



An Idol Called

SPORTS

Let us be clear, sports have become an idol in the church. In the name of freedom in Christ, multitudes indulge the desires of sin by participation in sports. 1 John 2:15 tells us to love nothing in the world, and that includes sports. How do we know if we love sports more than God? Those who do not hate sports, love it. There is no middle ground. Christ calls us to hate our own lives and that would include the pleasure of sports. Those who do not hate their own lives, forfeit eternal life. If you tried to evangelize fellow sports fans would they laugh at you when you tell them they must give up all to be saved? Laugh because they see you as a hypocrite when it comes to sports? Denying self as Jesus demanded results in every disciple hating the part of his life drawn to sports.

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:25)

To attend a sporting event, or to play on a team in a godly manner requires the utmost painful crucifixion of self that most people flatly refuse to allow (1 Peter 4:1). Most love the pleasures of sin more than the sufferings of Christ (Hebrews 11:25). If you want to keep your life for all eternity, then hate your life now, including that part of your life that likes sports. Begin this in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit and everything else will become righteously clear.

So unholy is the church today, that sports, and the promise of a good time, is often used to lure people in. Many devotional books are sold in connection with sports and frequently individuals skip church to attend a game. Sporting events often begin with a prayer, as if Jesus died on the cross so that we can run a little faster or play harder. It's as if doing all through Christ means playing better at sports rather than filling up in our flesh the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24).



Sport Idols

Do I mean that a football, soccer ball, or baseball bat are evil in and of themselves? Not at all. And driving a race car does not make someone automatically

doomed to hell. But God does require us not to drink of two cups—the cup of God and the cup of demons.

Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. (1 Corinthians 10:19-23)

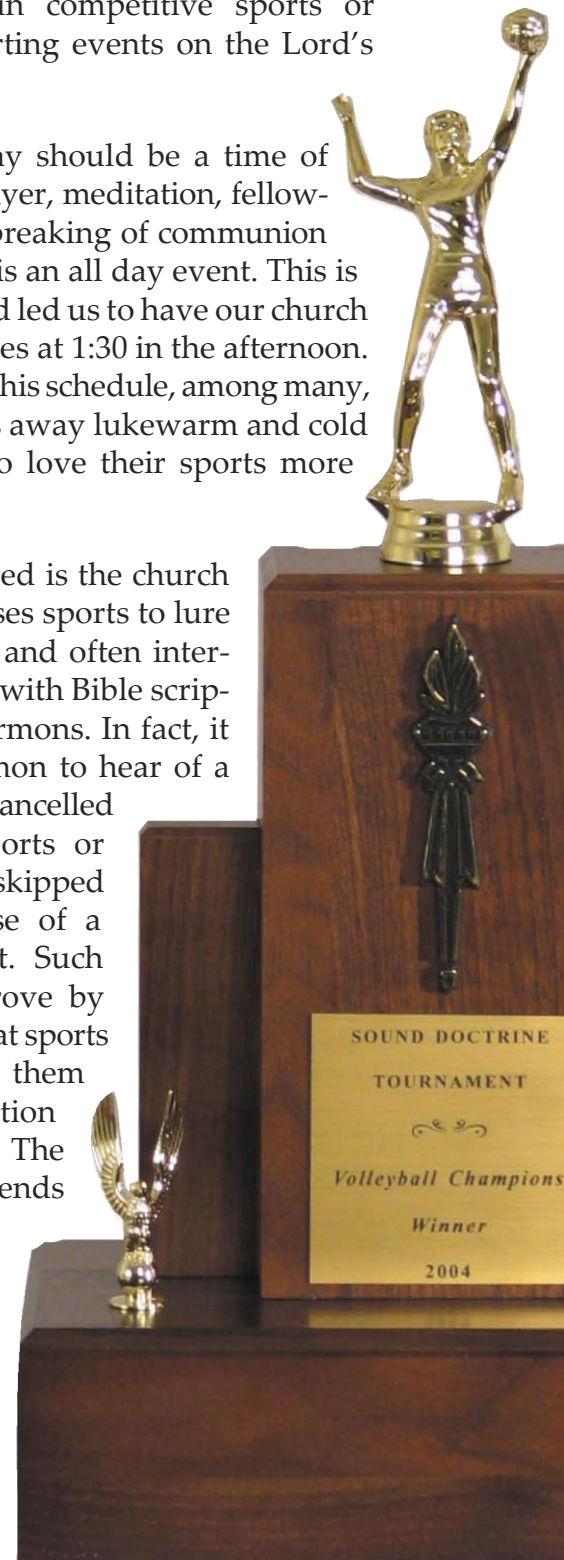
Opening a worldly sporting event with prayer mixes the cup of the Lord with the cup of demons. The demonic cup wears the symbol of a favorite team on a sweat-shirt when our banner as Christians must be the Lord, and only the Lord. The cup of demons dyes hair, paints the face, and indulges in the team spirit of the moment. It is permissible to play a game of football if it is the Lord's will and played with the purity of Jesus Christ. It is not, however, beneficial to sit down on the bleachers with the world and yell for a favorite team.

