

The Da Vinci Code: What Does Christianity Really Teach?

Was Jesus Just a Man?

[Walk in wearing a hat]. I'm glad Christianity encourages us to keep our 'thinking caps' on. When you come to belief in Christ, God does not ask you to "check your brain" at the door of faith. He who is the Truth is not afraid of truth, and neither should we be. God doesn't want us to take off our 'thinking caps' [take off cap and hang it on a coat rack] when we become Christians.

Now it is true that Christianity isn't a religion one would invent just from human reason. The Bible says "not many wise men according to the flesh" have joined the Christian calling that "no man should boast before God." "By God's doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). But the truths of Christianity, having been revealed by God, are rational. One would never think up the plan of redemption, but when God explained it to us through the Bible, it makes sense:

If man is sinful—and we are—then man's sin must be forgiven before he can stand before a pure God in a perfect heaven. But because we are sinful, we cannot redeem ourselves no matter how much good we might do or how much evil we might avoid. The only solution is for God himself to pay for our sin. And the only way God could pay the penalty of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23), is if God himself would become human. God became human through Jesus. And his being conceived within a virgin—again, man would not have thought that one up, but it makes rational sense—is the way God and man could be joined miraculously. What other way might a God-Man arrive among us? God entered humanity through a virgin birth. Then Jesus taught lessons and touched lives for three decades. And then on what we with irony call "Good Friday," he died. Since Jesus Christ was human, he could die. Since Jesus Christ was God, his death could redeem. "For Christ also died for sins once for all—the just for the unjust—that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). And since his death satisfied God the Father's demand for justice, Jesus Christ was raised back to life on the third day, on Easter. Now, in heaven the living Lord Jesus offers salvation through his death as your substitute. The forgiveness of the sins of each one of you is paid for, if you will receive the free gift by faith through God's mercy and grace.

Man didn't figure out this plan, but when God revealed the plan, at least it's rational. It makes sense. I am glad I don't have to "check my brain" or "take off my thinking cap" to be a Christian. We Christians should not be afraid of truth.

Today we are in the third of four weeks in which our sermons have been examining the assertions of *The Da Vinci Code* to see if the theories of the book can withstand critical observation: The first week we asked and answered the question: "Did the Church rewrite history?" No. The second week, the question: "Can the Bible be trusted?" Absolutely. Next week, appropriately on Mother's Day, I will be answering this challenge thrown out by this book: "Are Women Valued in Christianity?" But today we turn to the most venomous insinuation contained within the *Da Vinci Code*: "Was Jesus Just a Man?"

Perhaps you've noticed other churches and radio programs addressing the challenges of The Da Vinci Code. Tom Hanks, the protagonist in the upcoming movie version, was quoted in the April 25th Oregonian on how the film might prove to be a boon for church services. *"If they put up a sign saying, 'This Wednesday we're discussing the Gospel,' 12 people show up. But if the sign says, 'This Wednesday we're discussing "The Da Vinci Code," 800 people show up'."* Well, I pray that many people show up here and in other churches to investigate The Da Vinci Code **and** hear the Gospel as well.

In presenting such studies about the false statements in The Da Vinci Code, don't want to be mean or vindictive—we are just accepting Dan Brown's challenge. Brown writes in the book's preface, *"Each individual reader must explore these characters' viewpoints and come to his or her own interpretations."* In an interview with NBC Today (October 10, 2005) Dan Brown was asked by host Matt Lauer, *"How much of this book is based on reality in terms of things that actually happened?"* Brown emphatically replied, *"Absolutely all of it is historical fact."*

Unfortunately, many, many people have read this book without separating fact from fancy, leaving their 'thinking cap' in the hall closet. Beginning May 19th, many, many people will line up at the movie theater turnstiles, checking their brain at the entrance, and will gulp down this poison.

Recently, I learned of a survey as to which celebrities are most trusted, believable to the average consumer. If you were to hire a famous talent to pitch your cereal and say it is nutritious, which one would give the message the highest credibility? Do you know who was at the top of the list? Tom Hanks.

