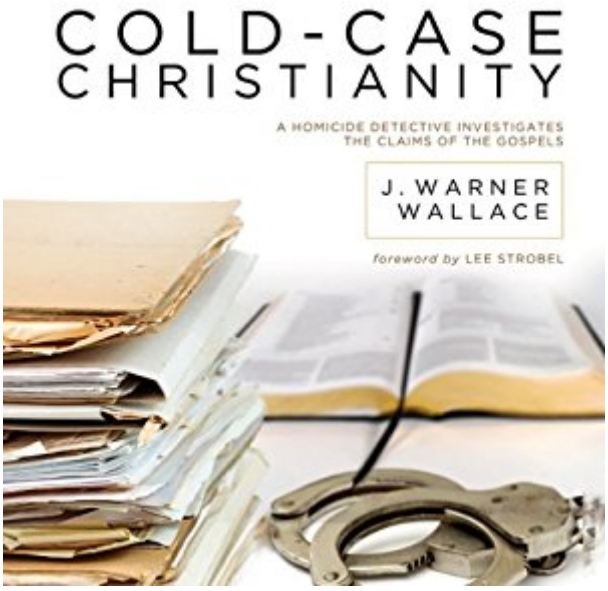
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Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates The Claims Of The Gospels



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Synopsis

You can believe because of the evidence, not in spite of it. For the first 35 years of his life, J. Warner Wallace was a devout atheist. After all, how can you believe a claim made about an event in the distant past for which there is little forensic evidence? Then Wallace realized something. Christianity was a lot like the cold cases he solved as a homicide detective - cold cases that turned out to have enough evidence, eyewitnesses, and records to solve. When Wallace applied his skills as an expert detective to the assertions of the New Testament, he came to a startling realization: the case for Christianity was as convincing as any case he'd ever worked as a detective.

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Customer Reviews

Christian apologetics is a constantly growing and changing scene and although it's the one career path that will absolutely guarantee that you'll never be rich, but there's definitely no shortage of "C-list/B-list" apologists out there. These folks are usually uneducated "discernment ministry" types running their own basement/blog "ministries" and defending the faith against the attacks of skeptics, academics, heretics and YouTube atheists. But, there are also a few "A-List" folks who have respectable education, write books, teach at Christian Colleges/Seminaries, debate Bart Ehrman or Richard Dawkins (two resume-making debaters for Christian apologists) and put on Alaskan cruises devoted to apologetics and worship via buffet. Of the "A-List" apologists, William Lane Craig is one of the biggest, so it's no surprise that several in his circle, the newest of which is J. Warner Wallace, are climbing onto the "A-List" and getting exposure (and plenty of endorsements from the staff and

friends of Biola).All that being said, when I started reading "Cold Case Christianity" by J. Warner Wallace, I already had an idea what to expect: Card-carrying evidentialist apologetics, mainly philosophical defense of Christianity, plenty of party-line towing with regards to the evidentialist apologists (i.e. Craig, Licona, Geisler, Habermas, Strobel, McDowell, Koukl, etc.), and a bit of theological inconsistency. I was not disappointed on that front; the book was what I expected.There was also a lot that I didn't expect, and that is why this book has climbed high on my ladder of apologetics texts. I'll throw down the Pros and Cons of the book:PROS:1. The book is wonderfully written and organized. J. Warner Wallace has done an excellent job writing with both clarity and accessibility, presenting his points with little technical jargon and explaining what jargon he uses (more than once too!). The chapters logically flow and the entire book is written with a layman in mind.2. The book is wonderfully engaging. Being a homicide detective, Wallace has a body of experience that is both foreign and intriguing to your average reader, and he utilizes parallels and descriptions from his police experience very effectively. Also, the book has pictures and a bit of variety in the page layout; these thoughtful insertions keep the chapters from becoming stale and visually repetitive.3. The book has a very broad scope and serves as a great introduction to a wide variety of apologetic issues (i.e. the resurrection, the arguments for the existence of God, textual criticism, the problem of evil, etc.) without bogging the reader down in details and nuanced argument.4. Wallace generally presents the counter-arguments to his points well. His responses are clear and concise, and one gets the feeling from reading Wallace that he has had a lot of practical conversations with people regarding the issues under discussion.5. Wallace usually gives good explanations of the concepts he discusses, like philosophical naturalism (page 25), abductive reasoning (page 33), reasonable doubt (age 131), etc. He's neither wordy nor vague, and he knows how to illustrate a concept effectively.6. Pages 55-60 contain a great, helpful discussion on the validity and usefulness of circumstantial evidence and its value when compared with direct evidence. This is definitely a place where his experience in the courtroom comes forward and assists him greatly, and this is one subject that many a Christian needs to brush up on for practical purposes.7. Pages 69-85 contain a very insightful and helpful treatment of eyewitness testimony, as well as excellent interaction with common accusations related to the unreliability of eyewitness testimony.8. Pages 109-117 contain a fantastic treatment of conspiracy theories, exploring and explaining the practical difficulties for concocting and upholding a lasting conspiracy involving multiple parties. Again, he draws examples from his police experience that prove to be excellent illustrations of his points.9. Page 131 has a very insightful unpacking of the standard of proof and reasonable doubt vs. possible doubt. Again, Wallace's legal understandings and courtroom

