

dreadfully far from having all the answers, but these practices help me keep a lively attitude toward my time with God in His Word.

If you have some approaches that work, share them with others! I find that multitudes of believers know **what** they are supposed to be doing, but they are at a loss to know **how** to do them effectively and fervently.

Never forget that all Scripture is God-breathed. When God exhales, beloved, inhale!

Beth Moore
Extracted from *Voices of the Faithful*

Loving the world like God does involve extreme sacrifice. Living the passionate, courageous life Jesus challenged us all to live also has radical effects. If you're bored with your comfort-fit Christianity, if you're ready for God to shake you awake, then take the challenge, and make a difference in the world. Read....

Voices of the Faithful

Contains
Inspiring stories of courage
from Christians serving
around the world

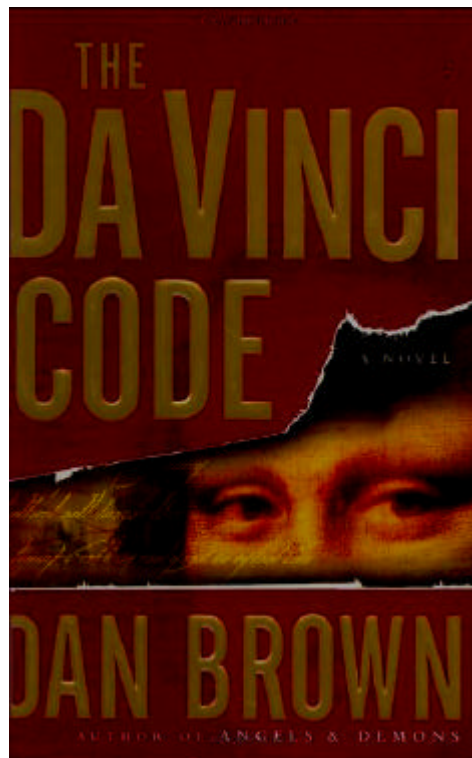
Written by
Beth Moore and friends who
put their lives on the line for
God

Compiled by
Kim P. Davis



The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?

From the DVD by Day of Discovery – Radio Bible Class
Summary notes by Ian Chai



The worldwide
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Part 1: Where did the Bible come from?

Claim: Constantine made up the list of the books in the New Testament at the Council of Nicea, which he controlled. The church has made a secret of this ever since.

Rebuttal: Constantine did not make up the list of books in the Bible – instead, the books were recognized by the church long before Constantine came on the scene. Since the church was spread all over the place, different churches had slightly different lists of books, but all the books that were even considered all taught the same doctrines about Jesus – the same belief we have today that Jesus is fully God and fully human.

There were various groups that had different beliefs from the main church, e.g. the Gnostics, who wrote the Gospel of Judas in the second or third century after Christ. The Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge from Jesus hidden from the church at large. But the clear teaching of the church from the beginning – even before the Bible was fully collected – was that the Gospel is what has been openly taught by the church from the beginning – there were never any secret hidden doctrines.

Claim: Constantine was actually a pagan his whole life – he was only baptized on his death bed and only under protest.

Rebuttal: Constantine supported the church much of his life. He built churches. He paid for the expenses of church activities. He couldn't stop doing enough for the church throughout his life after his conversion. Only one part of this claim was true: he did get baptized on his death bed. The reason was because there was a common belief at that time that since baptism wiped out all

your sins, it was a good idea to get baptized just before you die. This was the reason Constantine got baptized only on his death bed – not because he wasn't actually a Christian.

Claim: History is written by the winners. History itself is not accurate. People with political power (i.e. Constantine and the church leaders under him) wrote what we think happened today with Jesus. So we cannot trust what they said.

Rebuttal: The church was not in power for the first 300 years after Jesus. All the New Testament was written during this time of political weakness. Most of the disciples of Jesus were in fact killed for their faith. Yet they died confessing the truth about Jesus, and their testimony is preserved till today, in spite of their political weakness during their own lifetime. These eye-witnesses were willing to die rather than recant Jesus being God. Who would be willing to die for something they *know* is false? And all this took place long before Constantine was even born, let alone become Emperor of the Roman Empire.

Part 2: Has the Bible been corrupted?

Claim: Constantine changed Jesus son of a carpenter Joseph to become the son of God. Before Constantine, the church did not believe Jesus was the son of God.

Rebuttal: We have lots of writings of Christians from before Constantine that show that the church believed Jesus was the Son of God. Many of them were willing to die rather than recant. Anyone who knows the historical documents would find this claim that Constantine invented the divinity of Christ laughable.

