

# A Christian Perspective on Play and Sports

Rev. Bruce Davis

*This is the first of a four-article series. The full title which the author gave to his articles was: "On Developing and Implementing a Christian Perspective on Play and Sports." We hope you will follow this series in subsequent issues of the Beacon Lights.*

## **Introduction**

Picture with me the following highlights from a basketball game played between two Christian teams: the two teams arrive at the gym and spend some time in fellowship with one another before they go to their respective locker rooms. Once on the floor warming up they continue to take time to talk with one another. Before the game starts the players on both teams shake hands with one another and with the coaches and officials. A father of one of the boys leads in prayer as players, coaches, and officials join hands and hearts in a circle around center court. From the opening whistle, each team encourages the other on good plays. Christian friendship is evident between the two teams in numerous ways. At one point an official is blocked from having a good view of a play and gives the ball out of bounds to the wrong team; a player whose team is about to get the ball wrongly and who knows what really happened on the play tells the official and requests that he reverse his call. At another point in the game a player has a breakaway and an easy layup but stops because a player from the other team is lying on the floor and seems to be injured. Not once during the game is disrespect shown to the other team or the officials. One team, which only had seven players to begin with, has three players foul out, so they have to finish the last few minutes of the game with only four players on the court. The other team's coach pulls his fifth player so that the two teams remain evenly matched for the rest of the game. The game ends with one team ahead by five points, and members of both teams again shake hands with one another and spend time together on the court and along the benches. One observing this scene cannot tell by facial expressions or conduct which team won and which team lost. Another father leads in closing prayer as the participants again gather at center court. After the game a number of boys and families from both teams meet at a restaurant for a postgame snack.

Is this a scenario that I witnessed one day? Regrettably, I have never seen such a game. Is this how Christians should participate in sports? Yes, by the grace of God. Then why is the scenario just described not the rule in the Christian community?

## **The Problem Stated**

The world in its sinfulness has perverted and distorted the divine intention for play and sports, and the church has embraced the world's philosophy; what a tragedy this is because the morally and spiritually bankrupt world only offers that which is morally and spiritually bankrupt. In this area, as well as in other areas of Christian living, the church has laid hold of broken cisterns which hold no water.

The world does not participate in play and sports to express the chief end of man which is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Games and contests to the world are opportunities for self-promotion and winning at the expense of others; coveting first place while viewing the other team as the enemy; taking an ego trip; looking out for # 1; viewing those who are better with envy; trying to demonstrate one's superiority over another; trying to win at all costs while

keeping in mind that the main thing is to win; and showing a killer instinct as one tries to put another away in the game so that the loser has a negative experience.

But is not all this the world's problem? Yes, but it is also the church's problem because the church has let the world teach her how to participate in sports. Much of what goes on in Christian homes and on Christian teams in the name of Christian play, sports, and recreation is worldly and wicked to the core. This sad reality is so because the church has learned how to play, not from the Word of God, but from the world. As in other areas, the standards of the world have become the standards in the church. By and large professing Christians imitate the world as they play. They do not look to the Lord to govern them by His Word in their sports; rather, the values of the world dominate their thoughts, words, and deeds while participating in sports.

Christians are taught to love their neighbors, but when the game begins they often abandon the biblical law of love in order to play according to the law(lessness) of the world. All too often professing Christians leave their Christianity in the locker room or in the gym bag during their play so that the values and standards of the world prevail. This shows a blatant disregard for the Word of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ during play; but the challenge for the church is to develop and to live out a distinctively Christian perspective of play and sports based squarely on the Word of God and implemented in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we take up the challenge of developing and implementing a God-centered and biblically-based philosophy of play, we need to ask and to answer a number of questions such as:

What is play?

What is God's purpose for sporting and playful activities?

How should a Christian approach and participate in sports and play so that God is glorified?

How does the Word of God bear upon our play?

Why should Christians play?

What qualities should characterize us as we play?

Is there such a thing as Christian competition?

How should winning and losing be viewed?

Is there a biblical view of play and sports, and if so, what is it?

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Originally Published in:  
Vol. 54 No. 3 March 1995