

# The Game

Ryan Kregel

On Sunday evening, February 4, millions of people will gather around their TVs to watch the Super Bowl. Sadly, many Christians will also sit down and watch “the game that everyone *has* to watch.” Some might even scornfully ask you why you will not join them. What is our response to this massive event that “everyone” watches?

“I can’t believe they watch the Super Bowl. It’s on Sunday after all. You know, they just spend way too much time watching sports, especially if they think they need to watch it on Sunday too.”

Have you ever said or thought something like that?

I have.

Then I thought about my own consumption of sports.

Super Bowl Sunday aside, how much time do we spend watching sports, sports news, or checking up on our favorite teams online?

My original thoughts while planning for this month’s editorial centered around addressing the idolatry and Sabbath desecration that surround the Super Bowl. Then, after devoting several Saturday afternoons to watching Michigan football games for three, sometimes four hours at a time, I thought to myself that maybe the problem is not just out there. Maybe the problem is in here, in my own heart as well. A true and honest examination of my own consumption of sports does not merely focus on whether or not I spend Sunday afternoon and evening watching the Super Bowl or other games, but extends to my consumption of sports during the entire week. My neighbor may struggle with the temptation to spend the Sabbath watching sports and I may not. But do I struggle with the temptation to spend too much time watching games and checking scores during the week?

Let me be clear, I’m not trying to guilt you (or me) into not watching sports. This is a legitimate activity for a Christian to engage in. But as with all things, each one of us must take a balanced approach and examine the circumstances of our lives when deciding how we engage in this activity. It’s different for each person. So how do we proceed? How do we decide on the amount of time we may devote to sports? How do we know when we may watch sports? There are a few principles we may use to guide us in these decisions.

First, as my pastor has aptly described it, “Has ball become Baal?” consider the possibility that sports is becoming an idol. Do we devote so much time to the activity that it is taking away from time we must be devoting to other things like family, public worship, and private Bible study? Is our consumption of sports that which causes us to forget the name of our God and stretch out our hands to a strange god

(Ps. 44:20)? Consider the first part of the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of idolatry. "That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry...and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him" (Lord's Day 34). The positive side of the first commandment is that we "rightly know the only true God." Has my entertainment by sports turned into an idol? Am I spending more time with my favorite players on the TV than I am with my God? If I spend four hours watching a football game on a Saturday afternoon, would I be willing to devote the same amount of time to reading and studying God's word even in a whole week?

Second, we must consider our identity. When speaking to our classmates, coworkers, or other acquaintances do we define ourselves by our team colors or by our identity in Christ? Do we find ourselves saying things like, "I bleed maize and blue" or "I am a Spartan (or a Hawkeye)"? Would we be bold enough to say things like, "I am Christ's" or "Christ is mine"? While talking after church, are we more likely to discuss sports than the sermon? In everyday conversation, is it always about this or that team, or are we able to put ourselves "out there" and talk about a Bible passage or a book we just read that really apply to the circumstances in our life?

Third, and more applicable to the Super Bowl and other Sunday sports, consider what we are telling God when we flip on the TV on Sunday afternoon or evening. By this action it is as if we are telling God, "you had your time this morning, now it's time for me." By this action, we are now desecrating the Sabbath, because we are not keeping the entire day.

What's the big deal if I spend a little bit of time in front of the TV on Sunday if I still go to church twice? Think about what the Sabbath day is a picture of. It points to the eternal Sabbath in glory, where all earthly cares and activities will be laid aside. We will spend eternity in worship of God. We will not be sitting in front of a TV, mindlessly entertaining ourselves. We will be engaged in constant praise of our God and our Savior Jesus Christ with the hosts of God's elect. Therefore, we should devote our entire day to worship of God and fellowship with members of Christ's body.

As you examine the circumstances of your life and consider how much time you may devote to sports, stay balanced. Watch your favorite team, but don't let it define you. Root for your favorite players, but be better acquainted with the people in God's word. Raise your children to enjoy playing and watching sports, but more importantly, raise them to enjoy covenant fellowship with their God even more. As with all the activities and entertainment available to us, direct your involvement in sports using the principles laid out in scripture.

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