

Worshipping the God of Sports

1 Timothy 4:8

Let the Games begin! That cry has been heard for many years. As far back as 776 BC, determined athletes have been striving for that coveted prize; a laurel of olive leaves. To-day, the prizes are gold, silver, and bronze medallions. And in order to encourage their amateur athletes; many countries have added many incentives. Some are even offering gold bars to their victorious competitors. Apparently, the term amateur has been re-defined. Wouldn't it make sense, just to open it up to whoever wants to participate?

And besides financial rewards to stimulate the athletes; the Games have had a reputation for being a bastion of banned substances. For many years, steroids were a regular dietary supplement for the Soviet bloc. In order to curtail that kind of activity, athletes are subject to rigorous drug testing. The apparent decrease in positive results, doesn't mean necessarily that these additives have been completely given up on. There are unscrupulous chemists working on other stimulants; which are not currently detectible.

The world-wide sports community is also trying to clean up the drug scene. What are the players going to do? Sports are big money to-day. And many of them are looking for substitutes. On a recent radio interview, a sportscaster was recounting of how players were turning to the spirit realm to get that winning edge. With the New Age being pushed on everybody, from school and up; many use yoga. Over the years, there has been pyramid power, crystals, corn dolls etc. You might ask; which is better? Does it matter; demons are still demons.

The born-again Christian can pray to Our Heavenly Father, in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit of God can empower the believers to help them. There are some interesting examples in the Bible with Samson, a judge in Israel.

Judges 14: 6 - And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

Judges 14: 19 - And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

Now, I am not sure if there are any modern equivalents to these events. They would either be considered as cruel to animals, or just politically incorrect. But if he was in any contact sport, his opponents wouldn't stand

a chance. And woe to any referee who tried to give him a game misconduct penalty.

Judges 15: 14 to 16 - And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. The IOC is always looking for new events; maybe this would be an interesting one. It would definitely compliment the tossing of the kyber.

In the New Testament, there are some interesting incidents.

Acts 8: 39 & 40 - And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Philip would have really cleaned up in the high jump, the long jump, the hop, skip and jump etc.

There was another major sporting event about 2000 years ago. What started in Rome on a small scale, kept ballooning bigger and not better.

What started with a few gladiators, had to evolve, to keep the blood-thirsty tyrants and starving masses pre-occupied.

And after Nero burned down the slums of Rome, so he could have a new palace; a scapegoat was needed to deflect criticism away from the emperor. Who did he implicate? There was a group of people, who wouldn't swear allegiance to the emperors. And they wouldn't fight back, like the Jews. The Christians. I won't go into all the gory details of what happened to them. But they did everything that their deranged minds could imagine.

These events have not been just about sports. Religion has always been a part of it. The Early Games were dedicated to Zeus, the main Greek god. The Roman games were dedicated to Jupiter, and then the emperor. In Greece, the process involved the lighting of the flame from Mount Olympus. This can be seen in the modern re-enactments; lead by a cult priestess. This symbolises fire coming down from heaven to mankind.

Not being a worshipper of the pagan cult; I prefer, and adhere to what the True and Living God, and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ has done.

If people want tremendous displays of fire from heaven; just read the Bible. 1 Kings 18: 17 to 40 - And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have

forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Balaam. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under . And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it , and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at the

time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

And in spite of what some say, the age of miracles is not over.

In the book, "Like a Mighty Wind", many signs and wonders occurred in Indonesia. One of them involved walking on water; to cross a flood swollen river. Also someone was raised from the dead. Praise the Lord!

Isn't it good to see things like that happen? It just confirms what Our Lord Jesus Christ set up.

Mark 16: 14 to 18 - Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. For some reason, sports are not given the same coverage as it is in the main media to-day. But there are some references.

2 Samuel 2: 12 to 17 - And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise. Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkathhazzurim, which is in Gibeon. And there was a very sore

battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.

Amazing; even back then, fights broke out in sporting events.

Even though David was watching the sheep, he had opportunities to play.

1 Samuel 17: 34 to 40 - And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee. And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

Whereas, sports are played in leisure time; it is not really mentioned in the New Testament; as many of the believers were slaves; or very poor, and had to work long hours to provide for their families.

There was one game that many believers did get involved in.

That was the gladiatorial contests in the Roman arenas.

It seems that Paul had some of these encounters.

2 Timothy 4: 17 - Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, & strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

Worshipping the gods was part of the ancients being involved in the games. Are there any tell-tale signs to indicate that it is still going on? If not, then why are many people wearing clothing dedicated to the gods? Nike is a god of victory. The bull with bloody horns is baal. How many athletes are using familiar spirits, or other occult items, like yoga; to attain success?

Is this something new, or has it been around for a long time? Tertullian, an Early Church father was appalled at what was going on at the games; that he spoke out firmly against it. Christians who were absorbed with them, had a noticeable decline in their spiritual growth and Christian witness.

