

The Da Vinci Code Debate – Where Da Vinci Code Critics Err

By J. Phillips

The Da Vinci Code, Mary Magdalene and the beloved disciple

**In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves;
if God peradventure will give them repentance
to the acknowledging of the truth** (2Tm. 2:25)

The truth is the best weapon against false teaching. Unfortunately most of *The Da Vinci Code* critics who have rushed to market with rebuttal books, CDs, tapes and broadcasts that are sold as doing battle against the errors of *The Da Vinci Code* have, in one regard, chosen to fight error with error. The idea that Mary Magdalene was the beloved disciple and that she was the one who “leaned on Jesus” at his Last Supper has found plenty of devotees, as a Google search of the phrase “the disciple whom Jesus loved” will reveal. The pitch used to sell this notion goes something like this: ‘The author of our fourth gospel remained anonymous because she knew that her gospel would not be accepted if the author was known to be a woman. Therefore she used the terms “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, “the other disciple” and “the other disciple whom Jesus loved” to conceal her identity and had to use masculine pronouns to refer to herself so that the readers would perceive that the author was a man.’

Of course adopting this idea requires one to accept the notion that the inspired writer of this Gospel was purposely deceptive in the record that we find presented by in this book. Yet despite this, the idea that Mary Magdalene was the one who “Jesus loved” persists. Those who cling to this idea are willing to dismiss the troubling fact that ‘she had to lie’ by saying that ‘she had to present herself as a man in order to have her gospel accepted’ – usually it is added that the narrow-minded bigots that ran the male dominated society of her day are the reason that she ‘had to’ do this. And this rationale becomes an excuse to look past this problem and dismiss this as being a case where the end justifies the means.

Sadly most of the works that have been produced in an effort to refute the ideas promoted by *The Da Vinci Code* seek to counter the notion that Mary Magdalene was the one who Jesus loved by promoting the idea that the beloved disciple was the apostle John even though there is not a single verse of scripture that would justify teaching this idea either. Admittedly those who teach that the beloved disciple was John and those who teach that the beloved disciple was Mary Magdalene both *claim* that their idea is based on the Bible, but neither side can cite a verse of scripture that actually says such a thing. Both start by adopting an idea that is put forth by a source outside of the Bible and then find a rationale for explaining how to fit idea into the record that is in the Bible.

Surely those seeking to expose the errors of *The Da Vinci Code* do not *intend* to promote error, but when it comes to the identity of the beloved disciple, this is what results from parroting tradition instead of searching the scriptures to see what biblical and what is not.

A better way

**Am I therefore become your enemy,
because I tell you the truth?** (Gal 4:16)

A love of the truth calls one to test their ideas, specifically the John idea in this case, and if it doesn't hold up to biblical scrutiny, then it is wrong to continue to promote this idea in order to avoid admitting that we made a mistake. Cases of mistaken identity happen all the time, and in the case of the anonymous author of our fourth gospel, that is in fact what has happened with the adoption of the idea that this unnamed disciple was John. Not only is there no verse of scripture to justify teaching this idea, but it turns out that the evidence in the Bible proves that John cannot possibly be the other disciple that stood by Jesus.

Read The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved and you will see the biblical evidence that proves **whoever this other disciple was he was not John**, the brother of James, son of Zebedee. Moreover, there is plenty of biblical evidence to make a strong case as to who this person truly was, but establishing the actual identity of this "other disciple" is a separate issue from being able to show that this person could not have been John. And if the facts in the Bible provide sufficient evidence that this disciple was not John, then those who claim to love the truth have a compelling reason to cease promoting this erroneous tradition.

One need not promote the false idea that the beloved disciple was John in order to counter the false idea that the beloved disciple was Mary Magdalene. Citing the plain text of scripture is the better method for refuting unbiblical ideas. However, as with most other false ideas, the ideas in *The Da Vinci Code* depend on getting people to rely on some source outside of the Bible. (In fact the John tradition also relies on this trick, see note below.) But non-Bible sources are not the Bible, and since people make mistakes, an idea cannot be presumed to be true simply because some people in 'the early church' might have said it. Thus, the best way for one to guard against being deceived on biblical issues is to look first and foremost to the Bible when it comes to questions involving biblical ideas.