When I see the many people who are unable to separate an exciting plot line from the fabrications of made-up-history in The Da Vinci Code, I am reminded of the quotation from G. K. Chesterton: *"When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing. They believe in anything."*

Many people seem to believe the authoritative tone of the fictional expert, Leigh Teabing. Concerning the topic of today's question, he says Christ was merely a man who was first proclaimed as God by the Council of Nicaea for Emperor Constantine's political purposes. But if you actually research the claims made by The Da Vinci Code or Holy Blood, Holy Grail, the 1982 book upon which it is based, you'll find its theories based on twisted scholarship or outright fraud.

Here's what The Da Vinci Code says on page 233, *"Jesus' establishment as the 'Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea...a relatively close vote at that."*

Is that true? Was that the purpose of the Council of Nicaea? Was the divinity of Jesus decided by a show of hands? Well, Emperor Constantine did convene the Council of Nicaea, and it did deal with a heresy, Arianism, that was ascribing less than full Deity to Jesus. But a close vote? Not unless you think 298 to 2 is close.

So, according to Dan Brown, how did Constantine spread this newly founded view of Jesus as God? *"Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier*

*gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned” (page 234). Later he writes, “The early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a **divine** being. Therefore, any gospels that describe **earthly** aspects of Jesus’ life had to be omitted from the Bible” (page 244).*

These quotes are grossly ill-informed statements. They claim Constantine was the one who formulated the Bible with the books selected as we have it today. But as Pastor David explained well last week, the people of God, reaching consensus over two centuries as the books were circulated, affirmed which books were from God. The canon was established long before the Council of Nicaea. That Council did not even address the issue of what books are in the Bible. The consensus of the Church was actually proclaimed, not by the Council of Nicaea in 325, but by The Synod of Hippo in 393.

“When at last a Church Council—The Synod of Hippo in A.D. 393—listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity.”
— F.F. Bruce

Dan Brown also said the Bible “omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits” and “any gospels that describe earthly aspects of Jesus’ life had to be omitted from the Bible.” Those of you who are familiar with the four biblical Gospels know they do, in fact, describe vividly the humanity of Jesus—the man who was, for examples, born as an infant and grew in wisdom and knowledge (Luke 2:52), was so exhausted he remained asleep during a storm (Mark 4), thirsted at a well (John 4), and shed tears at the grave of a friend (John 11).

And to say “the earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned” is an out-and-out lie. No scholars—Christian or non-Christian—say the Gnostic Gospels (such as the Gospel of Thomas, or the recently re-discovered Gospel of Judas) were earlier than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were not “the earlier gospels.”

What we have in the Da Vinci Code is simply old heresy dressed up in new clothes. There have been many cults and heresies that error when they do not attribute to Jesus full deity. The Bible warned there would be heretical assaults upon the identity of Jesus who is Christ, that is, the Son of God.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:1–3).

Consider the views of previous cult founders:

- Charles Russell, leader of the Jehovah’s Witness cult: “The man Jesus is dead, forever dead.”
- Brigham Young, of the Mormon cult: “Jesus Christ was a polygamist; Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, were His plural wives. And Mary Magdalene was another.” (Perhaps, Dan Brown would be comfortable moving to Salt Lake City.)

- The Christian Scientist founder, Mary Baker Eddy: *“God is indivisible. A portion of God could not enter man; neither could God’s fullness be reflected by a single man.”*
- Islam believes Jesus was one of God’s many human prophets who were chosen to teach Islam to mankind at different stages, the final and completed stage being taught by God’s final prophet, Mohammed. Jesus was one of God’s highest ranked and most beloved prophets. Islam teaches Jesus was born miraculously without any human biological father by the will of God. But to Islam there is no Trinity. There is no god except the one true God, Allah. Thus, as with all prophets, Jesus was just a human being.

So we have many views of who Jesus was. A billion Muslims will say: “Prophet, yes. God, no!” Jews scattered around the world will say: “Teacher, yes. Messiah, no!” Liberal Protestants and Dan Brown’s converts will say: “Incredible man and teacher, yes. Divine, no!”

The Da Vinci Code proclaims through Leigh Teabing, *“Until that moment in history (the Council of Nicaea in 325), Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal.”* (page 233).

There is only one huge problem with that statement though. It isn’t true. It ignores what the Apostles believed about Jesus and what Jesus claimed for Himself.