experience provide helpful illustrations here.10. Pages 135-136 give 2 good responses to the problem of evil: Wallace points to the presuppositional philosophical inconsistencies of the problem of evil (if objective evil exists for the problem to have substance in the first place, there must be a universal standard of "good" by which evil is judged), and also gives what I call the "Ten Trillion Year" response (God is eternal and judges good and evil from his eternal perspective; i.e. ten trillion years from now, the ten thousand years of evil that mankind endured will be considered inconsequential to the 9.9999999 trillion years of comprehensive and continuous good of paradise earth).11. Wallace has incorporated a wide variety of information, including some rather recent stuff from the academic world. One example of this was how on page 192 he included the recent work of Tal Ilan on the frequency and distribution of names in the New Testament world to show how the writers of the Bible were from the geographic location that they claimed. I was also really pleased to see Wallace reference Edwin Yamauchi (page 209) and give a brief discussion of the actual problematic nature of archeological evidence; how most items from history don't actually survive as evidence and our picture of the past, as based on archeological artifacts, is actually amazingly incomplete and inaccurate.12. On the whole, chapter 12 was excellent, exploring the internal and external corroboration of the Gospels. For the Christian who has recently discovered the popular (and mostly irresponsible) manifestations of doubt regarding the reliability of the New Testament (i.e. Richard Carrier, the movie "Zeitgeist", the skeptics annotated Bible, etc.), this chapter would be a welcome encouragement.13. I did appreciate his call for Christians to be case-makers, especially with his cooking analogy on page 260-261. I thought it was a great way of presenting the difference between the biblical office of Evangelist and the Christian who responds to the great commission.14. His list of books for further reading was great; 2 or 3 books per topic and not too overwhelming, though I did think that some of his books might be significantly above the reading level of someone who might find "Cold Case Christianity" a bit challenging. Going from a 5 page discussion of textual criticism to reading Metzger, Wallace and Comfort is a leap that will likely leave a lot people on their faces. Then again, I'm not really aware of a layman's introduction to textual criticism outside of James White's "The King James Only Controversy", so there possibly is a book that needs to be written there. I'll get right on that.CONS:Before I address the cons, I must say that most of the things I didn't like about the book were admittedly minor in nature. Only the last 2 con points (points 5 & 6) were ones that I would consider relatively significant.1. On page 41 Wallace presents the Habermas/Licona "minimal facts" argument for the resurrection. I understand that the "minimal facts" argument for the resurrection is convincing to Christians, but it's actually a really weak argument for most people to use outside of a New Testament studies class in a seminary.

Arguing that "a majority of scholars agree on these four facts" basically assumes that most people on the street care what a majority of "scholars" say. Let's face it; your average atheist/skeptic electrician who's spent a hundred hours on the internet reading about New Testament history (and watching YouTube) thinks he knows as much as most "scholars" and has absolutely no problem dismissing academic consensus in favor of an idiotic theory on some website ("Zeitgeist" anyone?). Beyond that, the first point (Jesus died on the cross and was buried) is actually denied by significant academic skeptics who hold that Jesus did die but was simply tossed in a mass grave (i.e. Marcus Borg and Bart Ehrman are vocal about this). Far more significant than this is the fact that the first point is denied as an unassailable tenet of faith by every Muslim on the planet. Living in a city where 1/3 of the population has immigrated from the Middle East or South Asia, I've long stopped using this argument.2. I was sad that on page 66 Wallace includes the transcendental argument for the existence of God in his list of arguments, but doesn't present it to his readers. Not a big deal, but as a presuppositionalist, I felt robbed. Boo hoo for me.3. On page 136 he gives the "love" defense to the practical problem of evil: A world with love is better than a world without love, love requires freedom and in that freedom many choose not to love. I know that idea gets a fair amount of traction in various apologetics circles, but there are at least 2 fatal problems with the "love" defense:3a. It's simply contrary to the consistent and explicit teaching of the scriptures with regards to why evil exists (namely that God has decreed that evil occur for his own good purposes i.e. Genesis 50:1-21). I don't find apologists offering an exegetical defense of this idea; it's a rather shallow and sentimental response to a serious problem that portrays the God of the Universe like a teenage girl (poor little guy just wants to be loved).3b. Why is a world with love better than a world without love? That whole idea is simply assumed, and I've found that many an atheist/skeptic sees the flaw in this argument instinctively: if a world with love has a world where a majority of people don't experience that love but rather experience war, disease, abuse, suffering, etc., that doesn't actually seem better for most people than alternatives (i.e. not existing at all, being a mentally deficient creature that experiences comfort but not love, etc.).4. Wallace writes like many popular apologists and seems to think that the biggest threat to Christianity is aggressive atheism; he repeatedly interacts with both the popular skeptics (Dawkins, Harris, etc.) and the academic atheists (Bart Ehrman), and I think I know why. Everyone who is in apologetics circles for any amount of time hears the scary numbers: 80% (or more) of kids that grow up in church leave the church when they get to college and most apologists (including Wallace) think that the reason is a lack of apologetic instruction. Those 80% of kids want to believe but their nasty philosophy or religious studies professors overwhelm them with arguments against Christianity and those kids, being unprepared, abandon the faith.I would suggest

