

## Fantasy, Fiction, Imagination

### I. Definitions.

- A. fantasy: Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present.
- B. imagination: 1. The action of imagining, or forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses (cf. sense 3); the result of this process, a mental image or idea (often with implication that the conception does not correspond to the reality of things, hence freq. *vain (false, etc.) imagination*). 2. The mental consideration of actions or events not yet in existence. 3. That faculty of the mind by which are formed images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses, and of their relations (to each other or to the subject); hence frequently including memory.
- C. fiction: The species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters; fictitious composition. Now usually, prose novels and stories collectively; the composition of works of this class.
- D. fable: 1. a. A fictitious narrative or statement; a story not founded on fact. b. esp. A fictitious story relating to supernatural or extraordinary persons or incidents, and more or less current in popular belief; a myth or legend.
- E. parable: a. A comparison, a similitude; any saying or narration in which something is expressed in terms of something else; b. *spec.* A fictitious narrative or allegory (usually something that might naturally occur), by which moral or spiritual relations are typically figured or set forth, as the parables of the New Testament.
- F. hero: 1. *Antiq.* A name given (as in Homer) to men of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods; at a later time regarded as intermediate between gods and men, and immortal. 2. A man distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; one who does brave or noble deeds; an illustrious warrior. 3. A man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, in any course of action, or in connexion with any pursuit, work, or enterprise; a man admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities.
- G. discretion: Ability to discern or distinguish what is right, befitting, or advisable, esp. as regards one's own conduct or action; the quality of being discreet; discernment; prudence, sagacity, circumspection, sound judgement.

### II. Preliminary thoughts.

- A. As in much of Christian life, this topic involves commandments, discretion, discernment.
- B. Is information that is not reality ever permissible?
- C. Is our Christian liberty unbounded?
- D. Can some information intake affect us negatively?
- E. Can information violate God's law?
- F. Is information necessarily evil if it is not based in reality?
- G. Can our imagination be completely shut off?
- H. Can our imagination be a good thing?
- I. Can our imagination be an evil thing?
- J. Can our imagination be our downfall?
- K. Information suitable for mature adults may not be suitable for immature children.
- L. Information suitable for mature Christians may not be suitable for immature Christians.
- M. Motive is important: of the author and the consumer.
- N. Should we make pleasure serve us or should we serve pleasure?
- O. Is Scripture the only permissible source of information?

- III. We are long past the age of fictional literature and live plays. We live in an age of that plus electronic visual fiction, fantasy games, animation, virtual reality hardware/software.
- A. For some, fiction and fantasy is nothing more than a pleasing diversion. For others, fiction and fantasy is an escape from an uncomfortable reality and/or a means to a false world that satisfies lust.
  - B. Pleasure in general can be addictive (**ISA 47:8**) but the interactive fantasies where the “entertained” actively engages in the “entertaining” are especially addictive.
    1. They cater to both the *pleasure* and the *control* longings of the heart.
    2. The Massive Multiple Online Role-Playing games are so addictive that many are unable to decouple from them and re-engage reality.
- IV. God is very interested in what we feed our minds, what thoughts are formed in our minds to dwell on, and how those formed thoughts become speech, character and action and influence worship.
- A. God demands to be worshipped in spirit and truth (**JOH 4:24**) which is seriously impeded by false ideas of God spawned from fantasy or fiction.
  - B. Evil communications corrupt good manners. **1CO 15:33**.
  - C. We speak out of the abundance of the heart/inward man. **MAT 12:34-36**.
  - D. What we think, we are. **PRO 23:7**.
  - E. We are held accountable not only for evil actions but for conceived evil thoughts. **MAT 5:28; JAM 1:15; ISA 55:7**.
- V. Imagination is a power of the mind that may be used for good or evil. **1CH 29:17-18; NAH 1:9, 11**.
- A. God holds us responsible for our imaginations but He also understands them. **1CH 28:9**.
    1. He knows why we imagine the things that we imagine.
    2. If we are struggling with our imaginations, God knows why and He can help.
  - B. Evil imaginations interfere with receiving and obeying God’s word. **JER 16:11-12**.
  - C. Evil imaginations will make you *good for nothing*. **JER 13:10**.
  - D. Vain imaginations lead to a moral free fall. **ROM 1:21**.
  - E. The gospel seeks to cast down imaginations that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. **2CO 10:5**.
- VI. We are warned against fables that oppose the truth. **1TI 1:3-4; 4:6-7; 2TI 4:4; TIT 1:14**.
- A. The gospel is not a fable, nor did it spring from a fable. **2PE 1:16**.
  - B. The gospel is special in that it is rooted in historical fact: the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. **1CO 15:1-4**.
- VII. The above warnings do not forbid all fiction or even all fables.
- A. Since imagination may be used for good or evil, so may fiction and fable.
  - B. Christ’s parables were, by definition, “...fictitious narratives...” E.g. **MAT 21:33-40**.
  - C. Consider the fable involving talking trees. **JDG 9:7-21**.
    1. This addressed a real situation in which the men of Shechem had chosen an unsuitable man to be their king.
    2. The trees represented different types of men who might be selected as king.
  - D. Another example of a fable put to good use is **2KI 14:8-14**.
    1. This fantasy tale was also based in truth.
    2. The lesson is that those who are most boastful and presumptuous tend to overestimate their ability and so court their own destruction, especially if they enjoy

