“Is “Lord of the Rings” OK for Christians to Read?”

Some young people in our church are reading some books called *Lord of the Rings.* Are these books suitable for Christians or are they ungodly books like that Harry Potter series? Apparently the teens think they are “harmless entertainment” from what I understand and they really enjoyed the Trilogy (read all 3 books). Please give me at least a sort of detailed explanation on where you all stand one way or another.

Dear _____,

We really ought to have an article on the Lord of the Rings trilogy. . .

It was written by a solid Christian, J.R.R. Tolkien, with a strongly Christian worldview. It is a tremendous blessing that something so biblical in its understanding has received the attention from Hollywood and the movie-going public that this trilogy has, and it has triggered further interest in reading the books that inspired the movies. We are completely behind the *Lord of the Rings* books.

I would like to point you to a helpful article by one of my personal heroes, Gene Edward Veith, who wrote an essay on LOTR in *World* Magazine: www.worldmag.com/world/issue/12-08-01/national_1.asp

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Published July 2004

Addendum, Feb. 2013:

Our friends at LeaderU.com created a marvelous Special Focus with the release of the LOTR movies that features links to excellent articles:

Lord of the Rings: True Mythology
Is *Lord of the Rings*, the most popular in the UK of all works in England's great literary legacy, based in pagan myth or Christian themes—or both? Dig into the story behind the stories and their master storyteller in our Special Focus.

"Are Dreadlocks OK for a Christian?"

Is it okay for a Christian to wear dreadlocks?

The answer to this question will depend on the motive of the person wearing the dredlocks. Why are they wearing them and what are they saying by it? This approach applies equally to any style of dress. There is no Christian haircut or clothing style. There are only Christians who wear clothes or wear their hair in a particular way for a certain reason. It might be a good way to start off a conversation with someone who wears dreadlocks by asking why he or she wears their hair that way. Generally, dredlocks represent a person's close connection to Reggae music and Rastafarianism; but not necessarily, since in our society people adopt certain trends and styles simply for the novelty and then are on to the next fashion. Clothing, like food, should not be a source of contention for Christians. Romans 14 tells us that every believer is responsible before the Lord for their actions and

that because we have the Holy Spirit, we will be able to make the right choices that are pleasing to the Lord.

Lawrence Terlizzese, Ph.D.

Posted May 26, 2013
© 2013 Probe Ministries

"What's the Difference Between Lesbian Relationships and Heterosexual Marriage?"

How are the dynamics of lesbian relationships different from a marriage's? A lot of marriages have issues and "skeletons in the closet" too. So just generally speaking, how are they different? Maybe more drama, more desperation in lesbian relationships? And what is the fundamental reasoning you have reached that may cause the difference?

Ever since you wrote, I have been thinking about your question and talking to people with lots of experience, including a dear friend who was a gay activist for decades and in a long-term relationship with another woman for twelve years.

The core problem is trying to force a same-sex relationship, where the God-designed complementarity is missing, into a marriage-like relationship that is designed for balance. There isn't any. The strengths and weaknesses of male and female are simply missing, so all you have are the same strengths and same weaknesses.

For example, we women are created to be relational; men are more task-oriented by design. Together, this means that things

get done in a context of people's hearts mattering. In lesbian relationships, it's ALL about the relationship. And since a part of lesbianism is a deep core of insecurity, women are driven by fear to protect the relationship at all costs, lest the other one even *think* of leaving. This means binding the other to oneself with gifts, favors, music, shared everything including finances, and constant contact throughout the day (and panic when the other doesn't respond immediately).



I have a ball consisting of magnets that fit and hold together by magnetic attraction. The orientation of the pieces in relation to each other matters because some pieces are drawn to each other, but if you flip one of the pieces, the magnetic polarity causes them to repel each other. You can make them touch, but you have to apply some kind of force to hold them together. God designed males and females to be attracted to each other and to hold together naturally, like the north and south poles of magnets, in large part because of our differences. When same-sex couples try to forge an intimate, romantic/sexual relationship, it's like two north poles or two south poles of a magnet, so they have to use some kind of force to keep them together. This is why manipulation is the glue of emotionally dependent relationships. One long-time lesbian said, "We don't have partners, we have prisoners."

