they're not in vain. So, do good works right now because Jesus resurrected. Your good works matter. They have a difference. And so, that was crucial.

DAN:

So, going on from, you'd graduated again ...?

BEN:

So, yeah. I mess around with people, and I'll say, I graduated in 2020. I got my first PhD then. And then I got my second PhD about a year later. I got a black belt in Jiu Jitsu. So, you know we're bringing stuff to the concrete world. You know, we're in there mixing it up. I was a hockey player. And again, I wanted to be law enforcement, so I always liked that martial arts kind of component growing up.

DAN:

Hockey's a pugilistic sport.

BEN:

I should say, by the way, I did meet my wife through hockey. I met her at Liberty, and she watched hockey. And she's from Alabama, of all places, and liked hockey. But she was roommates with one of my friends from Florida. So, we met, and we got married.

DAN:

Nice. And you have three kids?

BEN:

Three kids, yes.





That's fantastic. You have a ministry coming out, I believe, very soon.

BEN:

Yes, we officially launch tomorrow. So, we're new but we've been in the works for a while.

DAN:

How'd you meet Mr. Davis?

BEN:

Yes, Ron Davis is the other gentleman's name. Now, he also studied with Habermas. So, when Habermas started his magnum opus and his big research, he goes, hey, guys, I need some help. People email him with questions, and doubts, and they want to talk with him. But Habermas had a focus on writing the book. So, he sent those people to Ron, a lot of them to Ron. And he would still send me some too, because I was hoping as well. But he sent a lot of them to Ron, probably 90% of them. And Ron was talking with emotional doubters, factual doubters. And he's talked to over 1000 doubters. He's well over 1200, actually.

And so, he ended up doing his dissertation on how to deal with emotional doubt, religious emotional doubts. And I actually was fortunate enough to sit on his committee. We have a lot of shared interests as well, just with business backgrounds, and things like that. I was V.P. of Marketing and Development with an insurance adjusting company. He owns an insurance agency. Actually, there's a backstory to that, but it's designed to help with Core because they want Core to succeed. And the ministry is called Core Apologetics. I should say that.

DAN:

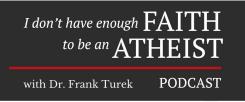
CoreApologetics.com.

BEN:

CoreApologetics.com, yes. And so, Habermas teaches a class on doubt. And so, it's funny. Ron, what I am to the resurrection, Ron is to doubt. And so, Ron knows resurrection, and I know doubt. But Ron specializes in doubt, and he talks to people on doubt constantly. And again, over 1000 people. And so, we joke. It takes two of us just to do half of what Habermas is doing, his ministry. So, we are trying to be, you know, his ministry, his spiritual child in some ways. We want to carry on his legacy. We're a minimal facts ministry for disciples and doubters, really.

To us, and Habermas is like this as well, apologetics is good discipleship, and it's evangelism. Giving the reason for the hope that you have. Well, I've got to know that hope. And if I'm discipling someone, they need to know that hope. And it's okay to remind, we need to be reminded of the hope. 2 Peter 1 says that. Like, I'm going to remind you of these things. I know you guys know them, but I'm going to remind them. Good to be reminded of them.





Yeah. And for our audience, hope is not "I hope I get a firetruck for Christmas." It is a very different type of hope. It is an established belief that what is coming is going to be realized. And in that sense, yes. I think the Christian faith is the only hope, frankly.

BEN:

Absolutely. And you know, C.S. Lewis has the great example. You're about to get surgery. You believe in anesthetics up until it's your turn for the surgery. Then it's all of a sudden, do I really trust all these facts I've heard about anesthesia? Am I really going to be numb? I'm not going to wake up in the middle? I've heard that happens to people before. What if that happens to me? And so, you have these different kinds of doubts that come up? But what can you do to address those? And how do you assess them, and what do you do? Sometimes, it's just going, no. The research does say that this works. It's not going to happen. And so, you remind yourself of those things. But that kind of highlights what it's like, what hope can be like.

DAN:

I've heard some Christians tell me, well, I've never doubted. And I almost want to tell them, then you've not studied much, because everybody has doubts. I certainly have.

BEN:

Barna has done research on that. And about 80% of Christians have had an unresolved question or unresolved doubt at some point, with 50% of Christians having it for a prolonged period of time. And we may not recognize it as doubt. Like I said, I wondered, how did the New Testament come together? So, that's part of how that 'Trustworthy' book, you know. That's part of why it's reliable, because those are the best sources we have about Jesus, and the early church recognize that.

But we also, you know, you don't realize those are your questions until you have a community that's talking about them or discussing them. And that's just again, why do we have the hope that we have? Why am I trusting Jesus? So, those are good questions, and we want to talk about those things. And also, skeptics have questions, and we want to be engaged, because that's going to help evangelism. And that's going to prep us for how we talk with them and understand those other worldviews and why they don't.

DAN:

So, do you see yourself with Core Apologetics, not just creating content, for the site, but do you see yourself and Mr. Davis going out and speaking at universities, churches, these sorts of things? Do you see more of an embedded ministry?

BEN:

We have a really big vision, very big.







Good! I'm all about big vision.