any success. **PRO 1:32.**

- E. Consider the staged production of **2SAM 14:1-23.**
1. Joab was scriptwriter and casting director; the woman was the actress.
  2. This story shows us the power of the stage to influence men.
- F. Consider Nathan's reproof of David by a fictional case. **2SAM 12:1-6.**
1. The tale was not historical fact inasmuch as Nathan said to David about the rich man in the tale, "Thou art the man..." (**2SAM 12:7**).
  2. It was made all the more effective by appealing to the strong (weird?) emotional bond between an owner and a harmless pet (v. 3). The tale would not have had the same effect if the animal had been a scorpion. Fiction, to be convincing, has to make sense.
  3. This was essentially a parable to illustrate and condemn a real sin, as our Lord did in **MAT 21:33-46**.
- G. In the above examples (B, C, D, E, F), the narrative was not factual and therefore not real.
1. But the theme or principle enshrined in the narrative was valid, and this is a measure of the worth of fiction/fantasy. John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is a fictional narrative with a Christ-centered theme.
  2. Such fiction differs from a lie which is: *a false statement made with intent to deceive; a criminal falsehood.*
  3. One can spin a tale in a godly way for good but one can also spin a tale to cover one's sin (**EXO 32:24**), seduce another (**GEN 3:4-5**), injure another (**EXO 20:16; MAT 28:12-14**), deny or defy God (**1TI 6:20**). Spin but don't sin.
- H. A good measure for discerning good fiction/fantasy from evil fiction/fantasy is if the fiction/fantasy promotes evil, it should be guarded against. **PRO 19:27; 1CO 15:33.**
- I. Another measure is whether or not the fiction/fantasy produces an effect in our minds contrary to what we are told to think on in **PHIL 4:8**.
1. think: *intr.* To exercise the mind, esp. the understanding, in any active way; to form connected ideas of any kind; to have, or make, a train of ideas pass through the mind; to meditate, cogitate. (The most general verb to express internal mental activity, excluding mere perception of external things or passive reception of ideas.) b. with about, of, (on, upon arch.), over: To exercise the mind upon, or have the mind occupied with; to meditate on; to consider, attend to mentally, apply the mind to.
  2. Many ideas from what we are exposed to will *pass through* our minds but this is not the same as *thinking upon* something.
  3. If the fiction or fantasy, rather than generating a positive applying of the mind in line with **PHIL 4:8**, instead generates negative imaginations contrary to **PHIL 4:8**, that fiction or fantasy wound up being used for evil.

VIII. It is not only those who commit sins that are at fault; God also judges those who "...have pleasure in them that do them" (**ROM 1:29-32**).

- A. This speaks to our choices in *heroes* (fictional or real) and *entertainments*.
1. Is our hero virtuous or virtueless?
    - a. The only flawless hero/role model is Jesus Christ, yet there may be respect given to flawed men who have virtue. We rightly respect the flawed champions of faith in **HEB 11**, or the apostles who had moments of weakness.
    - b. But should we look up to someone who is really no less wicked than the foes he overcomes?