Not everyone wants the truth

**And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth,
and shall be turned unto fables.** (2Ti 4:4)

Sadly, while everyone thinks that what they believe is true, the Bible makes it clear that not everyone has a "love of the truth" and that some people will turn away from the truth when it is shown to them. Those who want to believe that Mary Magdalene was the one who Jesus loved believe this in spite of the biblical evidence, not because of it. But the same can be said of those who believe this beloved disciple was John. Both these ideas spring from sources outside of the Bible and these ideas can then lead one to view the Bible in such a way so as miss what the plain text of the Bible actually says.

As noted above, in order to believe that Mary Magdalene was the beloved disciple who was the anonymous author of our fourth gospel, a person has to look past the fact that the author of our fourth gospel is identified as a man. So the choice is where to turn. One will either turn to the evidence of scripture or they will turn to an idea outside of scripture and develop excuses to explain away any biblical evidence to the contrary. This same choice faces those who promote the idea that the disciple that Jesus loved was the apostle John. When confronted with the truth on this question they will either turn to a tradition that is based on sources outside of the Bible or they will turn to the facts presented in the Bible.

Fans of *The Da Vinci Code* and those who believe that Mary Magdalene was the one who Jesus loved are clearly willing to turn to sources outside of the Bible – they are told that such-and-such can be found in this-or-that source and they buy into that idea. In contrast to this, those who believe that the beloved disciple was John are often ignorant of the fact that there is no verse that would justify teaching this idea and that those who try to defend this idea have to turn to sources outside of the Bible in order to do so. Since John's name was added to this gospel in the form of a title, *The Gospel of John*, it's easy to understand how someone today might make the mistake of thinking that this idea is biblical. But the same cannot be said of those who have written books or are giving talks against the errors in *The Da Vinci Code*. The experts who rush to point out the errors in Dan Brown's book might want to reconsider how the words of Jesus, "cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye", would apply when it comes to the unbiblical John idea.

The ends do not justify the means

Exposing the ideas in *The Da Vinci Code* that are unbiblical is a fine goal, but arguing in favor of a false tradition is not the way to do so. Surprisingly, those who say that the one who Jesus loved was Mary Magdalene and those who say that this disciple was John have the same number of verses that could be cited to justify their position – but in both cases that number is **zero**, so there is no biblical reason to prefer one above the other.

In order to defend the idea that John was the beloved disciple, one has to turn to sources outside of the Bible, usually statements that this idea was believed by this-or-that person. But simply repeating what has been said by others does not make an idea biblical. In order for an idea to be biblical it needs to be taught in scripture. Of course, those who want to promote the John idea will say that the non-Bible source(s) that *they* urge people to rely on should be trusted, while the non-Bible sources that are referred to by those who want to say that Mary Magdalene was the beloved disciple are not credible. But **instead of arguing over which non-Bible source is more reliable, pointing people to the facts in the Bible better serves the cause of truth.**

Perhaps the debate over *The Da Vinci Code* will enable many to learn that the identity of this other disciple is neither 'obvious' nor 'settled', as many like to imply. If you want to see what the Bible says on this subject, then go online and read the free Bible study posted on TheDiscipleWhomJesusLoved.com. You will also find a study there on the biblical evidence that proves Mary Magdalene was not the beloved disciple.

This bible study is free, but you must still honor the copyright. Do not take material from this site to post it on other sites, as we may make updates or corrections and do not want older versions posted elsewhere. Instead, encourage others to study this issue and post links to TheDiscipleWhomJesusLoved.com to help others find this study when they search for information on this topic.

© 2006, 2010 by J. Phillips. All rights reserved. To promote Bible study, print copies may be reproduced in any language if they contain the complete, unaltered text of this work and are not sold for profit. Any excerpts from or uses of this material must cite TheDiscipleWhomJesusLoved.com as the source of this material and must be for non-commercial purposes. Electronic excerpts are limited to 200 words or less, however, longer excerpts are permitted for use in book reviews.