BEN:

That's right. So, our 5-10 year vision is very big. We are trying to make sure our launch sets up the long vision so that those flowers can bloom at the proper time. But right now, we have certain things we need to focus on to set those up. So, we don't want to launch in such a way that we've choked out some flowers in the future. We want to set up so those flowers can bloom. So, some of those things, those things you said, those are things we absolutely want to do. We want to help churches, and organizations, and individuals. And with churches and organizations, it'll be a top down and a bottom up approach. Because we've seen stats regarding pastors who have a biblical worldview, and it's scary.

We see church leaders and their biblical worldview stats are scary. That's the top down approach. We want to help those guys and have certain curriculums, and classes, and working with those churches to increase that biblical worldview. And that comes from again, just, why do you have the hope that you have? And again, it's not just things that happened in the past, but a biblical worldview, it applies now. When I'm confronted at my job to lie, cheat, or steal, I don't do it. Why? Because I know God's watching, and I want to honor him, and I'm giving a good testimony.

You mentioned Joseph earlier. I want to be like, Joseph. I'm not doing that. Well, why aren't you doing it? I'm not doing it because it's uncool, because the Lord will be ashamed. It's going to sin against the Lord. That's why I'm not doing it. I trust Him and He's my savior. He's my king. It's a totally different perspective. But if I just leave that on Sunday mornings, I can check out. Now it's okay to do that.

DAN:

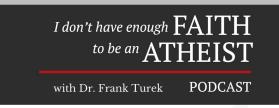
And I know you're going to agree with me. And it's a horrible technique for an interviewer to say, I know you're going to agree with me. But, you know, there is a verse that says to much who has been given, much is required. And I know you feel, you know, from other conversations we've had that you've been given so, so very much. And I know Core Apologetics and your other activities as a Christ follower, emulate that teaching. Much is required of me so I'm ready to go. And I think Core Apologetics is going to be a great outworking of your talents.

BEN:

That's what we're really trying to do because we want it to affect believers. We want to encourage that hopefulness that believers have and should have. But if you lose the biblical worldview, you start losing the hope that you have. And so, we want to have that in there. Again, top down, bottom up. But also making disciples of all disciplines. One of the things I've noticed in academia, and this is just a generalization. So, there's exceptions. But a lot of times, the theologians, the New Testament scholars, they don't go to the disciplines and work with them.







Like how do you live out a biblical worldview if you're in law enforcement, if you're a lawyer, if you're military? What if you're in medicine? What if you're in drama?

DAN:

What's that look like? How do you deal with that?

BEN:

Yeah, we're working on some projects now. For example, I've reached out to some lawyers, trying to see if we can get some Christian lawyers to get together. Because they're going to face different trials, and tribulations, and tests than other guys. I've seen them in insurance, you know? Sometimes it's just convenience. It's just easy to do it this way. So, it's okay if we cut the corner. But that doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. Lawyers are going to have a different stress, you know? So, we want to work with those groups, get them together, and say, hey. These are the things that they may work on, they may struggle with.

Well, what's the Bible say? What are some of your solutions? How are you putting the armor of God on to be prepared in those situations? Are you even putting the armor on? And that's part of the reason for the 'Trustworthy' book because, you know, I didn't know. So, I say biblical literacy is not well-known. But I was part of that. So, that's why the 'Trustworthy' book came out, because I didn't know Paul authored a chunk of the New Testament until I went to college. I knew who Paul was, but I didn't realize he was the author, because we just weren't talking about those things.

DAN:

Right. Much like, I think Hugh Ross came out with a book called 'Rescuing Inerrancy' that's coming out first quarter next year, same thing. You know, you're both defending Scripture. You know, I remember that the truth doesn't need defending. Set it loose, it's like a lion, right? Something like that. But there is an accommodationist sort of view amongst many theologians and prominent theologians today where we're just going to interpret the Bible to mean something that we think it means today.

And it's, you know, that discordant view, I would say, can be a real threat. As you mentioned, as you see the clergy now, who says the Bible is reliable now in clergyman? It's a small percentage. I mean, that's heartbreaking. If you don't have that standard to go against, you're really lost. You're just standing on Jell-O.

BEN:

Growing up, I would see a lot of those guys not only not holding those views but taking it really far and getting arrested because they're just there for other reasons. And we're to be on guard of that, of wolves in sheep's clothing, too.





Yeah, that's fantastic. So, we'll go ahead and wrap up. Is there any other things you would like to offer in a brief moment to the viewership and CrossExamined while you have the mic? Your book, I believe you're going over with Frank in another podcast. But any other things you can offer as far as Core Apologetics?

BEN:

So, we're just starting Sunday. And what we're just starting is fundraising. Okay, so that's where we're just starting. So, that's what we really are focusing on. Now you guys can tell like, I do Jiu Jitsu, I do hockey, I do academics. I want to get to work. So, my goal is to get the fundraising done as fast as possible so I can get to work because that is a hang up for us. We need to get our funding set so we can get to work.

DAN:

Great. We'll talk after the podcast on that. I'm a big supporter and of course CrossExamined will help in any reasonable way that we possibly can help. We're all about the kingdom and I know you are too. And certainly, your mentor Gary is good, great personal friend of all of us here. And I'm jealous. [Laughter] Thanks again, midweek podcast for CrossExamined. Glad you could join us.

