

Book Review
Cold-Case Christianity

Cold-Case Christianity by J. Warner Wallace, David C. Cook Pub., Colorado Springs, CO, 2013, 288. ISBN: 978-1-4347-0469-6. Cost: \$18.99.

J. Warner Wallace is a cold-case homicide detective who has investigated the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ and found them credible. He is an adjunct professor of Christian apologetics at Biola University. Wallace was a vocal atheist for many years. Now, he uses his investigative skills to make the case for Christianity (this word is used in a general sense). This is a unique book because it approaches apologetics from the perspective of a cold-case detective.

The book is divided into two sections. Section One gives the details of how to be a detective. Wallace develops ten important principles every aspiring detective needs to master. Each principle is covered in one chapter. Therefore, the first ten chapters fall into section one. Section Two focuses on applying the principles covered in section one to the New Testament. Wallace does this in four chapters. The book is comprised of fourteen chapters with an appendix of resources. A Foreword was written by Lee Strobel and a second by Rice Brooks who wrote, *God is Not Dead: Evidence For God in an Age of Uncertainty*. A Preface was written by the author who indicated that as he studied the New Testament from the standpoint of a detective, he moved from belief that Jesus was a wise teacher to belief in what He said about Himself. A journey from casual assent to committed trust.

Chapter One is titled, "Don't Be A Know-it-all." Wallace discusses the presuppositions that all of us have when discussing most topics. Presuppositions are foregone conclusions. Presuppositions destroy objectivity. Predetermined beliefs interfere with honest investigation. One spiritual presupposition that atheists have is philosophical naturalism. This is the presuppositional belief that only natural laws and forces (as opposed to supernatural forces) operate in the world. This presupposition eliminates the supernatural and all miracles. A logical fallacy is involved in these presuppositions. It is called "begging the question." This logical fallacy involves putting the conclusion in the premises of an argument. We come to a particular conclusion because we started with it in the premises. This is a true definition of bias. An honest investigator must go wherever the evidence leads him. Wallace creates a "callout bag" wherein he places tools and a checklist. He uses this device to help those who want to investigate the claims of Christianity. The first tool is the principle of objectivity. Don't assume you know the answers before you begin gathering evidence for the crime.

Chapter Two discusses inference. Homicides have no statute of limitations (a time period beyond which a case cannot be legally prosecuted). Unresolved homicides become "cold-cases." To "infer" means to "gather in." In logic, inference refers to the process of collecting data from numerous sources, and then drawing conclusions on the basis of the evidence (an important part of the law of rationality). An inference is a deduction of fact that may be reasonably and logically drawn from another fact or group of facts. Jurors are often instructed by judges to draw reasonable inferences. These are described as "conclusions which are regarded as logical by reasonable people in the light of their experience in life (35).

Speculation is nonevidential. Speculation is reasoning based on inconclusive evidence: conjecture or supposition. Wallace emphasizes that any investigation involves distinguishing from that which is possible and that which is reasonable. Judges tell jurists to refrain from speculation and consider only the explanations for which there is evidence. The goal in every trial is to get to the truth and base a verdict on the truth rather than speculation. Wallace gives a good definition of abductive reasoning when pursuing a cold-case homicide (37-40). While the possibilities may be many, they are not all reasonable. The honest investigator goes where the facts lead him. Wallace applies his skills to the ancient death-scene investigation (Jesus' death and resurrection). He follows the four basic facts about Jesus' death, burial and resurrection that most scholars, believers and unbelievers, agree upon: 1) Jesus died on the cross and was buried; (2) His tomb was empty and no one ever produced His body; (3) Jesus's disciples believed that they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead; and (4) Jesus's disciples were transformed following their alleged resurrection observations (43). Wallace considers the explanations for these facts. The list includes: (1) the disciples were wrong about Jesus' death; (2) the disciples lied about Jesus' resurrection; (3) the disciples were delusional; (4) the disciples were fooled by an imposter; (5) the disciples were influenced by limited spiritual sightings; and (6) the disciples' observations were distorted later. Wallace then considers that the disciples were accurately reporting the resurrection of Jesus. When he applies his investigative skills to each of these explanations, he concludes that the resurrection of Jesus actually occurred as reported by the disciples because it is the superior explanation. Of course, this would involve acceptance of the supernatural. The second tool Wallace puts in the callout bag is evidential faith. Faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith is the opposite of unbelief not reason. Faith is reasonable inference based upon evidence (53).