that this whole paradigm is mistaken and this leads me to my 2 serious points of disagreement with Wallace in the book:5. Wallace seems to argue that the reason people disbelieve the scriptures is because of philosophical naturalism. He comments on this on pages 25-26, and he points to this idea throughout the book (like on page 208 where he suggests that skeptics disbelieve the Bible because of the presumption [without evidence] that the account is false unless corroborated, and this doubt stems from philosophical naturalism.) I would suggest that the Bible is clear that the philosophical naturalism (and every other articulate expression of doubt) is the fruit of unbelief, and unbelief is the natural state of a sinful heart.One place where this is explicitly taught in the scriptures is in the story of John 9-10, where Jesus heals the man born blind and the Pharisees refuse to believe, though the man stands before them with his eyes being healed. The disbelief of the Pharisees is confusing to Jesus' disciples (and the man born blind), and the whole scenario boils over in John 10:22-27, which reads:"At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."The whole point there was that the unbelief had nothing to do with the presence of evidence, for the evidence was both public and irrefutable (the man born blind could see). Nowhere in John 9 or 10 does anyone challenge the obvious nature of the evidence; the problem was only with the interpretation of the evidence. The Jews did not interpret the evidence correctly (i.e. they manifested philosophical naturalism that refused the possibility of the miracle proving Christ's claims) because they were not among Christ's sheep (i.e. they still had sinful, unbelieving hearts).Now this may seem like splitting hairs, but abandoning philosophical naturalism for supernaturalism is not synonymous with becoming a believer in the person and work of Christ. As a Christian apologist, I don't want people to abandon philosophical naturalism; I want people to repent of their sin and believe the gospel. This then leads to my final point of disagreement.6. This also manifests in Wallace's one strange idea; the "2 decision Christian" idea. On pages 253-255, Wallace talks about a criminal named Santiago who got saved at a crusade and then became a bank robber for several years but finally got caught by Wallace. What is shocking is Wallace's interpretation of the events:" Santiago made a decision to trust Jesus for his salvation, but he never made a decision to examine the life and teaching of Jesus evidentially. Santiago failed to make a second decision to examine what he believed. He was unable to see his faith as anything more than subjective opinion as he struggled to live in a world of

objective facts. As a result, his beliefs eventually surrendered to the facts of his situation and the pressures of his addiction. He allowed his friends and family situation to influence him, rather than becoming a source of inspiration and truth for his friends and neighborhood. Santiago was a one-decision Christian, and that decision was unsupported by a reasonable examination of the evidence." (page 255)Now this is the description of a guy who was a career criminal: "he made a decision to trust Jesus for his salvation" and Wallace says the problem was that " Santiago was a one-decision Christian". I would dare suggest that Wallace disagrees with the apostle John:" Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him." - 1 John 3:4-6Santiago didn't need to make a second decision to examine what he believed; he wasn't a tier 1 Christian who needed to get to tier 2. It seems fairly clear that Santiago was a guy who, at some time in the past, was made to feel guilty for his sin and was, for whatever reason, lead to believe that if he walked to the front of a building, his life would somehow change and he'd get what he wanted (good marriage, no more addictions, etc.).Santiago had been deceived and now was living a life that proved it.Santiago needed to believe the gospel and repent of his sin (for the first time), and I praise the Lord that during his time in prison, it sounds like he did.FINAL THOUGHTS:- I know that this review has a longer "con" than "pro" section, but I wanted to give a fair and critical review of a book that was deserving of a serious interaction (and I do so out of respect for Wallace as a co-laborer in the gospel and an effort to give helpful feedback, not out of some effort to belittle him). I honestly found "Cold Case Christianity" to be a fantastic general introduction to apologetics. Wallace and I have some serious theological differences, but those differences don't really manifest with an overwhelming majority of the material in the book. In the future, I'll most likely use "Cold Case Christianity" as an textbook in my introductory apologetics courses for senior high and college-aged kids, and the theological differences we have will be easily addressed in a single lecture.I give Cold Case Christianity 4 solid stars (I'd give it 4.5 if would allow) and a high recommend.***Update - Jan 25th***I recently got the chance to hear J. Warner Wallace speak in my town and got the opportunity to talk with him directly. He basically gave a talk that was a 1.25 hour overview of this book, mostly focusing on the second half of the book (establishing the credibility of the Gospels). Wallace was a wonderful speaker who was thoroughly enjoyable to hear, and I appreciated his presentation immensely.After the presentation, I got an opportunity to speak with him privately and he asked me if I had read his book. I admitted that I had read it and had already reviewed it, and we got into a quick discussion about some of my issues with the book (as well as

