

Colossians 1:15-20
“Da Vinci or Divinity?”
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About three years ago I was at a dinner party in DC and got cornered by a guy who, when he found out I was a pastor, asked me if I had read *The Da Vinci Code*. I said that I really hadn't- I had heard of it, but had not gotten the chance to read it. He told me that I definitely needed to read it and that *The Da Vinci Code* would shake my foundations. “OK, I'll read it and we can talk about it the next time I see you.” I went home, borrowed a copy and read it. It's a gripping page-turner that is hard to put down. But about halfway or 2/3 of the way through the book, I couldn't believe what I was reading. The novel takes you on a thrill ride, following a set of clues that lead to the discovery of secrets that have been covered up by the church- secrets as to the real identity of Jesus Christ and the reliability of the Scriptures.

Let's set aside *The Da Vinci Code* for a while- we'll come back to it. Let's look first at a passage that should give us some background to the very question of who Jesus Christ is: Colossians 1:15-20

Book- **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by [\[6\]](#) him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

I doubt that I'm going to do justice to this breath-taking passage. I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't just be better to read a passage like this over and over, letting the words soak in and teaching us ourselves, because they are powerful. But let us look and explore this nonetheless.

Could have been a hymn or fixed testimony of the early church. Paul places it right at the beginning of his letter to the Colossians. He doesn't start with a rebuke or a question about how the church is being led astray, as he does in some of his letters. Colossians starts with this beautiful picture of who Jesus is.

You can split this text in half: the first three verses speak of Christ in creation, the last three speak of him in re-creation/redemption/salvation. In other words, Jesus is Lord over creation and Lord over the new creation. Look at the parallelism between the two sections:

(PP slides)

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| -Both sections identify Him- | 1 st half- image of invisible God |
| | 2 nd half- head of the church |
| -Both sections show His priority- | 1 st half- firstborn in Creation, He existed before all else |
| | 2 nd half- the beginning, the first to rise from the dead |
| -Both sections tell what happened “in Him” or “through Him”- | 1 st half- all things created & hold together |
| | 2 nd half- reconciliation/peace made |

Let's work our way, verse by verse through this Scripture.

-v. 15a- Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is not the symbol of God, not just a representation of Him, as a coin with George Washington's face is a representation of the former president. He is the “manifestation.” I was reading a book called “With One Voice” by Reggie Kidd recently: the Old Testament is roughly split into three sections/types of writings: the Law shows God's mind, the Prophets show God's

will, and the Poets/Writings show God's heart. Romans 1 says that all mankind has been shown the glory of God in nature, so He has revealed Himself in a very limited way to all mankind. Then He revealed Himself greater to the Israelites- Moses saw His back, the prophets and leaders heard His voice, and they wrote down His words. But now in Jesus Christ we have God Himself. What God had revealed of Himself in limited ways in the thousands of years before Christ, He now shows fully in the person of Christ.

-v. 15b- The term "firstborn" has been misunderstood- cults and other religions teach that Jesus was created from God- one in a series of prophets or revelations of God. The better sense of firstborn is not to think in terms of time, but in terms of honor, the heir of God's inheritance. He is first in line to receive God's blessings. R.C. Sproul explains that "when we speak of the subordination of Christ we must do so with great care... The Son voluntarily takes on a subordinate role to the Father..." The Father and Son are equal in divine being and nature (as is the Holy Spirit), but the Son takes a subordinate position in redemption. The bottom line is that we must not confuse this obedience and humbling as meaning that Jesus is anything less than equal with the Father, it is how they act out their various roles.

