

# A Christian View of Sports (1)

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Play and sport was an accepted social activity of God's Old Testament people. It was indicative of health, life, and other temporal covenant blessings of God (Zech. 8:5). The Old Testament background for a Christian view of sport lies in its connection with the Israelite emphasis on feasting, dancing, and hospitality. There is no hesitation by the inspired authors of the New Testament to apply analogies drawn from sport to the Christian life. I Timothy 4:8 declares bodily exercise to be profitable for a little time, and both Philippians 3:14 and I Corinthians 9:24 use the image of a sprinter straining toward the one true prize.

Games can be divided into three sorts. Firstly, there are games of wit or industry, which are regulated by human skill, such as physical sports, intellectual board or quiz games, or music. These are to be commended the most, as they promote to the greatest extent the health of the body and mind. Secondly, there are games of hazard, in which luck bares the sway and chance orders the game. These are unlawful for the Christian, because they resemble the Old Testament use of lots, which were used to determine the mind of God when it could not be found by any other means. Also, such games tend to stir up troublesome emotions like fear and sorrow, and covetousness is usually the ground for them. Thirdly, there are games which mix these two elements, and which therefore are to be used sparingly if at all, and neither commended or condemned.

The purpose of Christian game and sport is ultimately the same as the chief end of man's existence, sport being a subordinate part of man's life. And the reason for man's existence is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The way in which we play a sport will be determined or conditioned by our aim in playing. If our purpose is spiritual and right, then our attitude while playing will be spiritual and right. More specifically, the main aim of playing sport ought to be to keep the sixth commandment, which requires us to preserve life and health, and to develop a Christian character and the fruits of the Spirit, particularly joy in fellowship, meekness in defeat, and temperance in victory.

It should be clear from this that our purpose as Christians involved in sport is not primarily to gain physical skill, to grow in social awareness to prepare for adult life, or to gain glory for the school. Our purpose should not at all be to establish personal superiority by winning, to gain admiration for our powers, or to play solely for the sake of competition.

What is the essence or heart of Christian sport and games? In a word, FELLOWSHIP. Sport is therefore a covenant activity, to be engaged in by Christians with Christians. It is about playing with, not against; cooperation, not confrontation. There is a place for competition, but it is to stimulate the best in our opponents so we can admire them and enable them to effectively keep the sixth commandment. Above all, it is about loving our Christian neighbors and doing good to the household of faith. ❖

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