

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

"...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE..." ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

VOLUME 3

NOVEMBER 5, 2017

ISSUE 19

SPORTS IN THE BIBLE

By Andrew Dow

It may come as a surprise to you, but I enjoy watching, playing, and talking about sports. It's true that sports can unnecessarily fill our time and distract us from important things. However, when kept in its proper place, sports can be valuable. Through sports, for instance, you may be able to establish meaningful connections with the people around you. Did you know that we see this in the New Testament?

No one in the New Testament talks about sports more than Paul, and nowhere does Paul more clearly talk about sports than 1 Corinthians 9. We read in the text,

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:24–27).

The sports analogies Paul draws here are likely an allusion to the *Isthmian Games*. This sporting event was held just outside the city of Corinth. Much like the Olympics, the Isthmian Games featured athletes competing in contests of strength, speed, and endurance. Paul calls to mind these well known Isthmian Games to teach an important lesson.

In this context Paul is addressing the appropriate attitudes toward **“meats sacrificed to idols”** (1 Cor 8:1). Paul argues that, since idols are fake and powerless (1 Cor 8:4), meat sacrificed to idols is just meat. **“However not all men have this knowledge”** (1 Cor 8:7). What should a Christian’s response be when his brother conscientiously objects to eating meat sacrificed to idols? Paul wrote, **“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.... I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel”** (1 Cor 9:19–23). It is at this point that Paul turns to sports.

Allow me to paraphrase Paul: *“Don’t you know about the Isthmian Games? Greece’s best athletes train their bodies to win a temporary prize. On the other hand, our prize is eternal! How much more should we train ourselves so that we can ‘run our race’ and ‘knock out’ our enemy.”* These Christians didn’t want to give up their freedom (*i.e.*, the ability to eat meat). Paul’s analogy informed them in no uncertain terms that, if they want to win, they will have to give up whatever it takes to win. They will do the hard work necessary, just like the world’s best athletes, to reach their goal. As a coach of mine once told me: “No pain, no gain.”

This is not the only sports analogy in the New Testament. Inspired authors frequently used sports (see Gal 2:2; 5:7; Phil 2:16; 2 Tim 2:5; 4:7; Heb 12:1). Instances can also be found in the Old Testament.

What do we make of all this? What lessons can we learn? *First, we should be looking for spiritual lessons all around us.* Maybe Baseball is not your favorite past time. What is? Football? Hunting? Cooking? Sewing? Writing?

Art? Whatever your hobby is, find spiritual parallels and learn from it.

Second, use your hobbies (sports, cooking, drawing, etc.) to make meaningful connections with and teach spiritual lessons to others. This is exactly what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 9. This is essentially what Jesus does in his parables (*i.e.*, He uses an everyday story to teach a spiritual lesson). We often wonder how to start conversations with or teach people about the gospel. Is there a big game on TV? Talk about how hard the players work to win. Are you working on a sewing project? Talk about the importance of following the pattern. Are you making a work of art? Talk about the Creator and His masterpiece. Like Paul and Jesus, use ordinary things to point to an extraordinary savior!

THIRD JOHN: MORE ON TRUTH & LOVE

By Andrew Dow

In a previous article we considered Second John in which a church is encouraged to maintain truth relentlessly and love others endlessly. That these two concepts can coexist is difficult for our minds to grasp. But they must. The book of Third John contains the same themes, but is written to an individual: **“to the beloved Gaius, whom I LOVE in TRUTH”** (v. 1, *emph. mine*). In this letter Gaius is praised for his own and provoked to future truth and love.

Truth and Love in Gaius’ Life (vv. 2–8): John was happy to hear from others that Gaius was walking in truth (vv. 2–4). Walking in truth led Gaius to treat brethren (even strangers) with love (vv. 5–8). In these verses, Gaius is held up as an example of how to live out what John wrote in

Second John: truth and love coexisting.

Truth and Love in Others' Lives (vv. 9–12): John gives two examples. Diotrephes was a poor example of truth and love (vv. 9–10). He disregarded John's letter (2 John?) and acted in ways that needed to change. He did not love the brethren, instead he **"loves to be first among them"** (v. 9). Don't be like Diotrephes. Instead, be like Demetrius, a good example of truth and love (v. 11–12). Those whom Demetrius loved and the truth which he kept spoke well of him. Be like Demetrius!

As in his second epistle, John **"had many things to write to [Gaius],"** but these things could wait until they met **"face to face"** (vv. 13–14). The things written in this letter, however, were of the utmost important and could not wait. May each of us be committed to truth and love.

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:
Elders: What
Are They?

PM LESSON:
Stepping Up to
Stoop Down

"GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES..."
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)