

THE CASE FOR CHRIST

(Adapted from the book, *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel)

Lee Strobel is an award winning journalist who once worked at the Chicago Tribune. Today, this former skeptic, is a Christian Pastor. His excellent book details the evidence that brought him to faith in Christ.

His introductory illustration provides insight into his ability as an investigative reporter. The story involved James Dixon, who was convicted of shooting police sergeant, Richard Scanlon, during a scuffle on Chicago's south side. It seemed to be an open and shut case.

- James Dixon had been seen with a gun, and was arguing with his girl friend.
- The police were called and fifteen year veteran, Sergeant Scanlon, responded.
- When Scanlon attempted to break up the fight a shot rang out, hitting him in the stomach..
- A .22 caliber gun was found nearby with one bullet fired.
- The gun belonged to Dixon and had his fingerprints all over it.
- Powder burns on Scanlon indicated that he had been shot at close range.
- Dixon had served three years in prison for an earlier shooting.
- Dixon confessed to the crime of shooting officer Scanlon, and was sentenced to prison..
- Police Sergeant Richard Scanlon was presented with an award for bravery.

James Dixon, however, was actually innocent, and Lee Strobel gives evidence to prove it. Here is what really happened. Dixon was pounding with his pistol on his girl friend's door when the gun discharged. An examination of her front porch showed where the bullet hit. Dixon didn't want to be found with the gun so he hid it before the police arrived. When officer Scanlon got involved in the scuffle he actually shot himself with a "pen gun." This is a .22 caliber weapon designed to look like a fountain pen. Pen guns are illegal to carry, even for cops. The powder burns inside of Scanlon's shirt pocket, and the trajectory of the bullet confirm where it came from.

Dixon's rap sheet did not tell the whole story either. Yes, he had spent three years in prison for a previous "shooting," but an appellate court set him free because they determined he had been wrongly convicted.

Dixon's confession came as a result of a plea bargain. He had already been in jail 362 days awaiting trial. He was promised that if he pleaded guilty he would be sentenced to only one year. With time served he would be back home in a few days. If he insisted on a trial, however, they promised to throw the book at him. If a jury found him guilty of shooting a police officer he might get twenty years. Having already spent three years in prison for a wrongful conviction, he decided to confess to something he did not do and go home.

In the end, however, Dixon was exonerated. He sued the police department and won. Officer Scanlon was stripped of his medal, indicted by a grand jury, and fired from the department.

The point is that Lee Strobel is willing to find the truth even when the search is difficult. This same hunger for truth resulted in his conversion to Christ. On page 13 he writes: *"For much of my life I was a skeptic. In fact, I considered myself an atheist. To me, there was far too much evidence that God was merely a product of wishful thinking, of ancient mythology, of primitive superstition. How could there be a loving God if he consigned people to hell just for not believing in him? How could miracles contravene the basic laws of nature? Didn't evolution satisfactorily explain how life originated? Doesn't scientific reasoning dispel belief in the supernatural?"*

After many months of painstaking research he wrote: *"By Nov. 8, 1981, my legend thesis to which I had doggedly clung for so many years, had been thoroughly dismantled. What's more, my journalistic skepticism toward the supernatural had melted in light of the breathtaking historical evidence that the resurrection of Jesus was a real, historical event. . . The atheism I had embraced for so long buckled. It was a stunning and radical outcome, certainly not what I had anticipated when I embarked on this investigative process. But it was, in my opinion, a decision compelled by the facts."* (p. 266.)

Have you considered the evidence in the case for Christ?