Most lesbian-identifying women are plagued by a yawning "hole" in their hearts, either a mommy-shaped hole or a best-girlfriend shaped hole. Thus, the attraction, unlike with magnets, is the hope of getting an aching emotional need met. A friend of mine who has been walking with same-sex-attracted people for decades calls that aching emotional need "giant sucking funnels." Another friend referred to it as "two ticks, no dog." And one of my friends met a fifty-something woman at a gay bar who actually said, "I want you to be my mommy." They try to stuff other women into that hole, and it never works.

That’s because once a girl’s legitimate developmental needs are not met at their appropriate stage in life, there is no way for another human being to fill such a large hole. But God can, and I have seen Him do it, through His people and through personal intimacy with Jesus.

My friends who came out of the lesbian community tell me that they’ve never seen healthy lesbian relationships. Women in long-term relationships present a well-crafted façade to the world. When the women split up, everyone is shocked, because there was one dynamic for public, and then the reality of what went on behind closed doors. Usually that means one person controlling the other, one person caretaking the other, and not a mutuality of equals. It’s more a matter of a major power differential. The biblical concept of husband and wife as equals before God, each contributing something intrinsically different to the relationship, is missing in lesbian relationships. This is especially true for those who get into longer-term relationships, where there is usually an age gap because women are hoping to fix the mother-daughter brokenness inside them. One of my friends watched her mother get into what became a long-term relationship with another woman, and over the years has listened to her mother complain bitterly about the way she’s treated. She is still saying, decades into the relationship, “I’m miserable but I don’t know how to live without her, so I’ll just stay.”

One day I was looking at a sculpture I have of a circle of friends, arms around each others’ shoulders. It reminded me of the dynamic of a husband-wife marriage, where they are face-to-face in a circle of two as they get established as a new family unit in society, and then they enlarge the circle by bringing children into it. By contrast, lesbian relationships are like two lovers face-to-face in their “us only” circle of two, excluding all others, jealous of outside friendships and suspicious of all other relationships as a threat to the circle of two. The relationship is inherently sterile; they

cannot bring children into the circle without engaging (one way or another) in God's "one male, one female" requirement for creating new human beings.

Another difference in the dynamics of husband-wife marriages vs. lesbian relationships is that when men and women work on getting emotionally healthier, bringing their marriage into alignment with God's Word, it strengthens the marriage and builds oneness between two very different, very "other" people. When two lesbian women work on getting emotionally healthier, it means de-tangling and disengaging from the enmeshment that defines their relationship and tries to erase the boundaries of who they are individually. If they bring their relationship into alignment with God's Word (Rom. 1:26), they will no longer be lesbian partners.

I do need to add a disclaimer, that there has been a major age-related sea change. What I've just said is true of women 30-35 and older, but some things are drastically different for younger women who identify as lesbians. Like the other people their age, they grew up in a far more sexualized culture than ever before, and they grew up in a world of ever-increasing approval of lesbian behavior (thanks to the proliferation of pornography, for one big reason). Many girls experimented in lesbian relationships and sex simply because of peer pressure and the messages of the culture: "How will you know if you like it or not unless you try? You owe it to yourself!"

However, just like with their older counterparts, these relationships are still volatile, intense, drama-filled, and very difficult to extricate from. Jealousy and manipulation (especially guilt) are major dynamics. Regardless of the age, same-sex romantic and sexual relationships are not God's intention or design, so they don't work well.

You asked about my fundamental reasoning for my conclusions; simply observing, week after week after week for 14 years, what these girls and women report about their relationships

and how hard it is to come out of a lesbian identity, is quite the education. Especially when I compare it to what I know of God's word combined with the experience of enjoying a balanced, healthy marriage for 38 years.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Posted April 2013

"Let Me Tell You About How I Know God Has a Sense of Humor"

I was reading Sue Bohlin's blog post Does God Has a Sense of Humor?, and I have something to add. My name, Talitha, is from Mark 5:41. It means "Little Girl." My mother told me that when she was pregnant with me, God told her to name me Talitha. Oh, and the kicker? I'm five-foot, and 108 pounds, roughly. God DOES has a sense of humor!