discussed some of the harsh responses from certain Calvinists, a category in which Wallace apparently places himself). I mentioned several of my personal questions that I had when I read the book (i.e. whether he gave the book of Revelation a late date...and he admitted that he wasn't informed enough on that issue to have an opinion) and then I basically focused on my serious question; the "two decision Christian" issue.Much to my delight, Wallace admitted that he needed to rework that portion of the book and acknowledged that it wasn't near as clear as he wished it was. What he apparently meant with the story of Santiago was that:a. Santiago had made a profession of faith at some time in the past (but was living as if he had not).b. If Santiago had made a decision to study the life and teaching of Jesus, he would have discovered that he was NOT living in proper correspondence to his profession.Wallace wasn't talking about some sort of "second blessing" theology at all, and he wasn't suggesting some sort of wild "no Lordship" position on salvation/sanctification. I definitely look forward to and next revision of the book, and I'd now up my review score from 4.5 to 4.75.I was definitely blessed to be able to get clarification from the horse's mouth (so to speak), and am delighted that Christian Apologetics has a new addition who is both down to earth, more in theological agreement with me than I had previously suspected, and a gentleman to boot.

I read this book because of questions I was having in my own belief. Years ago, a skeptic planted some seeds of doubts by asking me how I could believe the Bible that was hand-picked and assembled by people who clearly benefited and had a vested interest in seeing their movement continue and grow. It was a reasonable question and I couldn't answer it. Mr. Wallace did a great job of answering this with convincing proof and a perspective I had not heard before.I also read many of the negative reviews of this book to see what questions remained unanswered out there and other proofs to the contrary. I can't compete with the academic scholars who have spent years studying and researching ancient writings and histories so I can't refute the facts and arguments they bring up, but I did notice a recurrent theme. Many of the people who dispute the authenticity of the gospels are essentially putting them under a microscope and picking out flaws to support their theories. Mr. Wallace, on the other hand, has taken a step back and looked at all the evidence as a body and drawn his conclusion from that. When considered individually, the gospels may have holes, irregularities and unanswered questions, but when taken as a whole with support from the rest of the letters in the New Testament and other historic factors, they form a convincing proof of authenticity.Any facts can be disputed. There are people that are convinced the Apollo landings were faked, the holocaust never occurred, and the earth is flat. I'm sure people will discount the

bible forever. This book took evidence available to us and arranged it in a way that an average person could understand and come to a logical conclusion. Thank you, Mr. Wallace for helping me see the big picture.

Superb; heartfelt and quite solid. Many have compared this to Lee Strobel's The Case for Christ, and indeed there are quite a few similarities. An atheists investigates the claims of Christianity and come to a conclusion that changes their lives. In addition to the two decades separating the books, it is significant that Wallace is a homicide detective while Strobel was a journalist. As such, Wallace is deeply concerned with the question of how we know something is true. This book walks through this thorniest of issues, what philosophers would call epistemology, how do we know anything is true. This issue is critical more than ever, and Wallace provides a superb resource along with his personal journey of faith.As a resource for apologetics, I have been delighted by this book, and have read it several times over the past few years, recommending it often.

Let me begin by saying that I am a born-again Christian. I regularly attend two Bible studies a week, presents by a learned and entertaining pastor.With that in mind, I found this to be a compelling study, raising and answering questions even I haven't thought of (I am a questioning gnat for my pastor during our studies). Wallace faces the inconsistencies, answers them, or demonstrates they change nothing. If I could, I'd get my pastor to read the book. He should have an opportunity to question as well.

If you are interested in a fresh perspective on the historicity of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, you should read this book. J. Warner Wallace writes from the perspective of a former atheist and a working cold-case detective. Watch how he uses the skills developed over a very successful career solving and prosecuting cold cases to show how the New Testament contains reliable eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.Contains some very deep philosophical discussion written in a language that the everyday reader can easily understand.

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