Claim: More than 80 gospels were considered, and Constantine selected only 4. These others were the true gospels of Christianity, and the 4 selected were faked ones by Constantine. The New Testament has been horribly changed from their original form. Constantine robbed the church of its worship of the Mother God as detailed in some of these Gospels, like the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was discovered at Nag Hamadi, and he made Christianity into a patriarchal (male-dominated) religion.

Rebuttal: Actually, there were only around 15-18 gospels. Gnostics wrote theirs 250AD onwards which taught a different doctrine. They were rejected by the church before Constantine. The books considered by the church all taught the same Gospel – even the ones that were considered and then rejected did not teach a fake gospel. The ones that taught fake gospel doctrines were never even considered!

The *Gospel of Thomas* was known to the early Church and they knew it was false because it contradicted the true beliefs of the church. For example, far from exalting women, it taught that Mary Magdalene couldn't originally be saved because she was a woman, but that Jesus would turn her into a man so that she could be saved! We know that women are highly valued by God and Jesus always affirmed that women can be saved – without the necessity of transforming them into men. God was always God the Father, but He values women.

We have thousands of manuscripts (hand-written copies) of the New Testament, and they agree as to what the message was. There are only very minor differences between them – a few words here and there. The message has never changed. The earliest manuscripts we have are from within a few decades of their original writing (i.e. 100-150AD)

The copies we have, both in the original Greek and translations into Syriac, Latin, Aramaic, etc., all agree to a substantial extent. Even after 2 millennia, there is only about 1% of the New

Testament that we don't know for sure what the original wording is. For the other 99%, we can be sure of what it said exactly!

We keep finding more and more fragments and manuscripts. They are remarkably similar to each other. Hence, instead of getting further and further away from the original, we are actually getting closer and closer to the original. So we can be confident we have the real story of Jesus in our modern translations of the New Testament.

Notes by Ian Chai (not from the video)

Many Evangelical Christians have this notion that the Bible was given to us as one nicely bound book from God. So whenever someone challenges us with how we got the Bible, or what is in the Bible, many of us get worried. And when we find out that the Catholics and Orthodox did not *add* the “apocryphal” books to the Old Testament, but rather, the Protestants threw them out, many of us get even more worried. And then we find out that there are other gospels out there that are not in our New Testament, the worry level goes sky high! I used to worry about all these things, but after several years of research, I am no longer worried.

This is now how the New Testament came to us: Luke wrote a documentary and sent it to Theophilus. Paul wrote a letter and sent it to the church at Philippi. Peter wrote another letter and sent it to various churches. And so on.

So after a while, different churches had various collections of books which they knew were reliable. But their collections differed. The 4 Gospels and Acts were copied and spread to virtually all the churches very early on so from the earliest days, there was absolutely no dispute about the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But as for many of the letters, and the book of Revelations, different churches accepted different ones.

So when various church leaders got together at various times to discuss what books they should recognize, at different times and places they came up with slightly different lists (though the 4 Gospels and Acts were always there when they listed the New Testament.)

Heretical books like *The Gospel of Thomas* or *The Gospel of Judas* were **never** even considered! Books that were considered, but which were eventually rejected, were all *good Christian books!* They were not rejected because they had wrong doctrine – if they had wrong doctrine they would not have been considered at all! They usually were rejected because apostolic authority and recognition could not be established. For example, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle of Clement*, and the *Didache* were all considered by some Christian leaders at various points to be possibly scripture but eventually rejected – if you read them, you will find that the teachings found in them are all Christian. They all teach that Jesus Christ, saviour of the world, is both God and human, not like those heretical “gospels” that *The Da Vinci Code* talks about. The early Christians knew about those heretical “gospels” – and rejected them, many of them long before Constantine came on the scene.

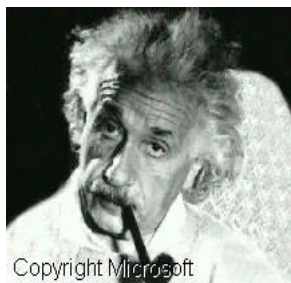
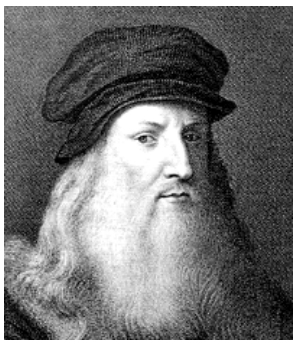
Many of the early heresies were called Gnostics – from the word “gnosis”, meaning “knowledge” – because they claimed hidden knowledge secretly passed to them from Jesus. But the church has always maintained that the true Gospel is what has been **openly** preached by the church from the very beginning.