Chapter three instructs us to think circumstantially. Wallace considers the difference in the type of evidence that may be present in any case. Direct evidence is evidence that can prove something all by itself. Circumstantial evidence (indirect evidence) does not prove something on its own, but points us in the right direction by proving something related to the question at hand (57). The cumulative effect of circumstantial evidence can lead to a supported conclusion about a crime. The more pieces of circumstantial evidence the more reasonable the conclusion. Jurors are instructed to make no qualitative distinction between direct and circumstantial evidence in a case (57). Juries can make decisions about guilt in cases that are completely circumstantial. Wallace states that "all my cold-case homicides have been successfully prosecuted with nothing but circumstantial evidence" (57). Circumstantial evidence can bring about conviction. Wallace applies the collection of circumstantial evidence to the question of the origin of the universe. He considers: (1) a universe with a beginning; (2) a universe with design; (3) a universe with complex life; and (4) a universe with objective morality. Wallace builds a circumstantial case for the existence of God and concludes that God truly does exist. God is the most reasonable explanation for the existence of the universe and life. The third tool Wallace adds to the call-out bag is circumstantial evidence. He affirms that, "when discussing evidence with skeptics, we don't need to concede that a particular fact related to the Christian worldview is not a piece of evidence simply because it is not a piece of direct evidence" (69). Circumstantial evidence can be used to build a strong case for the Christian worldview. The more evidence that points to a specific explanation, the more reasonable that explanation becomes.

Chapter four instructs us to test the witnesses. Wallace gives fourteen questions that judges ask jurors to consider about the nature of the witnesses in a case (73). He narrows down these fourteen questions to four critical areas of concern: (1) were the witnesses present to observe anything related to the crime? (2) have they been honest and accurate?; (3) can the witness be verified?; and (4) do they have an ulterior motive? Further, Wallace shows that eyewitnesses may differ in the testimony that they give and yet be telling the truth about what they saw. A disagreement is not a disqualifier. Two people may see or experience the same event from different perspectives (how close or far away they were; were obstructions in the way of view; did the sunlight or lack thereof affect their ability to see clearly). Wallace applies what he knows about witnesses to the gospel writers as eyewitnesses to the events about which they wrote. These men were so committed to their testimony that they were willing to die because of the truthfulness of it. Some characteristics of eyewitnesses are given by Wallace: (1) their statements will be perspectival (written from a personal point of view); (2) they will be personal (given in their own vocabulary and style); (3) their testimony may contain complete areas of agreement; and (4) later statements may fill in the gaps. Wallace makes an important statement about inerrancy (83). Inerrancy means that the Bible is accurate and free from error. In addition, "inerrancy does not require, however, that the biblical texts be free of any personal perspectives or idiosyncrasies. In fact, the existence of these distinctive features only helps us recognize the accounts as true eye-witness statements written by real people who revealed their human gifts (and limitations) along the way" (83). This statement helps us evaluate the claims that these men contradicted each other. Disagreement in the written testimony does not automatically mean contradiction. The fourth principle added to the call-out bag is that the Bible is reliable because the eyewitness accounts it contains are valid.

Chapter five presents the importance of hanging on every word. Wallace introduces his readers to "forensic statement analysis" (90). This involves a careful study and analysis of the words (both written and spoken) provided by the suspect, witness, or victim. The purpose of the analysis is to determine the truthfulness of the statements. Wallace gives examples of four statements and what they convey about the relationship between a husband and his wife. The four statements are: (1) "I took Amy, my beautiful wife of thirty-one years, out to dinner and a movie." (2) "I took my wife out to dinner and a movie." (3) "I took the wife out to dinner and a movie." (4) "I took the old lady out to dinner and a movie." The examination of the words used helps in evaluating the relationship. Wallace uses this type of analysis to show that Peter was a source used by Mark for his own writing. Wallace adds forensic statement analysis to the call-out bag.

