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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: An Interview with J. Warner Wallace

Today, Pastor Nat joins special guest - detective and apologist, J. Warner Wallace, author of *Cold Case Christianity*:

NC: I am here with a special guest - author and cold case Detective J Warner Wallace. Jim, it is a pleasure to have you on the show today.

JWW: I'm the one who's honored to be here. I'm just glad to be part of your Ministry today. So thanks for having me.

NC: I greatly appreciate it. Well, I found your pathway to Christianity really unique and quite special. So, for our listeners today, who may not know who you are, do you want to share how you went from an atheist to a convinced and committed follower of Christ?

JWW: Well, I was in Los Angeles County and grew up here - born here, raised here, and worked here. And I was working as a police officer, eventually became a detective, and then started working unsolved murders. I was assigned to robbery - homicide for a number of years, and we always had extra murders that had been unsolved from years before - a couple of them were my dad's. My dad was here from about 1961 to about 1988. So I thought, you know, I'm going to open up all his old cases, and try to solve it.

I was not a Christian growing up. My dad's not a Christian - no Christians in our family. But my wife was very interested in taking our kids to church, when we finally had kids. And I was somebody, like my dad, who would have said, "You know, I'll go if you want to go. I don't think it's true, but it doesn't need to be true, in order to be useful." So I was more than happy to jump into something that might be useful, and at the same time would please my wife, to go to church, so "I'll go".

And so I got in church, and heard the pastor describe Jesus. In a very selfish way, I was interested in Jesus, because he described Jesus as the smartest man who ever lived. So I was interested in the wisdom of the ancient Sage that's known as Jesus, right? I mean, I bought the Bible - I bought one, just so I could look at those red letters. I thought all of the accounts - I was surprised, first of all, that it was more than just red letters - that there was this expectation that the writers of the Gospels had, that I would somehow believe that the sequence of events they're

describing is actually true. This is much of what happens in eyewitness accounts. And so I ended up just getting involved in the Gospels, and testing them as eyewitness accounts, because that's really all I need to do. And I actually thought that every Christian did that. I thought that everyone who reads this Bible does the same thing, right. Like they test it to see if it's true. And that was my journey toward even considering the Gospel - started with testing the Gospel accounts. And so that's really my pathway to becoming a Christian.

NC: Yeah. And I know that you found this out as well, but it's kind of amazing how many people really do kind of approach Christianity as a blind faith. They really don't take the time to investigate the truth claims. I don't know if it's because they're afraid of what they might find, or they're just fine, you know, going on this blind faith alone. I'm not sure what it is, but I know you found it to be incredibly beneficial to pursue truth as I have. And what I found really cool is, you took your expertise, you took your experience, and your research, and you actually put it into a book called *Cold Case Christianity* - great book, great resource. But I'm just curious, you know, why did you write this book, and for our listeners, what is this book all about?

JWW: Well, I was teaching the material to students. I had, you know - we got saved - and years later, I went to seminary, got a degree in Theology. Then I started pastoring, usually the same age as my kids. As they grew up, I was pastoring in ministries that were age appropriate for my kids, so we could be together as a family. And so by the time my kids were in high school, I was the high school pastor. And I was teaching this material to high schoolers, because I saw so many of them, even then, were walking away from their faith. My kids now they're 31 to 23. So they're a little bit older, but I can see that they were struggling - you know, a lot of their friends were no longer Christians after the first year in college. And to be honest, they stopped being Christians long before that. But by the time they went to college, they had the liberty to stop claiming they were Christians.

So I was really determined to take an evidential approach with my high schoolers. And I shifted toward teaching what we call Apologetics, which is just really to make the case - to defend. I hate to even use the word defend - to make the case affirmatively, for why Christianity is evidentially true. Then I started doing that, and I would take my students on trips to Berkeley and to Salt Lake City to stretch them theologically, or to stretch them from an Apologetics perspective.