So, don't believe it when people tell you there are a lot of gospels rejected by Constantine that tell the true story of Jesus! There are a lot of gospels rejected by the church leaders, even before Constantine, which tell of fake teachings. The Christians always could tell what should not even

be considered because the true Gospel was openly preached by the Church from the very beginning – even before everyone had the full New Testament in their hands.

Actual Historical Fact

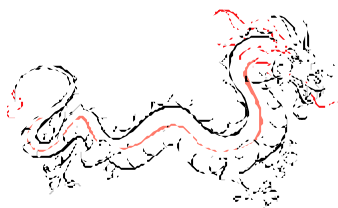
Leonardo Da Vinci was born in 1452. That would have made him 502 years old if he were to be really a Grandmaster of the Priory of Sion society! As for Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), he was at least 312 years old when he was a member. How absurd!



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Fear Not Idols

Here in Malaysia, many Christians fear that idols, pictures of dragons, phoenixes, etc. have evil spirits behind them. I think that these beliefs are based on Chinese traditional beliefs and are contradictory to Scripture, as well as harmful for our Christian testimony.



For example, some Christians fear their family's religious altars might cause them demonic harm, and in exhibiting that fear, cause non-Christians to think our God is not so powerful. Many people have, after becoming Christians, destroyed valuable antiques just because they happen to have dragons and phoenixes decorating them – and hence needlessly giving some non-Christians more excuses to ridicule Christ. In many cases, people destroy clothes and household items that have images of dragons and phoenixes on them, even though nobody has worshipped those items, and there is no way for a non-Christian to make the mistake of thinking that the Christian worships those items.

That said, I have to also keep in mind 1 Corinthians 8:1, "Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." I want to be

careful to say this in love and not in a "pride in my own knowledge" manner that will end up being more harmful than beneficial.

There are many injunctions in Scripture that speak against **worshipping** idols. I have no quarrel with that. But let us examine passages that talk about the **nature** of idols:

Habakuk 2:18-20

*"Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' **Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.** But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."*

Jeremiah 10:2-5

*This is what the LORD says: "Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. **Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.**"*

Isaiah 44:9-20

All who make idols is nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing? He and his kind will be put to shame; craftsmen are nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and infamy.

The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint.

The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal; he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god."

They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no

one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"

Deuteronomy 4:28

*There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, **which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.***

Psalms 115:4-8

But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

The tone of all these passages is one of derision, not of fear. The idol is portrayed as nothing. In the New Testament, we see, indeed, that Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 8:7 "Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, **we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.**"

Hence, the reason that Paul advised people not to eat food offered to idols was not because there's any power in idols, but **in order not to cause someone to stumble.** (1 Corinthians 8:7-13.)

Therefore, there is nothing to fear from the presence of a picture of a dragon or phoenix, statues of Kuan Yin, Ang Kong, or Buddha, or a Chinese calendar in the house, except for the caution that it might stumble someone. This is why I have no objections to my parents' statues in display cases – they are clearly shown as objects of artwork, and not as shrines of worship.

Yes, demons are real, and demons do possess people, especially if the person has opened himself up to demonic influence by playing with the occult. But a believer who doesn't worship any idols should have no fear of idols. We should only be sensitive not to cause a weaker brother to stumble.

Chinese traditional belief teaches that the soul of the ancestors reside in the ancestral tablets and altars. This is very similar to the belief of many Chinese-Malaysian Christians' belief that evil spirits are present in idols.

As we have seen from the passages above, the Bible clearly teaches that idols are mere objects – works of human hands that have no power. If you as a Christian think they have power, you must seriously ask yourself, "Did my beliefs in this matter come from the Bible, or from non-Christian Chinese beliefs?"

"But wait," some may say, "how come in 1 Samuel 5 the idol of Dagon fell down before the Ark of the Covenant? Doesn't that prove that there is a demon inside that statue that was forced to worship God in the Ark?" Why should we believe there is a demon in the idol of Dagon? Can God not cause a statue to topple over, demon or no demon? If idols were really houses for demons, why did all the other passages talk of idols in the derisive manner shown above?