-v. 16 echoes John 1:3- "through Him all things were made," that Jesus created all things. If you're thinking that you've read Genesis 1 before and never seen Jesus' name there, it's because Jesus is not named in the Old Testament. The New Testament sheds light on the Old Testament (progressive revelation) so that we can see that Jesus was around and created all things. Colossians 1:16 adds the idea that all things were created "for Him." That's the goal of creation- to honor and glorify Jesus.

v. 17- Jesus didn't just create the world and set it spinning; then came down for 33 years to do his work on earth, but otherwise keep His hands off. He holds all things together; through His providence, His active working. Without Him the world would see chaos.

v. 18- 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 develop the theme of the Church as the Body of Christ working together; here we have Christ named as the head. All bodies are submissive and obedient to their heads. Without a head, the body is useless/powerless.

He was the firstborn from the dead- other Scriptures say that because He was raised, we can be raised as well.

-v. 19- In Jesus the "fullness of God was pleased to dwell." He was not one of many revelations of God, which is what most cults and world religions claim about Jesus if they do not simply write Him off as a man; He was the supreme, complete and final revelation of God to us.

-v.20- Finally, what Jesus did here on earth: 1) We were enemies of God that needed peace to be made on our behalf. 2) This freedom and liberation applies to all things-not just man, but "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

I don't think there's any question about Paul's understanding of who Jesus was. If people can read Paul's writings and still think that he was confused or ambivalent about Jesus being divine, they have missed it. And this has a lot to tell us as we hear modern interpretations of who Jesus is.

Let us turn our attention to this book and movie, *The Da Vinci Code*. I don't have time to fully explain the plot- it's very complicated. The main ideas of the theology that the book comes up with is:

1) The Bible, at least the New Testament is unreliable; the early church and the first "Christian" emperor chose the theology and writings that it wanted and covered up "the truth" so that Christianity would become male-dominated/female-oppressing and worshipping of Jesus as God.

2) Jesus was just a man, got married, had a daughter- his line continues even today. He meant for his wife, Mary Magdalene to be the leader of his church, but the church took over and buried all evidence to the contrary; Priority kept the secret.

The book has touched a nerve, it has sold millions of copies, multiple weeks on the NY Times Bestseller List. There have been many, many books published within the last three years debunking the claims of the book. Currently there are many “guides to the movie,” one of which I ordered and you can have a copy if you like. And most of the things I’ve read question Dan Brown’s motives, and his claim that all the artwork, architecture, documents & secret rituals are accurate. But to Dan Brown’s credit, his website says that he does not claim that all the conspiracies and conclusion he makes are true; just that the locations, artifacts and groups he mentions really exist. So we’re going to give him the benefit of the doubt- he might really believe all the theories or he might just be laughing his way to the bank.

But... people are believing this stuff and taking it as fact. Just like the guy who came up to me at the dinner party, probably a lot of your unbelieving friends and neighbors are taking this as fact.

One writer, Josh McDowell estimated that about 2% of what Dan Brown writes is accurate. I don’t have time to work through a lot of the problems with the book. So let’s just take one statement from the book and examine it as typical of how Dan Brown twists historical facts.

-(PP slide) “Fortunately for historians,” Teabing said, “some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert.” That sounds like a credible statement- there was an emperor named Constantine, the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in a cave, etc. But put together, hardly any of this sentence is true:

- 1) Constantine did not participate in the canonical process by destroying gospels he simply didn’t like.
- 2) The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the mid 1940’s
- 3) They were all exclusively pre-Jesus writings, Jewish writings from BC; not a single Gospel found among them.
- 4) The Qumran community sealed up the documents in the late AD 60’s, before the fall of Jerusalem; well before any Gnostic gospels were written, and *250 years before Constantine lived!*

While it seems that as you’re reading through the book, the evidence is becoming so indisputable against Biblical Christianity, we must realize that there are answers to everything that Dan Brown brings up!

There are two other problems with *The Da Vinci Code* besides its evidence and facts:

- 1) The Prescription- We can’t just replace the four “traditional”, “unreliable”, “biased” Gospels with the “superior” Gnostic gospels, we have to replace pretty much the whole New Testament. There’s not a book in the New Testament that doesn’t talk about Jesus as the divine Messiah.
- 2) The Alternative to the false, male-domineering version of Christianity- We are left to believe that Jesus gave us the Sacred Feminine, pagan goddess worship that’s just uncritically accepted as obviously the best possible religion out there because somehow it’s less sexist, and freeing.