Now, people all over the world get very passionate about their sports.

But, is it having any effect on their general health; or are they just spectators and hooligans?

Does the Bible say anything about the sports craze? 1 Timothy 4:8 - For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

When we were an agrarian society, people were much more fit. But now that we are in the Information Age, most people are too sedentary. So, we have to be more active, to keep ourselves in shape. Don't forget walking; it's cheap to be involved in. No expensive uniforms; no expensive tickets to get in, etc. And get your children out playing, and away from the TV and computer.

Where should our priorities be? Paul gives preference to spiritual growth over involvement with physical activities, including sports. Is this the norm to-day? Whenever there is a scheduling conflict between sports and Church; which one wins out? And why does it seem that so many of these events; from childhood up, are held on Sundays?

From the beginning, God wanted our complete attention. Do you know how often we are reminded of this?

Jeremiah 24: 7 - And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

Jeremiah 31: 33 - But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 32: 36 to 40 - And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

Ezekiel 11: 19 to 21 - And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be

their God. But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 14: 10,11 - And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him ; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 37: 21 to 23 - And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 37: 27 - My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Zechariah 8: 7,8 - Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

2 Corinthians 6: 14 to 18 - Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Hebrews 8: 8 to 13 - For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will

make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant , he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

So, in both the Old and New Testament, Our Lord tells us of His Love for us, and what He wants to do with us. The question is: why do we let so many distractions get between us and Our Lord Jesus Christ? This is called idolatry. Exodus 20: 1 to 6 - And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

I hope that no-one is going to say that there are not any idols involved in sports; either in playing or spectating. How many wear clothing advocating their extreme loyalty to their favourite player or team? How many know the stats of their sport, but know next to nothing about the Bible? How many impressionable youths idolize certain sport figures; only to have their trust betrayed when they are caught doping etc. How many sport figures boast of how many women they have had relations with? A major NBA player recently boasted that he had had 14,000 women. It's almost like the Olympics; as was written about in a new book released just before the 2012 Summer Games began.

It has been said that sports brings out the best in people. I guess that the fighting in the NHL must be a throwback to the Ne-ander-thals. And how many careers of good players have been cut short by goons, just out to get them. Violence and abuse has unfortunately cropped up in many sports.

How many incidences are there of coaches abusing young players? And it seems that there is more rough play in the stands, than on the ice or field in children's games. Parents have even been thrown out for abusive behaviour.

This is not a good witness for Christians. If we followed the example of Our

Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples, things would be better.

Let us remember, that our main adversaries are not the other team.

Ephesians 6: 10 to 18 - Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places . Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Sports are often heralded as the only way to get people to work together; especially children.

There are other options available to increase responsibility and sharing.

These include doing chores at home, helping the family business, doing volunteer work for the elderly or disabled etc. This helps them to develop important life skills that are needed. It helps them to become responsible citizens in society.

Another ungodly trait of the sports world is the gambling on the results.

Activity here and in casinos and with lotteries is creating another major problem; gambling addiction. It has been noticed that the poor are the main ones to make the bets; and usually losing. They would be better off, by keeping their money and using it wisely.

The Book of Proverbs has a lot of good advice on the proper way of handling your finances.

Proverbs 13: 11 - Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

But one of the major objections to the over-indulgence or the worshipping of sports; is that it is taking up too much time in most people's lives. What effect is it having on people? It seems that there is a growing problem with some who can't control themselves.

Mail On-Line - August 14, 2012.

Sports-mad pensioner dies in house fire started when TV overheated 'as he watched hours of Olympics coverage'

A man has watched so much Olympics on TV that it blew up, killing him in a

freak house fire. Fire investigators believe the man died when his TV caught alight from overheating after being left switched on or on standby too long. Perhaps it was Britain's growing medal tally or his keen love of sport that kept Peter Horbury watching but it was a tragic and unusual end for the man who lived alone.

By being so absorbed in it; people are not aware of the many important things that are going on in the world. There are usually elections going on somewhere; but how many really pay attention to them? Most jurisdictions report declining voter turnout. Is it public apathy or are people just interested in something amusing; like sports? There are big economic problems all over the world; but how many are trying to clean up their financial situations?

And speaking of money; sports is big bucks. From the extremely high salaries to the high ticket prices; if big money wasn't involved, many wouldn't be interested. Even in children's sports; high fees and expensive uniforms, are making it hard for some parents to put their children in.

What did children do centuries ago, before all this modern sports stuff?

Now there are many religious players, even some believers too. But how effective are they being for Christ; being involved in the mainly ungodly profession of sports?

And if the average Christian spent as much time in Our Lord's Service; the whole world would be saved. If the average Christian spent as much of their money in Our Lord's Service; many destitute believers would be better off. And when Christians start living like Our Lord Jesus Christ; the world would sit up and take notice.

Acts 2: 42 to 47 - And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men , as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

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