Another person may say "God puts His special presence on the Mercy Seat of the Ark. Demons imitate God. Doesn't that mean demons would inhabit idols?" Just because demons sometimes imitate God does not mean they can do everything God can do. In fact, we know for a fact that they *cannot* do everything God can do. Scripture talks of demons as inhabiting people, and in one occasion, pigs. I know of no Scripture talking about demons inhabiting idols (if you know of any, do let me know), yet I know of many passages that talk of idols as just dumb inanimate objects.

In his book *A Biblical Approach to Chinese Traditions and Beliefs*, Pastor Daniel Tong from Singapore said:

The idea that demons reside in idols gives us cause for alarm, and indeed many have gone about destroying idols for fear that if they did not, the spirits would somehow cause them harm.

*...Note that this thinking is not in line with the teaching of the Bible and only serves to give the wrong impression that the devil is very powerful, while our God and we, the children of God, are weak. **The teaching that evil spirits reside in idols is an animistic perspective not supported or encouraged by the Bible, which holds clearly to the perspective that idols are nothing but the work of our own hands.** Understanding this frees us from the fear of being confronted with and attacked by demons every time we encounter an idol.*

The Bible teaches that when people make offerings to idols, they are, in fact, making offerings to the demon/s behind the idol (1 Corinthians 10:20). That is to say, the image of the idol serves merely as camouflage to deceive a person into worshipping the devil, something most would not voluntarily do.

*...When a person is caught up in the worship of the devil in this way, these disguises become for that person an idol, as he sells his "soul" in worship to the devil. Which brings us to the point that it is precisely **our worship that the devil is after** and if we understand this, we understand that **demons are not present in idols but in the hearts and lives of all who bow down in worship to those idols. Idols are nothing. The focus of our worship is everything.**¹*

¹ Appendix D: Images of Worship, *A Biblical Approach to Chinese Traditions and Beliefs*, Daniel Tong, Genesis Books, Singapore, 2003.

I see a lot of harm done by this fear of idols, dragons, phoenixes, etc, which, as I have described above, I believe is un-Biblical and derived from Chinese traditional beliefs rather than from God's Word. Remember that *"greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4.)

Some people argue that while idols are made of inanimate matter, people worshipping them will give demons the "right" to inhabit them. I don't think this is Biblically sound, but even if it were, it still does not mean that just because an item has a picture of a dragon or phoenix on it that it therefore means that a demon inhabits it.

1 Corinthians 10:25-28

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' — the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

We can eat meat that has been offered to idols without question, as long as it won't cause someone to stumble. In the original context, the Pagan saying, "This has been offered in a sacrifice," meant he was basically telling you, "Come and participate in my worship of my idol." That was why the Christian should not eat it for the sake of the other man's conscience: the Christian was free to eat the food and no harm would have come to him. However, he might have caused the Pagan to stumble because he would have thought that the Christian was participating in worshipping his god, and no longer faithful to Christ.

So there's nothing wrong with the meat. We're neither better nor worse off if we eat it (1 Corinthians 8:8). Some people say, "Just say grace before eating any food that may have been offered to idols and you'll be fine," as if saying grace would "disinfect" it of demons (or germs)! But that is not what the Bible teaches.

A similar application can be made to clothing and other items with phoenixes and dragons on them. Some people fear that just because there is printed on a bowl a picture of a phoenix or dragon. We have already shown that there is no reason to fear idols, and this is even less than an idol. "But someone may have dedicated that bowl to a demon before!" Firstly, these items are mass-produced in factories, so it's unlikely that anyone has used them in idol worship. But secondly, even if they had been used in idol worship, so what? The principle from eating meat offered to idols applies here. If it is not likely to cause anyone to stumble, go ahead and use the item!

In fact, sometimes *not* eating will cause someone to stumble. How many parents have thought that Christianity was against respect for parents and family unity because their Christian sons or daughters suddenly refuse to participate in the family meal because the food may have been offered to the ancestors?

Yes, I know, some parents have adapted, because as the child continues to show respect and love, they have become reconciled and will even provide a "non-offered-to-idols plate" for the Christian. But I also know of others who have been unnecessarily pushed away from Christ by such actions. Remember the principle in Scripture is "do not cause someone else to stumble." The offence of the Cross is enough – let us not add unnecessary offences to hinder people from coming to Christ!

I hope this has been helpful. As I said before, I am very cautious that I don't become one whose knowledge has puffed me up, but rather one who is sharing the truth in love.

*Ian Chai, with suggestions from his wife, Juliane.
CBC, Puchong Centre*