- c. Watch out for the deception of a wicked villain (real or fictional) who is so intriguing that he becomes respected in your thoughts.
- d. In light of **EXO 23:13**, making pagan deities like Thor or Hercules into our heroes should be re-examined.
  - (1) Scripture makes mention of the names of pagan deities (**ACT 7:43**) so the mere mention of the name is not the issue.
  - (2) Giving that idol god reverence as one should only do to the true God or desiring to be like the idol god is the issue. **JOS 23:7**.
  - (3) Would Satan be a good hero? Mind that pagan deities like Thor are devils. **1CO 10:20**.
  - (4) How effectively has Santa Claus displaced the true God in the minds of children and exploited natural covetousness? Santa is little more than a fictional god fashioned after man's own image.
- 2. There are plenty of imperfect virtuous men and women in Scripture and in history that would make better heroes than some immoral muscle-bound bodybuilder, sexualized Amazon dominatrix or a pagan god.
- 3. Few things in life are as satisfying as a loving, selfless, principled parent one day hearing their child say, "My dad/mom is my hero."
- B. Do we derive pleasure from wickedness itself in various forms of entertainment (book, song, play, movie, etc.)? **PRO 2:14** condemns the man who would "...**delight** in the frowardness of the wicked."
- C. When it comes to information intake, *our motive* is a factor: are we consuming the material for a virtuous theme it may set forth or for the ungodliness that is part of the story? Motives enter into how God judges our choices and actions.
 

**EXO 21:12-14; MAT 6:1-18; 2CO 9:7; 1CO 10:31.**

  - 1. Most anything we read, hear or watch will have a mixture of evil in it.
    - a. Scripture itself has accounts of sin, sinners, and detailed listings of the basest human lusts to be avoided.
    - b. Paul was familiar with the works of heathen poets and prophets which would have had their share of error in them. **ACT 17:28; TIT 1:12**.
  - 2. Sin has the power in us for all manner of concupiscence (**ROM 7:8**), which is *eager or vehement desire, esp. libidinous desire, sexual appetite or lust*.
    - a. One could even read the Bible account of David and Bathsheba for only carnal gratification.
    - b. How much more is this possible from other information sources where the Spirit is completely absent?
  - 3. We are to reprove the works of darkness. **EPH 5:11-12**.
    - a. As with the names of pagan deities, Scripture speaks of the wickedness we are to reprove. How else would we know what they were?
    - b. Of necessity, we must speak of those things to warn against them or condemn them. But we should not speak of those things approvingly, tolerantly or inquisitively.
    - c. Scripture reports the works of darkness in such a way that it never gives approval or encouragement to anyone pursuing them. That cannot be said about much of modern entertainment in which there is the occasional jewel, as one might also find a jewel in a septic tank.
- D. If the main message of the media source one is consuming is good, one might expose himself to it for the good message, providing one is spiritually mature enough to discern the evil and not dwell on it. **HEB 5:14**.

1. This is not contrary to **PSA 101:3**, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes...”
  - a. Without qualification, **PSA 101:3** would forbid one from reading the portions of Scripture where evil men and evil works are described.
  - b. to set before: orig. = to place so as to be seen by, acquired the meanings of to put before one for use, consideration, imitation, etc.
  - c. God’s law, God’s Son and our duty are so *set before us* to consider and imitate. **DEU 11:32; HEB 6:18; 12:1.**
  - d. David would put no wicked thing before his eyes for consideration or imitation.
2. The problem is that media producers have figured out that they can sell a lot of filth with the thread of a good message in it, and we are subject to the influence of the filth as well as the good message. **1CO 15:33.**
  - a. Too much graphic portrayal of evil is contrary to **ROM 16:19.**
  - b. Excessive exposure to evil can vex the soul and numb us to the ugliness of the evil. **2PE 2:7-8 ct/w PSA 119:158.**
  - c. Conscience can be wounded and, if wounded enough, made numb to the point that we no longer deem something as evil to be avoided but rather something harmless, then acceptable, then preferred and practiced. **EPH 4:18-19 c/w MAL 3:15.**
  - d. “Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”  
(Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man, Epistle II*)
3. Again, the question is, “Why are you reading that book, watching that show, playing that game, etc.?” Is it to magnify good and reprove evil, or is it because you delight in the evil?

IX. Modern entertainment made available even for young people may be riddled with gratuitous sex and sexual perversion, substance abuse, profanity, blasphemy, disrespect of law and of public order, etc.

- A. We have fallen a long way from the standards established by a voluntary self-regulatory group (Comic Code Authority) in 1954:
  1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.
  2. If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
  3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.
  4. Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.
  5. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.
  6. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gunplay, physical agony, the gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.
  7. No comic magazine shall use the words “horror” or “terror” in its title.
  8. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

9. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.
  10. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.
  11. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.
  12. Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.
  13. Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.
  14. Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.
  15. Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.
  16. Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Rape scenes, as well as sexual abnormalities, are unacceptable.
  17. Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.
  18. Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.
  19. Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.
- B. This was the “backwards 1950’s” to which modern progressives dread that the culture might return if God-fearing people were to have too much political influence. I say, “Turn the clock back!”
- C. As a child of the 1960’s, I know what effect some of the comic books produced under the above code had on me.
1. Fantasy and fiction were not always helpful to my moral development.
  2. In our corrupt age, the works of darkness are done openly, discussed openly and graphically presented. And shame is becoming outmoded. **JER 6:15; ZEP 3:5.**
  3. Parents: be aware of what your children are reading, hearing, seeing!
    - a. Do not prematurely permit or promote the corrupting of innocence.
    - b. As your children mature to where they may have an interest in more mature material, sit down with them and reason with them about the values that should be honored, the evil that should be despised, and the dangers of evil communications.
    - c. Remember the millstone. **MAT 18:6.**
- X. If we are forbidden to *devise wicked imaginations* (**PRO 6:18**), how does one write a book which deals with the struggle between good and evil?
- A. The Holy Spirit inspired men to write such a Book.
- B. The struggle between good and evil is the substance of post-Fall existence.
1. As noted earlier, Biblical instruction about this struggle is not limited to factual history or commandments but includes fictitious narratives (like parables) and fables.
  2. A man could hardly be at fault for authoring a history book or a fiction work that sets forth the struggle between good and evil when God Himself directed men to do such in the composing of Scripture, providing that the written work is not intended to corrupt others, defame Biblical righteousness or be a rival to Scripture (e.g. The Book of Mormon).
- C. In order for an author to develop his theme of the struggle between good and evil, he of necessity must develop an evil character or situation. This involves imagining evil.
1. The *motive* of the author and *how* he develops the evil come into play.

2. If his motive is to enjoy or promote the evil, or blur or pervert the distinction between good and evil, then it is an evil imagination.
3. If he develops the evil character or situation in such a way as to arouse the sinful appetites of the reader, then it is an evil imagination.
4. But if the evil character or situation is developed in such a way as to show the evil as evil and that evil does not profit in the end, this accords with the way Scripture presents evil. This is developing the evil through the grid of **PHIL 4:8**.
5. Scripture has many accounts of the struggle between good and evil in which “the good guy’s” weaknesses, failings and even his sins are part of the record.
  - a. But never is the impression left that the “good guy” was justified in his sins or that his sins were at God’s behest. **ROM 3:8; GAL 2:17-18**.
  - b. Nor are the errors of the “good guy” ever gratuitous or glamorized: bad decisions are set forth as things to avoid, and sin set forth as meriting certain judgment from God for which mercy alone is the relief.
6. If you author something which presents evil or if you play the role of a villain in something (play, fantasy game, etc.), present evil in a Biblical fashion: a thing that God hates and will judge. Do not make sinners into winners.

XI. What about enjoying books, movies, etc. that depict violence, inasmuch as the Lord hates them that love violence? **PSA 11:5**.

- A. The answer to this question depends upon the kind of violence being promoted.
  1. There is godly violence in repentance. **MAT 11:12 c/w MAT 21:31-32; COL 3:5**.
  2. God commands the saints to rejoice at the violent overthrow of spiritual Babylon. **REV 18:20-21**.
  3. Violence against evil is one thing; violence against the right or the innocent is another.
- B. God wrote a Bible filled with descriptions of positive violence and negative violence, some of it very graphic.
  1. He declares it all profitable. **2TI 3:16**.
  2. He commends it to children. **2TI 3:15**.
  3. Which of you is wiser than God to decide otherwise and declare some portions of Scripture unfit for human consumption?
- C. violence: The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property; action or conduct characterized by this; treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom. **c.** In weakened sense: Improper treatment or use of a word; wresting or perversion of meaning or application; unauthorized alteration of wording.
- D. The Bible says much about war. We even read of a “...book of the wars of the LORD...” (**NUM 21:14**).
  1. War obviously employs “physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property.”
  2. Therefore, war is an act of violence.
  3. That “book of the wars of the LORD” included the overthrow of Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea for which Israel rejoiced and celebrated God as a *man of war*. **EXO 15:1-21**. Note **v. 3**. Were they at fault for so rejoicing?
  4. Deborah and Barak celebrated the violent overthrow of the Canaanites by the army under Barak’s command, including the violent death inflicted upon Sisera by Jael (**JDG 5**). Were they at fault for loving this violence?
  5. David was a *man of war* (**1SAM 16:18**), who *slew and beheaded Goliath*

(**ISAM 17:51**), and *shed blood abundantly* (**1CH 22:8**) but the only violence he was condemned for was the **unjust** slaying of Uriah the Hittite.  
**2SAM 12:9; 1KI 15:5.**