Love it! Thank you so much for sharing your story—and for making me smile!

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

Posted Apr. 15, 2013
© 2013 Probe Ministries

“I Am the Male Victim of Verbal Abuse”

Kerby,

I am the victim of verbal abuse, a process that we are in counseling for.

I am a man. I was disheartened that one of the top searches for verbal abuse in Google comes from you, and every reference is to the woman being the victim. There is no explanation that this happens all the time from a woman against a man.

As a fellow Christian man, I hope that you will see how this hurts to read. I would like to recommend to you that you change the pronouns to he/she or his/her.

Thank you for your consideration and bless you for your call to this subject.

I am sorry for what is happening to you. I understand your reaction, but perhaps you missed the section in which I say:

> *Frequently, the perpetrator of verbal abuse is male and the victim is female, but not always. There are many examples of women who are quite verbally abusive. But for the sake of simplicity of pronouns in this radio program, I will often identify the abuser as male and the victim as female.*

When I had June Hunt on my radio program last week, she documented that 95% of abuse is male to female. I recognize that abuse, especially verbal abuse, can be done by women.

Obviously, I could change some of the pronouns. [*Note from the webservant: and we have done so.*] Thank you for your email.

Kerby Anderson

Posted Feb. 26, 2013
© 2013 Probe Ministries

"Why Does God Allow Natural Evils Such as Tsunamis, Hurricanes and Earthquakes?"

My question is about natural evils such as tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes etc. I feel like the problem of moral evil such as murder and stealing is solved by the free will defense but I haven't heard a good refution of why God allows tsunamis and other natural events to take out huge villages and kill children.

The so called "natural evils" such as natural disasters are only evil from a human perspective. Tsunamis and earthquakes are normal and necessary occurrences in nature. We could not live on planet earth without them. They shape the environment and contribute to an inhabitable planet. They are part of a normal cycle of nature, along with every other occurrence in nature such as volcanoes, floods and even disease and plague, which is God's way of maintaining balance in the ecology, necessary for human survival. These natural occurrences only become evil when humanity gets in their way. This sometimes has to do with human choices and "moral evil." For example building huge population centers on known fault lines and danger zones and not taking proper precautions in construction or having an efficient evacuation plan and warning system in place. Humanity cannot do away with the normal cycles of nature because we need a healthy natural environment to live.

But we can adjust ourselves to nature in order to mitigate some of its more deadly effects on civilization. New Orleans is the perfect example of human arrogance, neglect and apathy in the face of known dangers from hurricanes. This city did not take the proper precautions in building a technological defense against hurricanes when it was known for decades that it was in danger of a disaster. The Netherlands is an example of a country that did take the proper precautions in protecting itself from flooding and goes on to survive without incident. So should we blame God for the apathy of New Orleans? This means there is not a strict separation between natural and moral evil and that they are more interwoven than we realize or care to admit.

Now, many times natural disasters are not the result of human choices. We have two options. First, it is a judgment of God. Second, we don't know why, other than saying God has a purpose in this disaster that we don't understand, which is certainly an acceptable choice; that is how the problem of evil is explained in the book of Job. I am not averse to saying natural disasters are a judgment from God. The Bible has no problem calling natural disasters judgments—floods and earthquakes are perfect examples. This does not mean that every natural disaster is a judgment. I am only saying judgment is a possibility.

So there are three possible answers to your question. Natural disasters happen as a result of human choices. They are a judgment of God or they happen for a reason we do not understand.

Feel free to follow up on any of these issues with me if you like.

Lawrence Terlizzese, Ph.D.

Posted Feb. 26, 2013
© 2013 Probe Ministries

“Are Calvinism and Arminianism Both Biblical?”

