

Grace Evangelical Free Church
Issues & Answers: Harry Potter

2 Corinthians 10:5: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...”

How should Christian parents look at the Harry Potter phenomenon? Chances are your children or grandchildren are clamoring to read these best-selling books if not begging to go see the latest movie, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” which, while not in theaters until November, the trailers have begun as part of a world-wide marketing campaign. The Church has not taken a definitive position as to the appropriate nature of the series. Some cast the series as harmless fancy while others sense sinister foreboding. Should parents encourage their children to read, watch and join in the Harry Potter experience? To discover the Biblical answer, we turn to:

- **Historical Context:** Written approximately A.D. 55-57 by the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 1:1), Paul expresses his relief and joy that the Corinthians had received his “severe” letter (now lost) in a positive manner. That letter addressed issues that were tearing the church apart, primarily the arrival of self-styled (false) apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13 – the nature of which we dealt with in the “False Christs” lesson from Matthew 24) who were assaulting Paul’s character, sowing discord among the believers, and teaching false doctrine. They appear to have questioned his veracity (2 Corinthians 1:15-17) and his speaking ability (2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6). There were also some people who had not repented of their licentious behavior (2 Corinthians 12:20-21). While there are many, many aspects and instructions within this letter, the focus upon stewardship, not only of money, but of time is a key point. The Macedonians not only gave generously, but “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (2 Corinthians 8:5). In the same way, **Paul emphasizes we should dedicate not only all we have to the Lord, but all that we are.** God really doesn’t need our money. He is omnipotent! He wants the heart, one that longs to serve and please. Stewardship and giving to God is more than just money. Yes, God does want us to tithe part of our income, and He promises to bless us when we give to Him. There is more, though, as He wants us to give Him our all by spending our allotted time on earth in service to Him. None of this can be accomplished without disciplined, purposeful capturing of our thought life in obedience to Christ.
- **Grammatical Usage:** “Casting down” in the Greek is “Kathaireo” an refers to, “demolish – specifically mental strongholds and imaginations”; “imaginations” or “Logismos” means, “a reasoning hostile to the Christian faith”; “knowledge” or “Gnosis” means, “the deeper more perfect and enlarged knowledge of God as it pertains to righteous conviction and living”; “captivity” is “Aichmalotizo” meaning, “to make a prisoner of war...to subjugate...to bring under control”; “thought” is “Noema” and specifically refers to, “mental perception”; “obedience” is “Hupakoe” defined as, “acknowledgement and then submission to”; “Christ” or “Christos” meaning, “the Messiah, the Son of God” as opposed to any and all others.
- **Literal Application:** “We demolish arguments, attitudes, misperceptions and every pretense that is set up against the righteous convictions of God, and we bring under control every deliberation and consideration to recognize Christ’s conviction and submit to it.”
- **Contextual Interpretation:** The implications for the follower of Christ just within this verse are far reaching, detailed and without compromise. Essentially four elements build upon one another which, taken together, work to unseat God from the throne of our lives:

1. **imaginings**--rather, "reasonings." Some misinterpret this word to be "thought" which expresses men's own *purpose* and determination of living after *their own* pleasure. This word, however, is specific reference to **determined reasoning** with the express purpose of coming against God – who He is, His very character and nature in order to dislodge Him as the focal point of our lives. This reasoning is calculated to work on the mind whether by blatant assault or insidious suggestion to unseat God;
 2. **high thing**-- A distinct Greek word from that in Ephesians 3:18 ("height"), Romans 8:39 and Revelation 21:16. It does not mean that which belongs to God and heaven from whence we receive nothing hurtful. Here "high thing" is not so much "height" as *something made high*, and belongs to those regions of air where the powers of darkness exalt themselves against Christ and those who know Christ (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:4);
 3. **exalteth itself**-- Such were the *high towers* of Jewish self-righteousness, pagan philosophic speculations, and rhetorical sophistries, the "knowledge" so much prized by many (opposed to "the knowledge of God"), which endangered the Corinthian Church given their cosmopolitan setting and culture;
 4. **against the knowledge of God**--True knowledge makes men humble. Where there is exaltation of self, their knowledge of God is questionable. Arrange the words in this manner: "Bringing every thought (that is, *intent of the mind or will*) into captivity to the obedience of Christ," that is, to obey Christ. The three steps of the apostle's spiritual warfare are: (1) It demolishes what is opposed to Christ; (2) It takes captive; (3) It brings us into obedience to Christ (Romans 1:5; 16:26). The "reasonings" (*English Version*, "imaginings") are utterly "cast down." The "mental intents" (*English Version*, "thoughts") are taken willing captives, surrendering voluntary in obedience of faith to Christ the Conqueror.
- Scriptural Comparison: Advocates of the Potter series are quick to point out how this very well-written fantasy proves enjoyable and compelling reading. Because it is written for children, it captivates the imagination of children. By tapping into the poignancy of the powerlessness of children, which is a painful part of being young, the series is full of real-life situations, ranging from the embarrassing to the hurtful to the scary to the satisfying – everything that real-life kids experience. Taken as a whole, the series has gotten hundreds of thousands of children excited about reading and, consequently, introduced children to the Harry Potter mindset.