So what should our response to something like *The Da Vinci Code* be?

1) If you noticed the insert in your bulletin, it gives a couple options that Christians are taking- ignore it, bury it or boycott it. But see this as an opportunity! Unbelievers are curious about Jesus- how often does that happen? Even if the questions are being raised by a false source, they are still being raised and unbelievers are looking for answers. Read it and find answers to it- you probably don’t want to debate someone or tear down the book if you haven’t read it. Believers should relish the challenge to have their faith strengthened by remembering how strong the evidence is for the reliability of the Scriptures. Immature believers and unbelievers want to know if there is truth to these things, or if there are answers.

2) The problem with combating something like “The Da Vinci Code” with mere facts, rebuttals and linear arguments is that we live in a postmodern age. (Hang with me if you haven’t been to a seminar or done much reading about the shift to postmodernism by our culture) The modern age has transitioned in the past 20 or 30 years into the postmodern age. Modernity believed that logic and rationality were the highest form of good. The church of the modern age evangelized by giving the facts of Christianity, hoping that any logical person would hear the facts, see the truth of the Gospel and come to Christ. That’s why we have McDowell’s “Evidence That Demands a Verdict,” Kennedy’s Evangelism Explosion, the four spiritual laws, etc. They’re all wonderful tools to explain Christianity, but to people who want to hear and learn it.

-The problem is that postmodern people have abandoned straight logic and authority and said that your truth is good for you and mine is good for me; truth is a slippery thing. Furthermore, and we Reformed people should understand this most, that coming to Christ is not necessarily just getting the facts straight, it’s a spiritual struggle where the Holy Spirit must work on the heart before the heart is open to the truth of the Gospel. So, you can argue about something like the Da Vinci Code until you’re blue in the face and it may not do a thing for who you’re talking to. Love the person that you’re witnessing to. Find out why their life hurting, find out why they don’t want to accept God’s father love. Let them know you care about them way more than you care about them agreeing with you. Pray for them, for the Holy Spirit to change your heart.

3) Christians often say that we are in a “cultural wars.” We may think our fight is against the atheists, the media, the gay agenda, those who want to shut down Christianity and promote the values that we don’t. While agreeing that we should work to bring Christian values in everything we do. But when we get caught up in that kind of thinking, we forget Ephesians 6:12- “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Donald Miller in his book *Searching For God Knows What*, has captured it well in a very short phrase: “In war, you shoot the enemy not the hostages.” Yes, we’re in a war, but it is against the devil, not those he has claimed as his hostages. That’s why we need the armor of God- to fight that battle. Our enemies are not Dan Brown or Howard Stern or Ted Kennedy or whoever it is you’re angry at. As believers we need to see them as hostages; we need to give them the gospel of grace; we need to free them, not attack them.

Acts 8:26-38 tells the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. God sent Philip to speak to a eunuch who was driving a chariot past him. The man did not understand what he was reading from the book of Isaiah- “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (ESV) v. 35 says that Philip taught him the good news about Jesus beginning with this text, and the eunuch was baptized. We have the ministry of Philip- you may not have quite the same blunt question from unbelievers, but they might as well be asking us, “How can I understand the Bible unless someone explains it to me?”

Closing:

Dan Brown wasn’t the first one to say that if Jesus wasn’t God, we’ve been deceived and our faith is worthless. As the Apostle Paul said, if Christ did not rise from the dead, we’re the biggest fools, our faith is totally misguided. The bottom line is that we must either believe that Jesus was God, the fullness of God, who is above and in all things, or we must reject Him as God, write Him off as a mere man, and find someone else to worship. Christ is either Lord of all, or not Lord at all. All those who believe that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the creator and reconciler of all things, the Alpha and Omega, said Amen.

Sources Used:

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