Chapter six develops the principle of distinguishing between artifacts and evidence. An artifact is an incidental item that may have been found in the area of a crime that has nothing to do with the crime itself. A piece of evidence is an item that relates directly to the crime. Wallace applies this principle to textual criticism of the New Testament. He mentions several texts that he does not consider to be authentic that have found themselves in some Greek texts and consequently translations. His list includes: John 8:1-11; Luke 22:43-44; John 5:4; I John 5:7; and Acts 15:34. Wallace does not go into enough detail regarding textual criticism and its principles to make a fair evaluation of this point. There is considerable disagreement even among textual critics over the inclusion or not of certain passages of scripture in the Bible. Wallace concludes that the scribal additions or subtractions do not invalidate the evidential

value of the text altogether.

Chapter seven is titled, *Resist Conspiracy Theories*. Successful conspiracies are very difficult to pull off. Wallace investigates the “big one” with regard to Christianity which is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (114). Wallace makes the following points: (1) the number of conspirators required to successfully accomplish the Christian conspiracy would have been staggering. The more conspirators, the less likely is the success of the conspiracy; (2) the apostles had no effective way to communicate quickly with each other. They could not know if one of their fellow conspirators had given up the lie about the resurrection. This makes the conspiracy theory untenable; (3) the apostles would have to protect their conspiratorial lies for a very long time—at least sixty years. This makes the conspiracy theory very unlikely. (4) the apostles were not intimately acquainted with each other for a long period of time. Some were brothers, but most were complete strangers prior to their discipleship of Jesus; (5) the apostles were aggressively persecuted and even killed after the resurrection because of their faith in Jesus. Why die if the whole thing was a lie? This adds to the implausibility of the conspiracy theory. Wallace adds skepticism toward conspiracy theories to the call-out bag.

Chapter eight focuses on the chain of custody. Every piece of evidence in a trial has to have a chain of custody. Wallace mentions a button that was found at a crime scene that had to be moved from the crime scene eventually to the court room for the trial. Each step in the process of transportation is a link in the chain of custody. The New Testament also involves a chain of custody from the time of the events in the life of Jesus until the full development of the canon of the New Testament (the 27 books currently recognized as inspired and authoritative). Wallace ends the chain of custody in 363 A.D. at the council of Laodicea. He also puts off the reader until section 2 to enumerate the individual links in the chain. He adds the chain of custody to the call-out bag.

Chapter nine is titled, *Know When Enough Is Enough*. The standard of proof is the line that must be crossed before someone can come to the conclusion that something is evidentially true (known as SOP) (131). The lowest possible standard is “some credible evidence.” The next standard is, “preponderance of the evidence.” The third standard is “clear and convincing evidence.” The final standard and highest criteria is “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Wallace gives the following definition for “beyond a reasonable doubt.” “It is that state of the case which, after the entire comparison and consideration of all the evidence, leaves the minds of the jurors in that condition that they cannot say they feel an abiding conviction of the truth of the charge” (131). All doubts may not be removed. There are possible doubts and imaginary doubts and reasonable doubts. But, beyond all reasonable doubt requires separating possible from reasonable doubts. We will never know all that there is to know. But, when we have adequate evidence, then, we can decide beyond a reasonable doubt. Wallace illustrates the use of ‘beyond all reasonable doubt’ with belief in God. He addresses the problem of evil which is the most common reason people give for unbelief in God. Epicurus was the first to state this problem of evil, “Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to. if he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked. If God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world? (134). Wallace addresses this problem by pointing out that mentioning evil (objective evil) means that there is a standard or right and wrong that transcends humans by which we determine what is evil and what is good. Objective evil argues for objective good. What is the standard of good and right

but God? Wallace also argues that God has created us with the ability to love and love requires freedom—freedom of the will. If I have the freedom to love, I also possess the freedom to hate. You cannot have one without the other. Additionally, from a Christian perspective, we are all going to live beyond the grave. God has not stopped evil yet, but He will stop it completely. God will judge all evil beings and persons. There are good reasons why God may permit evil in this life. God is not directly responsible for man’s transgression of His will which is by a free act of his own will. The only intrinsic evil is sin. Sin is a transgression of God’s law by people as a result of their own free will. Wallace adds evidential sufficiency to the call-out bag.