You know, U.C. - Berkeley in our state is a pretty hostile - or either apathetic or hostile - to the Christian worldview. So it's a great place to take your students, to see if they understand how to navigate those issues, and how to have conversations. And I was on one of those trips with a friend of mine, Sean McDowell, who is Josh McDowell's son. And he had a high school class that I was training, on the way up. And he saw me training his class, and he said, have you ever thought about writing a book about this? And I thought, I just don't have time. I mean, I've also had - you know, I'd never stopped working as a cold case detective. So I had a bunch of cases in trial, but my wife encouraged me, you know, "Sean's going to help you find a publisher. Why don't we just at least write a chapter or two?" And that's how *Cold Case Christianity* got written to begin with. It was really because of Sean.

NC: So give us kind of just an overview of the book, and what exactly this book is about.

JWW: What I try to do in this book, like all my books, is number one, teach you the skill set. I try to give you 10 skills in that book that we use as detectives, that we're then going to apply in the second half of the book, to test the eyewitness accounts in the Gospels. Are they eyewitness accounts? If they are, they seem to be slightly different - why would that be, and does that make them unreliable? Well, how would we even test any account from the past, whether it's an eyewitness that comes into trial tomorrow, or whether it's a document - whether it's something that happened 40 years ago, or whether it's a manuscript from 2000 years ago?

There is a process by which we test and measure and evaluate eyewitnesses. It's actually in one of these books back here behind me on the shelves, from the California jury instructions. I just took the California jury instructions for the testing of eyewitnesses, and I applied that process to the Gospels. This is what I had to do - what I did when I was a new investigator of the Gospels - and the book just kind of retraces my steps. It's basically four large areas in which we test an eyewitness, and we do that in the second half of the book.

NC: I do want to talk about some of these areas that you cover in the latter half of your book. You know, you talk about the importance of eyewitnesses, okay. And in particular, in this book, you talk about the Gospels. So from your perspective, and from your research, were the Gospels written early enough to have been written by actual eyewitnesses? And why does this even matter?

JWW: If you wanted to lie about Jesus, here's how you do it. You wait until everyone who is dead - who was there at the time - is dead. And then you can say, whatever thing you - anything you want. If it's 150 years after the fact, there's not going to be anyone around to fact check you - no one else is going to be around to call you a liar, because you're writing it so far. And a lot of skeptics, this is the position they take. They believe that the Gospels are so late, written so late. You hear this all the time on social media. If you're making a case for Christianity on Twitter, or on Instagram, or wherever you might be on social media - get ready. At some point, someone's going to say to you, these things were written 150 years after the fact. And we don't even know who wrote them, and the names that are on those Gospels aren't even the real names of the writers, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I needed to know upfront - how early can I date these? Because clearly, if I'm going to write these 150 years late, that is a problem. You can't call them an eyewitness account, even though they might contain some truths. I needed to know, was the writer available as an eyewitness?

Now, some of this, they didn't even attempt to be the eyewitness, or don't even claim to be an eyewitness. Luke, for example - Luke is the eyewitness during the book of Acts, and even the substantive first person. But when he writes his Gospel of Luke, he writes that saying, "Hey, you know, I wasn't here for this. I instead spoke to the people who were - who were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. And so, this is the guy." So again, I can now test this to see - well, is Acts written early enough, that Luke could really have known these people, and have really talked to

the people who knew Jesus personally? Could he really have been an associate of Paul? Could he really have been an associate of Peter? Could he really have been an associate of James, the brother of Jesus? Could he have spoken to these people? That's going to matter to me.

