

Christian Competition?

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Best-selling shampoo in America, . . . sexiest smile . . . Bayer Aspirin is better.” Advertisers seek to cajole us into buying their products by appealing to our sense of competition. A national characteristic of the American people is that we are constantly seeking the biggest, the brightest, the newest, the best. Every aspect of our lives has been geared to that end. In our jobs, tremendous pressure is placed on us to be best, to get promotions. In school we are urged by our parents and teachers to be the best in the class, to get the highest grade. In our social life, we strive to be the most beautiful, the most popular, the most prominent. In sports, competition is a major factor and the desire to win and be number one sometimes overrides all other considerations. So competition becomes a motivation for at least a part of every aspect of our lives until we are totally immersed in competition. How must we as Christians regard competition? Does it affect our Christianity?

I believe that extreme competition can be and is deprecatory to the Christian life. I believe extreme competition leads to self-glorification, dissatisfaction, coveting and in short becomes “another god” that we worship.

Because we are the best or the highest in the class we begin to feel a smug satisfaction with ourselves. Because we got the big promotion, we note conceitedly that good work pays off in the end. Because our team is first in the state, as a part of that team, we feel that our athletic prowess has led us to the top. Constant success seems to assure us that success is an indication of superiority. We are better than our neighbor. Perhaps all men are equal in God’s sight but we can’t help but feel that we are perhaps a little more equal. No longer do we look to God as the ultimate source of blessings. After all does not “the Lord help those who help themselves?” Although we may send up a hasty thanks for His Grace bestowed on us, we have a niggling suspicion that even if we did not entirely bring this blessing about, at least we had a hand in it. Yet we are forced to compete and I would be the first to admit that competition is almost unavoidable. Although consistent success may lead to self-glorification, consistent failure can lead to self-hatred and coveting. Because we are not V.I.P. number 1, we are sure we are a nobody. Because we were passed up for the promotion again, we torture ourselves with the thought of our inadequacy. Because our talent is small, we become resentful and are apt to bury it. Not only do we begin to hate ourselves but we begin to feel resentful of the one who gave the talents, “I knew thee, that thou art an hard man” (Matt. 25:24). We feel slighted by God and ignoring our purpose in life, feel worthless.

In the face of our redundant failures, we look to our neighbors and begin to covet. We cannot love our neighbors because we long to be like them, to have what they have. We cannot love God because we are dissatisfied with His wisdom as shown in our lives. We cannot accept ourselves because we have begun to believe that success measures worth.

Perhaps the real danger of competition is that in an extreme it begins to be an end to itself. No longer do we view God’s creation for its beauty and its indication of His omnipotence, instead we see it as an implement or detriment to our success. In school what becomes important is not education itself but where it gets us. In our jobs what matters more than a job well done is its material rewards. In our sports a well-played game loses precedence over victory. Our lives begin to retain meaning only in so far as where it gets us. Even in our Christian lives we are urged by the big gospel sellers to win the world for Christ (emphasis on winning). Competition

becomes a god who demands our complete obeisance.

As Christians, responsible citizens of God's Kingdom, it is surely our duty to cultivate and multiply the talent God has given us but always keeping in mind that through ourselves we can do nothing. As Christians we must learn to be content in whatsoever state we are, we must accept and trust God's will for our lives. In a sense as sinful creatures we can never succeed not even in the smallest way, but in a larger sense as recipients of God's Grace we can never fail "If He be for us who can stand against us." We must never forget that God judges not as men. Didn't he choose a small uneducated band of fisherman to be His apostles? We, as His children, must recognize the irrelevance of competition and ask ourselves how much does it rule our lives. Are we willing to "Gain the whole world and lose our own soul"?

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