Calvinism and Arminianism: is either one Biblical? Can they both be Biblical? Should the differences between Arminian and Calvinistic theology really be of that great of concern as long as both teach that the Lord is sovereign and we are all sinners and the only way to the Lord is through Jesus Christ and the atoning sacrifice He made on the cross?

You ask a very good question and (of course) who you ask will determine the sort of answer you receive. Yes; many Calvinists view Arminianism as “false doctrine” and are often very condescending in the way they discuss it. □(□□Of course, Arminians are also quite capable of being condescending toward Calvinists too.) Personally, I think this is unfortunate. This is a very important discussion and the competing viewpoints definitely have something to learn from each other.

Regarding your question, both perspectives view themselves as perfectly “biblical.” Adherents of either system will want to affirm that their view is most consistent with the teaching of Scripture. If they thought otherwise, they would change their view.

Of course, both systems cannot be correct in all the details (though they could both be wrong in *some* of the details). In this sense, they cannot both be “biblical” in the sense that they both get everything right according to Scripture. The disagreements between the two systems are significant and they cannot both be right in all the particular views that they affirm (although they could both be wrong in certain respects).

The differences should concern us (even though there is much in which both systems would agree). The differences are significant. Calvinists deny libertarian freedom; Arminians affirm it. Calvinists embrace a different definition of "total depravity" than Arminians. Both groups disagree about the nature of election, the extent of the atonement, and whether or not a true believer can lose his/her salvation. These differences (and others as well) are significant enough to be of concern to all true believers.

At any rate, this is a huge and complex issue (as you've probably come to see). Let me conclude by recommending what I consider to be a really great book that deals with these issues (although the author takes something of a "mediating" position between the two). The book is called *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. It is written by the Baptist theologian Kenneth Keathley and was published in 2010. You can find the book on Amazon.

Keathley's book is one you definitely want to read if you're concerned about these issues. Personally, I think his particular version of a "Molinist" approach offers the best way out of the labyrinth. I hope you find it helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted Nov. 28, 2012
© 2012 Probe Ministries

"Is Quantum Physics

Legitimate or Spiritually Dangerous?”

Michael, thank you so very much for your insightful articles about Reiki. My father was an excellent medical doctor and surgeon and after retiring, he was led into Reiki and he is always trying to push this on us. His three adult Christian children all have known from the start that this was not of the Lord and have rejected it. Now he is advocating Quantum Physics as the answer to life even though he claims to be a Christian. Have you written anything about Quantum Physics or can you give me just a couple of scriptural reasons why it is off-base? I imagine that they are the same as the reason for Reiki.

Thanks for your kind and encouraging letter. I’m glad to hear that the article on Reiki was helpful to you. Concerning quantum physics, this is a legitimate and highly-developed branch of contemporary physics. Any difficulties with quantum physics would not be due to the legitimate scientific work being done. However, difficulties with quantum physics do arise, and these can usually be traced back to two sources of origin.

In the first place, the vast majority of people who mention quantum physics have very little idea of what it is they’re actually talking about. They may have read a popular-level book or two on the subject (or they may not have even done that). With this bit of new knowledge they may then make all kinds of far-fetched and dubious claims. The problem is, they usually don’t know what they are talking about and it is difficult for anyone to challenge them (because not many people have a deep enough knowledge of this important field of physics to do so). In particular, quantum physics has been embraced by many non-Christian Eastern religious movements (or religious movements influenced by such philosophies) as a

means of showing that physical reality is paradoxical, or illogical, etc. This often fits in with their religious claims, but many of these views are based on misunderstandings, misappropriations, and misinterpretations of quantum physics—and hence are not to be accepted uncritically.

Secondly (and this is very important), there are MANY DIFFERENT interpretations of what the mathematics and experimental science behind quantum physics is actually telling us about the nature of physical reality. This is terribly important to understand, but sadly, most people are not aware of this. Many of the "wild and crazy" ideas which people propound with an appeal to quantum physics are based on a particular interpretation of the mathematical and physical evidence. But the problem with this is that there are numerous competing interpretations, each one of which adequately accounts for the data, but many of which would NOT result in the same strange views of the physical world. And here's the kicker: we do NOT know which interpretation is the right one! Hence, as you can easily imagine, many of the strange ideas which are based on a particular interpretation of quantum physics may be incorrect, simply because the interpretation upon which these ideas are based is incorrect!