But there's one substantial difficulty with the Harry Potter series: it makes sorcery and witchcraft acceptable if not enticing to the reader. In addition to characterizations of established authorities in our lives, the work is not consistent with a Christian worldview as sharply defined by the Word of God:

1. We are called to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" according to 2 Corinthians 10:5. We are to recognize *determined reasoning* which has as its basis an anti-God presupposition, example, reference, illusion or exclusion. On this point of exclusion, critic Lev Grossman of Time Magazine (July 12, 2007) wrote, "If you want to know who dies in Harry Potter, the answer is easy: God. **Harry Potter lives in a world free of any religion or spirituality of any kind. He lives surrounded by ghosts but has no one to pray to, even if he were so inclined, which he isn't. Rowling has more in common with celebrity atheists like Christopher Hitchens than she has with Tolkien and Lewis.** What does Harry have instead of God? Rowling's answer, at once glib and profound, is that Harry's power comes from love. This charming notion represents a cultural sea change. In the new millennium, magic comes not from God or nature or anything grander or more mystical than a mere human emotion." **In short, god is self.** Yet, the Apostle John affirms in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love." In fact, as Grossman correctly stipulates, God as defined in the Bible is missing from the Harry Potter series (note His exclusion as a foundation of vain

- imaginations). Any misrepresentation of God is wrong, much less His exclusion. Insult to injury comes with the employment of the literary vehicle of the spiritual world yet a spiritual world devoid of God despite John 4:24, “**God is a Spirit:** and they that worship him must worship him in **spirit** and in truth.”;
2. Regarding the spirit world, God gives us very strong and clear commands about witchcraft: it is a sin according to 1 Samuel 15:23a, “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...”;
 3. The occult is an abomination before God according to Deuteronomy 18:10-11, “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. ¹¹Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer;”
 4. The Old Testament penalty for sorcery or witchcraft was death as noted in Exodus 22:18, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live;”
 5. The proscription against the practice of magic is continued in the New Testament as found in Galatians 5:19-21, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God;”
 6. There are several incidents of conjuring, where witches and wizards wave a magic wand and instantly produce things like food for a banquet. Conjuring is a counterfeit of the way God creates *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Casting spells, such as speaking the word "Lumos!" to make one's magic wand become a light source, is a counterfeit of God's ability to speak things into existence as documented in Genesis 1:3, “And God *said*, Let there be light: and there was light;”
 7. Bewitching cars to make them fly and ceilings to twinkle like the night sky is a counterfeit of Christ's ability to do miracles like walking on water and feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes (Matthew 14:25; John 6:11);
 8. Harry's invisibility cloak mimics God who is always and truly with us even though He's invisible (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5);
 9. As a role model, Harry is not a good kid. He lies, he cheats, he steals, and he's never punished for it. In fact he gets worse as the series goes on. While his efforts are for “good”, Christians know it is never right to do wrong to right. God does not operate in this manner. With Harry, the concepts of submission if not the admonitions of the Ten Commandments are ignored (1 Peter 5:5-9);
 10. Every rule-keeper within the Harry Potter series is portrayed in a bad light. Every authority figure is portrayed as a buffoon rationalizing rejection. Yet we are commanded to be in subjection to the authorities over us (Romans 13:1-7; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 2:13-14; and Titus 3:1). Christians understand that rationalization is defined as the lowering of a standard;
 11. Specifically, Harry identifies with most children regarding the emotional pain as they related to peers and superiors – including parents. Parents are portrayed as non-magical Muggles. His school tormentor, Draco Malfoy, is also denigrated as a Muggle. However, Scripture is clear as to the respect and honor due parents (Exodus 20:12);
 12. Fantasy is a story of things that cannot happen without a spiritual cause. The fact of the matter is we live in a world not of flesh and blood but of principalities and powers where the Bible affirms the spiritual origination of all there is (Ephesians 6:11-13). Positioning and portrayal are the essential elements with respect to a fanciful foundation and the Potter series' exclusion of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob coupled with actions and reactions opposed to Scriptural precept leave only one alternative with respect to spiritual origination as confirmed in our Scriptural citation.

