

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

COLD CASE CHRISTIANITY (GUEST SPEAKER J. WARNER WALLACE)
MARCH 1-7, 2015



MAIN POINT

It is not enough to believe that the gospel is true, we must also believe in the gospel so deeply that we are compelled to actively share the hope of the gospel with the people around us.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What are some things that you believe that don't always affect your behavior (most of us believe that high fat foods are bad for our long term health but we continue eating them or we believe that recycling is good for the environment but we don't take the time to recycle etc.)? Why don't our lives always match up with our beliefs?
2. Ask those who feel comfortable to share about a time when you realized a specific way that your life did not match your beliefs. How did you respond to this realization?

Leader: J. Warner Wallace, a former LAPD cold case detective, shared the difference between *belief that* and *belief in*. We all believe *that* we should not eat too many foods high in cholesterol, sodium, and saturated fat but we haven't examined the dietary evidence closely and as a result we often fail to take the necessary steps to change our eating habits. One of the points that Wallace makes in his book is that many Christians do something similar with Christianity. We believe *that* Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again on the third day and yet many of us fail to take the next step and examine the evidence of Christianity so closely that we can no longer live in ignorance. While we have made the first decision to believe that Christ is our savior, we have failed to make the second critical decision to examine the truth claims of Christianity so deeply that they begin to dictate our behavior and our witness. When we move from believing *that* Christianity is true to believing *in* what the gospels tell us about Jesus, we will begin living as active "case makers" for Christ, pointing those around us to the eternal hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

3. One of the points that Wallace made in his book is that when he moved from belief *that* to belief *in* Christ, he became aware of both the true nature of Jesus and the true nature of his own fallen condition. How has an awareness of these two things changed the way you think and live?
4. How might investigating the evidence to support your beliefs help you grow in your personal walk with Christ?

Leader: Knowing that apart from Christ we are dead in sin and that Christ is our only hope keeps us humble as we seek to share the hope we have with others. Furthermore, remembering that Christ graciously, powerfully, and miraculously saved rebels like us give us confidence that He has the power to save the people around us. When we make the decision to deeply investigate the truth claims of Christianity ourselves, we will be less likely to be swayed by the sinful influences of others and will instead be prepared to point them to Christ.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 PETER 3:13-17.

Leader: Much like today, 1 Peter is addressed to Christians in Asia minor whose faith was being challenged by the unbelieving world around them. In these verses Peter challenged them to seize any suffering they might experience as an opportunity to defend their hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. Does sharing the gospel or defending the truth claims of Christianity seem like a daunting or intimidating task to you? Why or why not?

6. What are the prerequisites for being a “Christian case maker”? Why does Peter say we must “set apart Christ as holy” in our hearts if we hope to be “prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”?

Leader: Being a “Christian case maker” doesn’t require an advanced degree in apologetics. According to Peter, there is only one prerequisite to being a “Christian case maker” and that is to “set apart Christ as Lord” in your heart (v. 15). This simply means to prioritize your relationship with Jesus above anything else. The best way we can prepare to share Christ with others is by growing to treasure Christ more ourselves. At the beginning of his letter, Peter described believers as those God “has caused to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . . who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5). Through faith in Christ’s atoning death and resurrection, believers possess a sure hope that unbelievers do not.

The hope that we have in Christ should fill our hearts with joy and move us to share that hope with others. While we often fall prey to thinking that we need a doctorate in philosophy or apologetics in order to defend the faith, nothing could be further from the truth. If you have come to truly believe *in* the Christ of the Bible, you have already been given everything you need to be an effective Christian case maker.

7. In his book Wallace compared being a Christian case maker to serving on a jury in a court case. He said, “Jurors don’t need to be experts in the field under consideration; they simply need to be attentive, conscientious, and willing to get in the game.”¹ What might need to change in your life in order for you to be a better Christian case maker?

8. If someone asked, are you prepared to explain what you believe and why? How are we to make our defense (v. 15b)?

1 Cold Case Christianity, J. Warner Wallace, (Colorado Springs, David C. Cook, 2013) 260.

Leader: The hope that we have in Christ should fill our hearts with joy and move us to share that hope with others. Our personal defense of Christianity may not be as robust or comprehensive as a professional apologist, but it can be just as powerful and persuasive. As we seek to become Christian case makers, it is important that we not only become more deeply acquainted with the hope we have in Christ, we must also exhibit our hope through the attitude with which we testify of our hope in Christ. Peter closed his teaching on evangelism by reminding us that the manner in which we share our hope matters—we must share the gospel with “gentleness and respect” (v. 15b).

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. Wallace challenges people to start small in becoming “case making Christians.” What might that look like for you? What could you do this week to investigate the truth claims of Christianity?

Leader: Some ways OEFC is equipping people to become “case making Christians” this month include our Deep & Wide conversation on March 8, as well as an entire Equip-U lineup from March 20-29 focusing on taking God’s truth to the world around us.