I think what you can do is, you can kind of work backwards from Luke's book of Acts. There's a lot of stuff missing from the book of Acts that Luke should have included: you know - the Destruction of the Temple, the Siege of Jerusalem, the death of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, James-the brother of John, you name it. There's a bunch of folks, who we know about when they died - and they are important players in the book of Acts. All four of those men were important players in the book of Acts. Yet Luke never mentions their death, even though he mentions the death of a true nobody - James, the brother of John. Sorry - that dude compared to the other four is a nobody. You never hear what James did in the book of Acts, okay - James - the brother of John. But you do hear what James - the brother of Jesus did - wouldn't you include that death? If you're going to include the death of James - the brother of John, why wouldn't you include the death of James - the brother of Jesus?

Well, if it didn't happen yet - if it hadn't happened when you're writing the text - and none of those deaths started to occur until about 61 AD - well then, you can't write about it. The Fall of Jerusalem's around 70, but it hasn't happened yet. So that means I'm tentatively placing the date of Acts at around 60. And I think you can actually move it earlier, but I'll place it at around 60. And now we also know - by the way, we're already within the lifetime of eyewitnesses - and you might think, "Well, wait a minute - 30 years later, you expect me to believe that somebody recalls something true?" That's what I do for a living. I often find witnesses, who 30 years later will come into trial. They'll make a claim about what they saw 30 years earlier. Now what's interesting about those claims is, defense attorneys will say, "Well hey, how can you know - how can you remember from 30 years ago?" Well, I will simply redirect, and I will ask the question, "Well, how many murders have you seen?" "Well, I've only seen the one." "Do you think you'll ever forget the fact that you saw that? You think it's a usual - it's kind of an unusual situation, right?" "Well, yes it is." "Do you think you'll ever forget what you saw, on the day you saw the one and only murder in your entire life?" "Yes, I will remember that forever." Okay. [Right]. Certain memories are more - stick in your head.

And by the way, when I'm working with a witness who comes into trial 30 years later, there's a good chance that witness really hasn't shared that information, all that much, with that many people. If every day, or every several times a week, you were telling the same story over, and over, and over again, you're going to remember it a lot better. And what we have with the accounts, even if they're 30 years after the fact - and I don't think they are - I think you'll see in my book, I date Luke into the early fifties. I date Mark at late forties. And so, if you look at that - even if you said, well, 10, 15 years have gone by -well, yeah, but don't forget: These folks transmitted this information orally, from the minute Jesus ascended. As they were commissioned as eyewitnesses, from the first pages of the book of Acts, they were telling the stories of everything that Jesus taught and did, and how He rose from the grave. And then at some point, they simply had to put that on paper, or on papyrus. So it's not as though they hadn't thought

about it 30 years and now suddenly, they've got to recall it, or they hadn't told anybody in 30 years. We're in an oral tradition in the earliest centuries, and these folks repeated their claims often, and wrote the Gospels within the lifetime of people who could have debunked them - who could have said, "Hey, I knew Jesus. And He was none of that". The early dating of the Gospels goes a long way toward validating the Gospels. But for me, it was only one part of four issues that had to be examined.

NC: Here we are talking about Jim's book, *Cold Case Christianity*. And you just talked about the importance of eyewitness testimony, but there's also the importance of corroboration with outside sources and evidence. Is there any of this, for the claims of the Gospel writers?

JWW: Well, people ask me that all the time, and I get it, and I'm glad they ask, but the assumption in the question is, "I can't trust anything that's from a believer of Jesus, or a follower of Jesus." So if you've got these four accounts, okay - we can't trust that. We're going to need something other than them. Now, I think it's important to corroborate, and we can corroborate the Gospels, either internally or externally - but sometimes people really want a non-Christian account that's early enough to be - Look, if you're looking for somebody who didn't start off as a believer, okay, who's not a believer, and he's going to write something about Jesus, there actually is one of these - it's in the Gospels.