Statements About Jesus Christ		Statements By Jesus Christ	
Only God Is...	Only God Does...	Only God Is...	Only God Does...
“Existed in the form of God...” (Phil. 2:5-11)	“By him all things were created” (Col. 1:16)	Calls the angels of God (Luke 12:8-9; 15:10) his own (Mt. 13:41)	Has the authority to judge (Mt. 25:31; Mark 14:61-62) and to reign (Mt. 24:30)
“The Son...is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature.” (Heb. 1:2-10)	“Upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3)	Claims to have existed before Abraham was born (John 8:56-59; see Ex.3:14)	Forgives sins (Mark 2:8-10)
“The Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1-14)	Brings us to God by his death (1 Peter 3:18)	Claims to be one with the Father (John 8:19; John 10:30-33)	Jesus accepts worship from disciples (Mt. 14:33), those he healed (John 9:35-39), women after the resurrection (Mt. 28:9), and believing Thomas (John 20:28)—even though worship is reserved for God only (Mt. 4:10; Acts 10:25-26; Rev. 19:10; 22:9).

The above chart demonstrates clearly that Jesus is declared to be God by statements about him and by statements by him. In each division, there are two classifications of statements: those that declare him to be God and those that say he can do things only God can do. As we read through this list, consider whether it would be worthwhile to save a copy to share with the next JW or LDS who comes to your door, or friend who goes to The Da Vinci Code movie.

One of my favorite incidents in which Jesus claims to be God the Son is John 8:56-59.

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

“You are not yet fifty years old,” the Jews said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Another is Mark 2:1-12. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: **to say** to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or **to say**, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

You may have read how C. S. Lewis points out the foolishness of such a view advanced by Dan Brown and many others that Jesus was just a great man, a gifted spiritual teacher. *C.S. Lewis writes:*

“to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him us for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His

*being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us.
He did not intend to.”* (Mere Christianity, pp. 55-56)

A correct belief about Jesus’ identity is essential to your very salvation. *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved”* (Romans 10:9–10). Those who step across this doorway of faith in Christ become part of the Christ’s Church.

I love to think of the Church Universal. The People of God who compose the Bride of Christ that he has purchased with his own blood. This great Church Universal is united in our belief in Christ though for now its members are divided from one another geographically, racially, linguistically, and chronologically.

Geographically, the Bride of Christ spans the continents of Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, Antarctica, South America, and North America.

Racially, God’s people come in all hues of color and shapes of structure, expressing worship to God in culturally distinct praises.

Linguistically, God’s Church raises songs of worship and prayers of intercession from Tagalog to Berber, from Cantonese to Mandarin, from Swahili to Spanish, from Japanese to—can you believe it—English.

And **chronologically**, that great Bride of Christ spans from generation to generation. It extends from the Apostles to the Church Fathers, from true believers in the Middle Ages to the scholars and martyrs of the Reformation, from the missionaries of the 19th century to Bible students of the 20th century, from John G. Mitchell of 1950 to the leaders of Central Bible Church today. God has his plans that will not be frustrated, that *“He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless”* (Ephesians 5:27).

Together, geographically, racially, linguistically, and chronologically we are One Bride. We are unified in our belief in *“One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism; One God and Father of all who is over all, and through all, and in all”* (Ephesians 4:5-6).

The Council of Nicaea is referred to often in The Da Vinci Code with many historical errors made in relation to it. As partners in that Bride of Christ, would you stand together with me right now and let us express our unity together with those fellow members of the Bride of Christ who made up the Council of Nicaea. We today affirm these truths articulated 1,681 years ago in 325 AD:

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty
Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through Him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, And His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son He is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy, universal, and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. *Amen.*

[Be seated]

It is fine for you to stand and make this declaration of faith with others, but have you made this belief your own? Jesus asks each of us a question, the same question he asked his disciples on the road to Caesarea Philippi, “Who do you say I am?”

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” Then he asked them, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. (Matthew 16:13-17, NLT).

Jesus asks you the same question: “Who do you say I am?” Was he God the Son or just a good man?

Eternity hinges on Jesus’ identity and your belief in it. Jesus was fully human and fully God. His death and resurrection brings us the offer of salvation and eternal life. God calls us to give our lives and trust our souls with our mind in gear, knowledgeable about what we are doing. Let’s put our thinking cap on while we take the step of faith.