10. How might we as members of this growth group help one another prioritize Christ over all else? What is at stake if we don’t become more prepared to share the hope we have in Christ with others?

11. What are some ways you could bring up your hope in Christ in the flow of natural conversation with your nonbelieving friends?

PRAYER

Thank God for the hope we have in Christ. Pray that we would be so amazed by this hope that it begins to shape and transform the way that we live. Pray that we would deeply investigate the truth claims of Christianity such that we would both live out our hope in Christ and be prepared to make a case for our hope to our lost friends and family members.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **What are you doing to deepen your investigation of the truth claims of Christianity this week?**
 - **Who do you know who is ignorant of the hope that is found in Christ? What are some gentle and respectful ways you might share the hope you have in Christ with them this week?**
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize 1 Peter 3:15.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

1 PETER 3:13-17

3:13. The last major section of 1 Peter begins with this verse. From here on Peter is primarily concerned with the believer's response to actual persecution and intimidation. His focus is the believer's response to specific attacks. He begins to zero in on this response by asking a question in verse 13: "Since we are doing good in our lives, will people harm us?" Peter has exhorted his readers previously to be good to others as a witness and defense against nonbelievers (see 2:12), so this question would naturally flow from such an exhortation. The question suggests an answer something like this, "Under normal circumstances when you do what is right and good, you should not expect pain or harm to be directed your way."

3:14. Circumstances are not always normal, however. Slaves face the prospect of suffering for doing what is good (see 2:20). All Christians need to hear about suffering and trials in general (see 1:6–7). Peter himself suffered under circumstances that were not "normal." Suffering in the believer's life requires discussion.

"Right" (*dikaionun*) is often translated as "righteousness." In this context, the emphasis is on right living, or living that parallels the standards of the Word of God. This kind of behavior sometimes produces a negative reaction from others. The believer is "blessed" in the sense of being a recipient of God's favor and grace and living out another dimension of his calling (see 2:21). Still, we have normal human responses to the harm directed toward us as believers. Peter hinted at one of the main responses: "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." A better translation of the first part of this sentence would be, "Do not fear their threats or intimidations."

Opponents often attempt to intimidate believers to change their "right" behavior or to deny their "right" beliefs. Inherent in "fear" is the suggestion of being put to flight, or running away. The word describes "terror that causes you to flee." In the midst of suffering for doing what is right, believers are sometimes intimidated into running from their belief system or running from their circumstances. Peter's counsel was that they should not allow this to happen.

3:15. Instead of running away, Christians need a renewed allegiance. Set apart Christ as Lord means "to treat as holy or to regard with reverence." Christians are to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Holy One and also as Lord. "Lord" is the New Testament term for the Old Testament personal name for God (see Exod. 3:14-15; 6:2-3), often transcribed as "Jehovah" but more properly as "Yahweh." The New Testament applies the Old Testament title for God the Father to Jesus Christ, thus celebrating the deity of Christ.

The believer is to view Christ as holy, as worthy of reverence because of who He is. To reverence Christ as Lord means to believe that Jesus Christ is in control and that those who come against the believer are not. To have such reverence is to maintain a deep-seated confidence in Jesus Christ as the reigning Lord of the universe (see 3:22). When our lives are centered on Christ, who is in control of the universe, then we are able to respond properly to the uncertainties and inconsistencies of life. When we have made this commitment, we can respond to harm by communicating a positive word regarding our hope in Christ rather than running away. Even while suffering unjustly, Christians are able to go on because of their hope in the future.

From the opening words of chapter 1, Peter has emphasized the living hope of the believer (see 1:3). The unbeliever does not enjoy this hope but is connected only to an empty way of life, and a life of spiritual darkness (see 1:18; 2:9). One of the distinguishing marks of believers in Christ is their possession of hope. Christian hope is to be so real and distinctive that non-Christians will be puzzled by it and ask for an explanation. We should seize the opportunities of witness presented in these kinds of situations. Our response should be characterized not by smugness or vindictiveness but by gentleness and respect. These words suggest that the believer should approach others carefully and kindly.

3:16. If we maintain our testimony with gentleness and respect, we can be confident of operating with a "clear conscience." This means that we should live in such a way that we won't have to keep looking over our shoulder, hoping that the wrong we have done isn't about to catch up to us.

By operating this way, our behavior and words will speak volumes to those who come against us. Peter promised that truth will prevail. What is not clear is whether the reference to the slanderers being ashamed refers to their present life or to the future day of God's judgment. Most likely the text looks to a change of heart by the persecutors in this life as they are confronted by the gracious responses of the people they are persecuting.

3:17. This verse is an effective summary of what Peter has already stated in 2:15, 19–20: Suffering for doing good may be God's will for believers.