All that a Christian does, thinks, and holds dear in his heart must be different from the world. Let us look at one example, that if lived out would cause

a radical change in the church. That is, not participating in competitive sports or attending sporting events on the Lord's Day, Sunday.

The Lord's Day should be a time of separation, prayer, meditation, fellowship, and the breaking of communion in a church. It is an all day event. This is one reason God led us to have our church worship services at 1:30 in the afternoon. One benefit of this schedule, among many, is that it drives away lukewarm and cold Christians who love their sports more than Jesus.

Again, so defiled is the church today that it uses sports to lure individuals in and often interweaves sports with Bible scriptures in the sermons. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear of a church service cancelled because of sports or that members skipped church because of a sporting event. Such individuals prove by their actions that sports mean more to them than the salvation of Jesus Christ. The world spends obscene amounts of money to attend events. The world indulges itself with food and



fun, and pays athletes wicked amounts to entertain them—after all such men and women are not called “sport idols” for nothing. If the world admits athletes are idols, then why do we attend these events and enjoy their hedonistic worship services?



Surely it is easy to see that the Lord's Day is a time of worship, not simply a couple of hours to sing a hymn or two, hear a short sermon, and then say good-bye as we head off to our chosen fun. But what about the whole purpose of the game, contest, or event? No trophy should ever be found in a Christians home let alone in the heart. We must be losers for Christ, not winners for man in the name of Jesus (Mark 8:35). As far back as the Old Testament, God made it clear we should never boast of the strength of man.

This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches (Jeremiah 9:23)

What folly gushes out of a Christian's mouths when, while accepting trophies from the world, he or she states “I would like to thank God, for without Him I couldn't have done it.” Folly, because the atheist athlete could say the same thing—and will someday declare

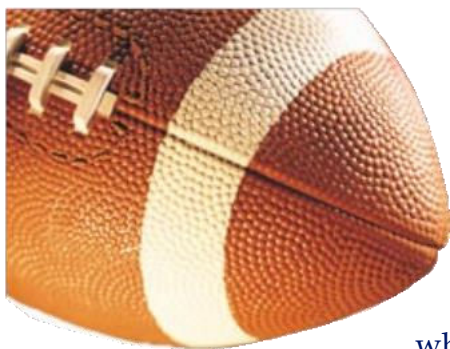
it so. The ability to win at anything comes from God, whether a believer or not. What is important is the life of separation from the world that the person lives. How much the cross has crucified us to the world; how much we boast of our weaknesses. After all, if we feel forced to boast, that is, if a real occasion occurs that we must talk about ourselves, it should only be in the context of pointing out our failures and weakness—not accepting our medals, ribbons, and trophies.

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.
(2 Corinthians 11:30)

Never would a true Christian boast or allow others to praise his athletic achievements and victories. Not only because this is the opposite of the message Jesus preached, but out of love for others. We should never want such things uttered because we know it would cause others to tumble further down into the hellish judgment called idolatry of sports.



Before you deceive yourself by saying that some Christian athletes are strong in the Lord and seek to glorify God, answer this question. Do they smell like death to some?



For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

In all that a true Christian does, he demonstrates by his heart and actions that he is not of this world. Not different by having a higher moral lifestyle, but different because the Holy Spirit has crucified him to the world and therefore he smells like death to thousands of fans. So crucified to the world (Galatians 2:20) that he would rather attend a prayer meeting than sit in the bleachers or play the game. Such a person would hate the money, fun, pride, competition, team spirit, or pleasures that come from sports (2 Corinthians 6:17). So out of touch with the world and so crucified to himself that at banquet dinners he finds it hard to smile and utterly impossible to enjoy. So heavenly minded that he gazes over the hoopla and loses contact with this world (Colossians 3:1-2). So suffering in his heart with his brothers and sisters around the world being tortured for Christ, that he acts very sober in spirit, feeling as if he was the one imprisoned (Hebrews 13:3). Such an athlete forces back the tears because he sees things with God's heart. He sees the arena filled with lost humanity at every event. So out of touch, that those who sit near him at the awards banquet table smell something foul—the Christian athlete whose life and words demand that

all around him accept the good news of repentance.

Persecution is part of everyday life for true Christians, so the question begs itself. Why are there no Christian athletes that smell as death? By this I do not mean a small objection to a Christian's moral stance on an issue, but a smell of death that others "boo" and want nothing to do with. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men exclude you." So where are the Christian athletes that have been kicked off a team because they smell like death to the worldly who don't appreciate their lack of team spirit? The answer is simple; the saltiness is gone and Christ has been made into a sports superstar.

The apostle Paul reminds us of the golden calf of Exodus 32, when the people created an idol and worshipped it in the name of the Lord. Similarly, today's sports fans build their idols and dance around them while lighting the barbecue grills and watching skimpily clad girls cheer leading the crowds on. The evil that the Israelites did, Paul warns us against. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written:

"The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." (1 Corinthians 10:6-7)

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