Chapter ten helps prepare the apologist for an attack by unbelievers. Wallace mentions the increase in attacks against Christianity since 2001. He identifies some of the attackers: Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens. Wallace reveals some of the strategies of defense attorneys that are also used by detractors of Christianity. He gives the following strategies: (1) defense attorneys challenge the nature of truth. Is truth subjective or objective? Truth has been redefined as subjective by many in our culture. Wallace shows how the definition of tolerance has changed. It used to be the attitude that we took toward one another when we disagreed about an important issue; we would agree to treat each other with respect, even though we refused to embrace each other’s view on a particular topic. Tolerance now is the act of recognizing and embracing all views as equally valuable and true, even though they often make opposite truth claims (142). Each of these redefinitions have profound consequences in a court room. If jurist believed them, they could not reach a conviction about a verdict; (2) defense attorneys focus on the best the prosecution has to offer; (3) defense attorneys target the micro and distract from the macro; (4) defense attorneys attack the messenger. Wallace discusses “ad hominem” arguments; (5) defense attorneys want perfection; (6) defense attorneys provide alternative “possibilities”; (7) defense attorneys employ a culturally winsome attitude. Wallace warns that Christians must not use these strategies. He adds these principles as precautionary principles to the callout bag.

Chapter eleven begins a new section of the book. In section two, Wallace applies the principles of investigation presented in section one to the New Testament. Chapter eleven takes up the investigation into the authenticity of the witnesses of the gospels to the life of Jesus Christ. Wallace affirms that if the gospels are late (written after the first century A.D.) then, they are a lie. He develops a time-line investigation of the gospels with the life of Jesus being the beginning of the time-line and the Council of Laodicea (350-363 A.D.) being the end of the time-line. Wallace then proceeds to examine the evidence for the dating of the gospels. The evidence is: (1) the NT fails to describe the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., (2) The NT fails to describe the siege of Jerusalem, (3) Luke said nothing about the deaths of Paul and Peter, (4) Luke said nothing about the death of James the Lord’s half-brother, (5) Luke’s gospel predates the book of Acts, (6) Paul quoted Luke’s gospel in his letter to Timothy (I Tim. 5:17-18), (7) Paul echoed the claims of the gospel writers, (8) Paul quoted Luke’s gospel in his letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 11:23-25, Luke 22:19-20), (9) Luke quoted Mark (and Matthew) repeatedly (350 verses from Mark appear in Luke and 250 verses from Matthew appear in Luke, p. 166), (10) Mark’s gospel appears to be an early “crime broadcast” (quickly gathers the details of what happened and reports them), (11) Mark appears to be protecting key players (unidentified characters are referenced by Mark). Wallace admits that these eleven pieces of evidence are all circumstantial. However, all of them taken together make a good case for the

early appearance of the gospels rather than a late one. Wallace also takes up five arguments that could indicate that the gospels are late versions. He dismisses each of these and concludes that the gospel accounts are early and written in the first century (180).

In Chapter twelve, Wallace examines the historical claims of Scripture under the subject of corroboration. He provides both internal and external corroboration of Scripture. Internal support consists of *undesigned coincidences* which he gives on pages 183-191. Internal support is also provided by a consideration of the names used in the New Testament for various individuals. Wallace includes a chart showing that the *names in the New Testament* correspond with the common names in use during the first century found in Palestinian literature (193). Also, Wallace points out that not only common names were used but a common written language style was used (192). Further, he mentions that there were many geographical locations that were cited by the New Testament writers that can be corroborated. Outside evidences include non-biblical writers: Josephus (AD 37-CA. 100) who described Jesus; Thallus (CA. AD 5-60); Tacitus (AD 56-CA. 117) described Jesus; Mara Bar-Serapion (AD 70-Unknown) described Jesus, Phlegon (AD 80-140) described Jesus. Wallace mentions archeology's corroboration of the biblical accounts (201-205) both people and places. The author once again considers objections to corroboration of the accounts but is able to dismiss them. Internal and external evidences of corroboration demonstrate the veracity of the gospel accounts.