When Christians lodge these complaints against the Harry Potter series, one often hears a condescending dismissal about fantasy vs. reality. No mention is made of the substance of the concern with witchcraft itself, which is a reasonable one. Case in point is the *Newsweek* article, "The Return of Harry Potter", July 10, 2000, p. 58. Many people impatiently respond, "But it's *fantasy!* It's only make-believe! Nobody's going to really *believe* that this stuff is true!" But the author J.K. Rowling revealed in *Newsweek* that she gets, "...letters from children addressed to Professor Dumbledore [headmaster at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the books' setting], and it's not a joke, begging to be let into Hogwarts, and some of them are really sad. Because they want it to be true so badly they've convinced themselves it's true." These are the vain imaginations of Romans 1:21 fostered upon the most innocent. Supernatural power that doesn't come from God is *all* evil. The lack of such a distinction in the Harry Potter series opens the door to the evil one to plant ideas which leads to considerations which leads to misdirection which leads to actions which results in consequences. Christians know that witches are not just fantasy characters, but that they are real whether as overt Satan worshipers or as sublime as the neo-pagan devotees of Wicca, in the end it amounts to the same thing.

Defenders of Harry Potter can point out that the Hogwarts witches have nothing to do with the Wicca or black magic kinds of witches. They are not evil at all, nor do they preach any kind of New Age nature religion. These witches are out of the fairy tales, with brooms and spells, except that they are good (as in the "good witch" in *Wizard of Oz*). Actually, Harry is learning to be a "wizard," such as Gandalf in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, not a warlock.

Still, at a time when witchcraft is becoming a major presence in our youth culture with books about how to be a witch targeted at teenagers, Christians are right to disapprove. In fairy tales, witches are typically "wicked," reinforcing the clear lines between evil and good, that is, the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Anything that blurs those lines is cause for concern as it sets up the very danger of imaginations as defined in our text.

Some people have likened the Harry Potter books to C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. While they are both fantasy literature, one is designed to create a thirst for Jesus and for heaven, and the other a thirst for power and manipulation as clearly documented in the *Newsweek* article. C.S. Lewis writes from a strong Christian worldview; J.K. Rowling writes from a naturalistic worldview that includes magic as a fact of life but excludes God. And by making witchcraft and wizardry so appealing, Harry Potter proves an alarmingly attractive door to the occult for impressionable readers (of any age). Children have a special place in God's heart and anyone who harms a child is inviting God's wrath upon him. Jesus welcomed little children to His side and said that the kingdom of God belongs to "such as these" (Mark 10:14). Jesus had harsh words for anyone who would cause a child to stumble, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." The Bible instructs parents to be gentle and loving with their children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21) raising them in the admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Based upon this instruction, it is right and good that parental control is exercised as to the type and nature of entertainment afforded children.

- Conclusion: Many argue that there is not a clear-cut answer as to whether the decision to entertain the Harry Potter series in their homes and lives of their children is right or wrong because it is a modern-day "disputable matter." (See 1 Cor. 8 and Romans 14.) Some people claim the freedom to read the books and see the movies without it violating their conscience; others cannot do that. Is this one of those decisions left up to conscience? I do not dispute that there are such matters. However given the work's basis in witchcraft, the evidence of children's reactions and the commands of Scripture to avoid even the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22), this does not

prove an issue of conscience but one of obedience especially as children are ill-equipped for such a decision leaving the full weight and brunt of such influences clearly with a parent or guardian.

Christian parents are right to steer their children away from the series. Yet, if the Potter bug has already bitten their children, they should handle the situation with care. Parents need to make clear that Christians are not Muggles. In other words, Christianity is not a narrow, materialistic, boring worldview such as the one satirized in the Potter novels and advocated by today's culture. It is Christianity that has the open universe with room both for the natural and the supernatural, for the ordinary and the miraculous. It is Christianity that recognizes unseen truths of goodness and beauty and that believes in a genuine battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. The account of how God became man in Jesus Christ, defeating Satan and atoning for our sinfulness by dying on the Cross and rising again, is the most wonderful, mind-blowing story of all — having the profound advantage of also being true. The Bible asserts it, history confirms it, and the Holy Spirit brings us to believe it. Those who think in biblical terms have a far bigger, more stimulating worldview than any of their materialistic and occult competitors.