6. In **JER 48:10**, God pronounced a curse upon him “...that keepeth back his sword from blood,” which a man who hated any and all violence would do.
  - E. John the Baptist did not censure soldiers for their military service but commanded them, “...Do violence to no man...” (**LUK 3:14**). c/w **LUK 7:8-9**.
    1. soldier: One who serves in an army for pay; one who takes part in military service or warfare.
    2. Since warfare involves violence, John must have been forbidding them from violence not justified by their service.
  - F. God Himself engages in violence (**ISA 22:17-18; LAM 2:6**). Would you call the Flood or the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah non-violent?
  - G. God finds relief and pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. **DEU 28:63; EZE 5:12-13.**
  - H. Godly parents exercise restricted violence in the beating of their disobedient children, and it is according to pleasure and rest. **PRO 29:15, 17; HEB 12:10.**
  - I. Conclusion: God abhors only a certain kind of violence: physical force that injures or damages the innocent or their property, or violence done to His law. **ZEP 3:4.**
  - J. It is not that one should love bloodshed and destruction merely for the sake of bloodshed and destruction but rather for the sake of justice.
    1. The feet of the wicked are “...swift to shed blood...” (**ROM 3:15**).
    2. Violence is their default position, their cheap first recourse in dealing with others.
    3. Jesus reprovved disciples for this type of “rapid response” attitude to people who offended. **LUK 9:53-56.**
    4. The violent invite evil and tend to die young. **PSA 140:11; 55:23.**
    5. Rather, blessed are the peacemakers and those who turn the other cheek in minor offenses (**PRO 15:1; MAT 5:9, 39**): diplomacy before DEFCON 1.
    6. Instead of “swift to shed blood,” we should be “...swift to hear...” (**JAM 1:19**).
  - K. Therefore, one may (with qualification) enjoy media sources that depict violence that accords with the kind of violence the Bible extols, which is the destruction of the evil by the good.
    1. One should be aware of the desensitizing nature of undue exposure to violence. The more graphic the violence, the greater becomes the desire for increasing levels of it. This is especially a concern in interactive media.
    2. *Recipitur ad modum recipientis* (Reception depends upon the receiver). Not everyone is suited to process violent information without it negatively affecting their souls or emotional well-being. This is especially important where children are concerned. Parents: be discerning in what your children see, hear, read.
- XII. God made us with the power of imagination: the ability to conceive in the mind things not present, be they concrete or abstract. It is a power for good and also for evil (hence, the need to *cast down imaginations and bring thoughts into captivity to Christ*, **2CO 10:5**).
- A. While all fiction, fantasy and fable, etc., are not evil, overmuch indulgence of them to the crowding out of God’s truth (including His truth about our duties) is a problem. Life is not a fantasy, and fantasy’s escape properties do not conquer life’s problems.
  - B. As with other things, discretion, temperance, soberness and moderation are critical. **1CO 9:25-26; 1PE 5:8-9; PHIL 4:5.**
    1. discretion: Ability to discern or distinguish what is right, befitting, or advisable, esp. as regards one's own conduct or action; the quality of being discreet;

- discernment; prudence, sagacity, circumspection, sound judgement.
2. temperance: The practice or habit of restraining oneself in provocation, passion, desire, etc.; rational self-restraint.
  3. sober: Moderate, temperate, avoiding excess...
  4. moderate: Avoiding extremes; characterized by temperance of conduct or expression.
- C. We should be wary of any entertainment that weakens our resistance to temptation. **ROM 13:11-14.**
- D. Watch out for the desensitizing to wickedness in general that excess exposure to it produces. Where did your grief and horror go? **PSA 119:53, 158.**
1. It is not only the violent and sexual materials that should concern us.
  2. The old “Lucy Show” soft-pedaled a wife’s underhanded rebellion against her husband.
  3. The old Walt Disney movies or “The Wizard of Oz” soft-pedaled sorcery and witchcraft.
  4. How many books, television shows and movies promote ungodly alternatives to the Biblical family structure (and make it seem so wholesome) or promote evolutionary themes and spiritual dualism through star/space stories?
- E. Liberty is not to be an occasion to our flesh or the hurt of others. **GAL 5:13; ROM 14:13.**
- F. Do not violate conscience. **1TI 1:19.**
1. Stop reading, listening, viewing or participating (acting, fantasy game, etc.) if your conscience is nagging you.
  2. Learn to distinguish between an *immature weak conscience* (**ROM 14:1-2**), an *instructed, liberated conscience* (**ROM 14:22**) and a *seared conscience* that is “...past feeling...” (**EPH 4:19**).
- G. Ask yourself, “Would I want to be consuming this if Jesus were here beside me, or be found doing it at His return?” **1JO 2:28.**