I'll tell you, if you think about it - the disciples of Jesus - it wasn't as though they weren't looking for a Messiah. Of course they were. Most of them were the disciples of John the Baptist. And they had heard for years, as the disciples of John, that there's a Messiah coming. And then John points them to Jesus and says, *There He is - the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*. And John's disciples leave John to join Jesus. So I can understand you're saying, "Well, look, yeah, this is kind of like everyone on the inside. They're the group that already thinks this is true, before they even start". But there's not - There's one of these guys is not in that group. He's not part of John's disciples. He's a tax collector, who is reviled by his own people, and who's so reviled in fact, that they don't even want to go to the dinner afterwards, when you're selected by Jesus to join the group. That dude comes in, and he comes in, not as part of the fellowship, not as part of the buds, not as part of John the Baptist's discipleship.

He comes in from the outside, but after three years of watching this, he's now committed - not on the basis of his expectations or his hopes, but instead on the basis of his observations. So Matthew is the account you're looking for, if you're looking for the account from a guy who was not part of the group, who then writes about what the group does. Because the only problem, of course, is if you started off as somebody who is not a believer, if you saw that stuff, in the end, you're going to end up being a believer. And now suddenly your testimony is discredited? Well, that doesn't seem fair. Look, he didn't start off as part of that group.

Now you can look at things like archeology. You can look at things like the use of names, pronouns that are used by the authors - just so happened to get the right pronouns. They use the same pronouns that are actually the pronouns that were used in that area in that century, which is unusual. If you wrote this from Egypt, just a hundred years later, you wouldn't necessarily pick the right pronouns for men and women, the right proper names. You wouldn't pick them, because

you wouldn't necessarily know what was happening on the other side of the Mediterranean, in a different century. And it turns out the authors seem to know the region. They seem to know the names of the people who were living in the region at the time, and much of their work, at least the cities. I'll give you an example of this:

If you are making a case for the book of Mormon, the book of Mormon covered a hundred year span of history in the North American continent from 600 BC to 400 AD. That thousand year period of time, there is not a single archeological excavation that can corroborate any city, any people group, any set of tools, weapons, any set of animals, that are described in the book of Mormon. You've got zero corroborative evidence archeologically for the book of Mormon. Yet you've got a ton for the New Testament. You actually can draw maps of the New Testament landscape, in a way that you cannot draw maps of the Mormon landscape of North America, because we've never found a single discovery to lock any of those cities into a specific place. [Right] So I wouldn't expect by the way - and corroborative evidence - I don't expect like a video. You know, if you're jumping on the counter and doing a robbery - if I find your palm print on the counter, that's considered corroborative evidence. Now it's probably pretty powerful in front of a jury, but it will not tell me what you were wearing, or what you said, or what's your action precisely - just, at some point you put your palm on the counter - that kind of corroborative evidence I call touch point corroboration. And there's a ton of this for the New Testament. But if what you're looking for is the video replay of every detail of the New Testament, that's a bar that you've set way too high, because you can't get that for any historical event.

NC: Well, okay. That makes a lot of sense. But you said something at the beginning, that made me think of another problem that we hear today when it comes to the New Testament and Christianity. People are all the time calling about bias, right? They're like, "Oh wait, but you know, they're biased. You're biased. You clearly, you know, you can't be objective in this." And so I've heard this about the Gospel writers today. Do you think from your research, that the Gospel writers were motivated to lie about their testimony? I mean, help me understand that.

JWW: Well, this is one thing we try to do when we select jurors, right. It comes down to what causes people to lie. Because when people say a bias, what they really mean is - when it comes to the authors of the Gospels - is they're writing something that's untrue. And they're writing this thing that's untrue, because they have a particular desire to achieve something. They are motivated in one way or another to say something about Jesus that we shouldn't trust, because it's truly, it's not really true. Well, what are the things that motivate people to lie? There's only three motivations for any misbehavior. Now I learned this working homicides, because you're often getting at a crime scene, and you're asking, well, "Hey, why would somebody have killed this young lady?" Well, it'd be nice to know if you had a short list. I do have a short list.