For more on quantum physics from an informed Christian perspective, please check out some of William Lane Craig's materials on his website here. These are the search results from "quantum physics" on his website. Craig is a world class Christian philosopher and theologian, who is intimately acquainted with the issues in contemporary physics. You might also want to refer your father to Craig's work. His website has scholarly and popular-level articles, podcasts, debates with leading atheists, etc. I would highly recommend Craig's work.

I hope this is helpful. May the Lord richly bless you in your service for Him!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted Nov. 28, 2012

“Does God Cause Bad Things to Happen?”

On Facebook my cousin asked me this question: “You know how they say everything happens for a reason, whether good or bad? Some people say that God has nothing to do with what happens in our daily lives, so He is not the one to blame for things going bad. But isn’t it possible that bad things happen because God wants them to happen, because of His overall plan? For example, a woman gets raped and has a baby. Since God chooses when and where you will be born, is God to blame for the woman’s rape so that baby would be born?” How would you respond?

Your cousin has asked about something that has perplexed Christians for a very long time. It actually marks a significant division between Christians theologically. Who is responsible for what happens on earth? Some believe God ordains everything that happens. Some believe He knows everything that will happen but He doesn’t always cause it (especially sinful things). Still others believe God doesn’t know everything that will happen in the future, so He can’t be blamed in any way.

The Bible indicates that God is sovereign over the world and nothing happens apart from His plan. Daniel 4:35 reads, “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and

[God] does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" In Isa. 45:7 God says, "I form light and create darkness, I make success and create disaster; I, Yahweh, do all these things." Typically when God brings disaster on people, it's as punishment. However, some hard things He brings our way are for the sake of discipline, to strengthen our faith and lead us into the way of righteousness (see Heb. 12:3-13). Even Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8).

What God isn't to be blamed directly for is our sin. If we sin, we are responsible. Sometimes God lets us go in our sinful ways so that we learn to obey, but that doesn't make Him blameworthy for the sin we commit. So, somehow God is working out His plan, which includes some bad things, yet we are responsible for what we do.

Regarding the example given, since it is hypothetical only a hypothetical answer can be given. Let's assume that the woman hadn't done anything provocative herself, and that she hadn't knowingly put herself in a bad situation (although other people can't excuse their sin against us because of what we do, we can put ourselves in situations where there is a good chance we will be sinned against). This kind of situation is especially perplexing. There is no way of knowing directly why God would allow rape to occur. Will it change her life and point her in a different situation? What will the child grow up to accomplish? What will it mean in the lives of family and friends? God, through one act, can accomplish several things in several people's lives. In hindsight she might be able to look back and see some good that came out of this evil, but that doesn't always happen.

The wonderful thing about being in a relationship with God is that terrible events aren't the end of the story. Too often people use the word "ruined" to talk about the life of someone who has suffered terribly. I think of ruined as meaning *ended*,

no good anymore for anything, destroyed. But we aren't forever ruined by disaster. Slowed down, re-directed, changed deeply maybe. But if we are willing to rest in God as sovereign over us and trust Him, we can let these things help shape us and guide us in the way God wants us to go. Difficulties come our way "that we may share [God's] holiness," the writer of Hebrews says. "For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (12:10,11).

None of this excuses the sin. I can't do something bad to you and then tell you to just accept it because God must've wanted it to happen. God doesn't need our help to guide people into righteousness!

I think that people usually want a very short answer to the question, is God to blame or not? Either yes or no. But I don't think simple yes or no answers are typically sufficient for understanding. The issue has to be put into a bigger context. For example, when thinking about a tough football coach I had a long time ago, if I only think about whether he was to blame for letting that bigger player knock me silly in a round of "bull in the ring," I would miss the whole point and misjudge him. He wasn't being mean; he wasn't trying to hurt me. He was making me learn how to be aware and be ready so I would be a better football player. Similarly, what God does (or allows to happen) has a reason or many reasons. The only way we can fully profit from it, though, is by being in a good relationship with Him through Christ and allowing ourselves to be shaped by it. I hope you and your cousin is in such a relationship with Him.

