

# A Christian View of Sports (2)

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In this article I wish to deal with some individual issues to which we can apply the general principles written about in the last issue.

*Firstly*, women and sport. Some argue that women should not be permitted to play sports, because it might compromise their modesty, cause unfeminine traits of personality, and the like. Besides, the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is too busy working with her hands, buying fields, and feeding the needy to have time for mere games. But women have equality in the area with men, as they are just as much under obligation to keep the sixth commandment as men. Furthermore, the Bible mentions both sexes playing together (Zech. 8:5). As women work just as worthily and strenuously as men, so their recreational activity is just as valid and necessary.

*Secondly*, violence and sport. Such violence can be of two sorts, either involving animals or humans. With regard to violence against animals, Herman Hoeksema suggests two reasons why animals should not be mistreated for any reason, including mere recreation. Firstly, as king of creation under God, man's lordship over the earth does not involve tyranny and abuse but care and nurture. Secondly, animals were, like man, created as living souls, and are related by creation (not evolution) to man in having the powers of sensation and instinct, as well as freedom of action.

With regard to violence against humans, most physical sport involves some sort of bodily contact as a secondary effect of the game. But there are some sports which have bodily contact of violent nature as their primary objective, such as martial arts. I believe that such activity can be justified within a Christian context for the following reasons. Firstly, the sixth commandment requires us to protect and preserve our own life, and the life of our neighbour, and self-defense teaching may enable us under certain circumstances to do this. Secondly, Paul uses an analogy from fighting—commentators say wrestling or boxing—as having a valid parallel with the Christian life in I Corinthians 9:26.

*Thirdly*, professionalism in sport. There are many problems with this concept. It mixes labour and rest or recreation, which ought to be kept distinct, after the creation pattern of God working six days and resting on the seventh. The context in which a Christian would have to work if he or she was a professional sports person would be unchristian, with unbiblical views of fairness and aims in playing. Often it would involve working on the Lord's Day, which would be an intolerable scenario for any Christian. Consistent membership in a local visible church would be ruled out because of the amount of travel involved. Besides all this, professionalism is simply unnecessary. People can get the same amount of pleasure playing and watching a sport if it is amateur in status.

*Finally*, there are the abuses of sport. Within certain modern church circles it is popular to believe that sport can be a tool for evangelism ("sports ministry") as it provides a way of contacting the local community and setting forth moral role models. All this is contrary to the biblical principle that only *preaching the gospel* saves sinners. (See Romans 10:13-15 and I Corinthians 1:17-18.) The church has no mandate to do anything else. But, of course, the largest abuse of sport is the blatant idolatry it occasions. Sport is the religion of the masses. Somebody's "god" is their chief priority in life, what they cling to for life and death, that on which they spend their time, money, and energy. For many modern nonchristians, their "god" is certainly sport. For Christians, everything else comes in a poor second place. ❖

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