Chapter thirteen examines the chain-of-custody with regard to the gospel accounts. Wallace looks at John's students: Ignatius (AD 35-117) and Polycarp (AD 69-155). Ignatius and Polycarp taught Irenaeus (AD. 120-202) and Irenaeus taught Hippolytus (AD 170-236). The New Testament was established as a reliable eyewitness account long before Codex Sinaiticus or the Council of Laodicea formalized the canon (221). Wallace links Linus and Clement to the apostle Paul in Rome. From *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (the earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament) a description of Jesus can be pieced together that is very similar to that of Ignatius and Polycarp (223). Second generation Christian leaders learned the truth about Jesus from the earlier eyewitnesses and passed this information on to their own students. Clement passed the truth from Evaristus to Pius (224). Pius I and Justin Martyr guarded the accounts (became apologists). Justin Martyr taught Tatian. Tatian the Assyrian (AD 120-180) was converted by Justin in Rome. He advanced an unorthodox form of Christianity but wrote the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the gospels. Early church records in Syria (traced back to Tatian) identified an early canon that included the Diatessaron, the letters of Paul, and the book of Acts (225). Wallace proceeds to trace the chain-of-custody for Peter. Peter taught Mark. Mark taught Anianus, Avilius, Kedron, Primus, and Justus. All of these men served the church in Alexandria. Justus passed the truth to Pantaenus. Pantaenus provided another important link in the chain because the writing of one of his students survives to this day, and identifies the books of the New Testament that were already considered sacred (227). Pantaenus taught Clement of Alexandria. He quoted or alluded to all of the New Testament books except for Philemon, James, 2 Peter, 2 John and 3 John. Clement of Alexandria taught Origen (AD 185-254). Origen carefully preserved the eyewitness accounts used by the Christian church around the Mediterranean Sea. He wrote extensively. He quoted from every book of the New Testament (227). Pamphilus of Caesarea adopted Origen's work. One of Pamphilus's students was Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 263-339). He recognized and identified twenty-six New Testament books as Scripture. Wallace shows that details of the eyewitness accounts of the life

of Jesus were preserved through meticulous copying and guarded closely through the years because of their sacred nature. He turns to objections to the accuracy of the Gospels and dismisses each of these in favor of the evidence that points to a high level of transmission of the sacred text.

Chapter fourteen examines bias. Wallace indicates that in every homicide cold-case investigation that he undertook there were always three motives for the death: financial greed (money), sexual or relational desire and pursuit of power. He exonerates the apostles on these three motives and shows that they were willing to give their lives for the cause of Christianity. Skeptics continue to attack the veracity of Scripture, but their attacks do not discredit the good evidence that exists which defends the integrity of Scripture. Wallace vindicates the eyewitness accounts of the apostles: they were present when the events occurred, their written testimony is corroborated, they were accurate and unbiased. Consequently, what they wrote was true.

The author concludes with a Postscript calling on his readers to make a decision with regard to Jesus. He gives resources for further reading and study. The book ends with Notes on each of the chapters.

Wallace provides a good case for Christianity from a unique perspective that of a cold-case detective. He provides the evidence for Christianity and takes time to consider objections skeptics might raise to this evidence. Then, he makes, as if a juror in a courtroom, a verdict based upon reasoning about the evidence correctly. In the process, he discusses logical reasoning, biases, prejudices, faulty reasoning, and techniques to dissuade --all of which can produce a failure in coming to the correct conclusion. The goal is to be convinced "beyond a reasonable doubt."