Thanks for writing.

Rick Wade

Posted Sept. 26, 2012

“I Feel So Guilty That My Baby Was Born with a Birth Defect After I Had an Abortion”

I had an abortion when I was young. Several years later I gave birth to a child with a disability. My guilt knows no bounds. I feel God is punishing my child with a life of suffering due to my horrible sin. I think of King David and how God punished his sin by killing his baby. At least his baby died and went to Heaven. My child will live and suffer all the days of their life. I know it’s my fault. What can I do?

Thank you from the bottom of my broken heart.

Guilty Mom

I understand your feelings of guilt, but let me gently point out that you have connected the dots between your abortion and your child’s disability as if one caused the other. Since the vast majority of post-abortal mothers deliver healthy babies after their abortion, this is not an automatic cause-and-effect relationship. In addition, many babies with disabilities are born to mothers who didn’t have abortions.

Secondly, the nature and character of God is that He does not punish innocents for the sins of their mothers. Twice in the Old Testament, God corrects this wrong assumption; here’s one:

> “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children’s teeth are set on edge’?

> “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.
> “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.” (Ezek 18:2-4)

This passage teaches that the consequences of one’s sins are borne by the one who sinned, not their children. (Now I will admit that there are effects of a parent’s sins on a family, such as angry parents producing fearful children, but that’s not the same as God punishing a child for the parent’s sin.)

One of the reasons Jesus left heaven to come to earth as one of us, was to show us what the Father is really like. He knew that we would paint the face of His Father out of the paint bucket of misunderstanding and fear that comes from our own warped perception of God. If you read the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, you’ll see the true heart of the Father—and He’s not the kind of God who would punish a child for their mother’s sin.

This same Father allowed David to experience a deep brokenness from his sin of adultery by taking David’s baby home to be with Himself. The God of Luke 15 is the same Father who disciplined His beloved David for his sin. God is not a vindictive, punishing God who takes pleasure in making His children suffer, but He knows what kind of discipline will best produce the beauty of Christlikeness in us.

Yes, your child will live with a disability all the days of their life. But let me assure you, as one who has lived with a disability almost from birth (so I have no memory of being strong and healthy), God has used my disability in mighty and profound ways. It has not been a punishment, even on my worst days; I have even gotten to the point, at age 59, of realizing that my disability is one of His greatest gifts to me. This has become my life verse:

> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:16-18)

It's easy, in our limited way of seeing things, to believe that suffering in any form is evil and to be avoided at all costs. This is not the way things work in the "real" world where Jesus is Lord. Suffering can accomplish very good and important things in our lives that we can't experience any other way. I wrote an article called "The Value of Suffering" that is one of the best things I've ever written, which you may find helpful.

You ask what you should do.

Your heart is so tender and wounded, there is no doubt that you have confessed your sin over and over, so that part is done. But 1 John 1:9 has another wonderful part to it:

> 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You have confessed your sin; because God is good, He has not only forgiven you, He has cleansed you from the stain of your sin. You are clean. It's all over. If you have trusted in Jesus' life, death and resurrection for you, you are a new creature and He is renewing you from the inside out.

So at this point, you can tell God, "Thank You for forgiving me, thank You for cleansing me, thank You for redeeming my sin and turning something evil into something good. Thank You for being bigger than my sins, and being able to turn things around in ways I cannot imagine. With Jesus' help, I receive the assurance that You have forgiven me and will use my

child’s disability for great and glorious purposes. Help my heart catch up with my head on this. Help me to see that You allowed me to go down that dark path into sin because You are able to redeem even the worst things we do.”

I pray for you, _____, for the peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7) to anoint you like warm oil and soak down deep into your heart.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Posted Sept. 2012
© 2012 Probe Ministries