There's only three things that cause any murder. They're the same three things that cause any crime, that cause any sin that you and I have ever committed, that are responsible for any misbehavior. There's only three things. It makes it simple, doesn't it? Now it turns out these three things are in Scripture. I think it's in Second John, but I didn't know that at the time - I just learned them working cases: *financial-greed* - that's behind a lot of stupid; *sexual lust*; and the

third one is a big overarching umbrella. It's a funnel for a lot of other misbehavior, a lot of other motivations - and it's the *pursuit of power*. So that's very nuanced - it kind of catches everything. When somebody walks into a Wal-Mart and shoots 30 people who don't look like him, what's causing that? Well, that is the pursuit of power. That's me thinking privately that my color, or my ethnicity, or my position in life, or what I believe, matters more than these 30 people. That's a pride issue. That's a power issue. That's a respect and authority issue. When one gangster shoots another one, because they were disrespected across the room, that is a pursuit of power issue. So these things kind of are umbrellas that catch a lot of other misbehavior.

And the reason why I think that's important to understand is, because if we're suggesting that the Gospel authors are lying about this, then what's causing the lie? What motivates us to kind of misbehave? You already know: it's going to be financial greed, sexual lust, pursuit of power. That's it. So where is it that these disciples are gaining something? And I think that most people intuitively understand that these are the only.

I'll give you an example of this: Bart Ehrman, who is a pretty well-scholared skeptic, I think his view is that it's the pursuit of power. It's this idea that if I claim these things to be true, that I become a leader in a religious community in that first century, whereas before I was just a fisherman, or, well, you know - I could see that motivation in that, right? I will now be the respected apostle, with a title - Apostle - whereas before I was just nobody. Well, okay. So that would be one thing, if Peter wrote most of the New Testament, but he didn't. And no fisherman wrote most of the New Testament. It turns out most of the New Testament was written by a guy named Paul, who had everything. If you think he's - look, he's already in a position of power and authority and respect, as a religious Jew in a much larger community that had much more power in that day. He had the power in fact, to draw up papers, to execute Christians. So you're telling me, he jumps out of that position, to strive for the next 30 years, getting beaten up all over the known world, to hopefully get back to the position he started off with - with a larger group, that was more influential within the Roman Empire. By the way, they were at that time - they both were distrusted - but Jews were just trusted slightly less than Christians, in the early centuries of the Roman Empire. So tell me, is it possible? Yeah, anything's possible, but it's not reasonable. And so, the problem I have with the claim, that this is all an elaborate conspiracy, or a lie, is that it lacks proper motivation. And the fact that these folks were willing to pay with their lives - and I'm not like everybody else - I'm not going to jump in and say I'm certain that every single one of them died a martyr's death, exactly as Christian history describes, because I think some of those descriptions are more reliable than others. But I do know this - in a generation of Romans and government leaders that sought to have Christians deny their God, recant their claims - we have no ancient source, in which any of the Apostles ever recanted their claims. Nobody who claimed to be an eyewitness of Jesus ever later said, even if tortured, that they would recant their claims. Now look, you and I might say we would die for what we believe as Christians. That would have zero evidential value - zero - because lots of people die for what they don't know is a lie. [Right]. But this is the one group that would know if it's a lie; they're in a completely different category. The death of the eyewitnesses is of far more evidential value, than the death of the students of the eyewitnesses, who never knew Jesus. So I think that the death of those 12 has at least some evidential value we should consider.

N: It is fascinating to actually look at the data, look at the evidence, and make the most reasonable conclusion using them. That seems to be the best way to go - not just looking at possibilities, not just looking at, you know, what could have happened - but what is the best explanation? And I think when you look at what you just said alone - just look at the fate of the Apostles - just Paul alone. Right there, I think that gives us enough reason to take it seriously, that Christianity is in fact true. Well Jim, we appreciate your time. Thank you for speaking with us. And we look forward to having you on the show again.

JWW: Hey thanks for having me. I appreciate it.