

Whatever Happened to Sportsmanship?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Dr. Michael Helms

Vacation Bible School Sunday

July 22, 2018

How many of you like to play sports? How many of you like to watch other people play sports?

When you play a game, what is the goal of the game?

The goal is to win. The goal is to do your best and hope you are better than your opponent.

Just to make sure I am right about this, is there anyone here that likes to lose?

I didn't think so. We all hate losing.

But we are not going to win all the time. All of us that play sports or games are going to experience losing.

Here's a good question. When you win a game, and you have played well and defeated your opponent, how do you want your opponent to act toward you?

- A. Do you want your opponent to say, "You won, but I was really better than you? You just got lucky. Next time I'll beat you so bad you'll be calling for your mama."
- B. Would you want your opponent to be so mad about losing that he or she just walked away without shaking your hand or saying anything to you?
- C. Would you want your opponent to accuse you of cheating or say that you didn't play fair and that's the only reason you won?
- D. Would you want your opponent to shake your hand and say, "Good game, congratulations!"

We want people to have good sportsmanship and congratulate us for winning, so that's how we should act when we win.

Sometimes when we win, we brag about it and make the losers angry because we rub in their loss.

Sometimes when we lose, we don't show good sportsmanship.

When I was in the ninth grade, I broke a bone in my hand, and I missed the last five games of the football season, so I didn't dress out with the team anymore.

It was near the end of the season, and we were playing our rival team, Clio. They were beating us really bad.

In those days, a lot of men would walk the sidelines along the fence so they could be near the action instead of sitting in the stands. So I was walking along the fence line with the men. I was standing beside Chuck Caraway.

Chuck's brother, Chet, was our quarterback. Chuck was really angry that we were getting beat by our rival. Like a lot of young men, he longed for the days when he played ball, no doubt thinking Clio would not be winning if he were playing.

Suddenly, one of the offensive players for Clio came running down the sidelines, and he was going to run right by us and score. Chuck's brother Chet was chasing him, but it was obvious that he wasn't going to catch him.

So Chuck jumped over the fence. He ran on the field and he tackled the Clio player. He threw him to the ground and then he jumped back over the fence.

Realizing what he had just done, he immediately began walking toward the exit.

The Clio player got up wondering what happened.

The Clio fans were yelling at the officials.

The Louisville fans were asking, "Who just ran on the field and tackled that player?"

Of course, the official saw what happened and awarded the Clio player a touchdown.

Chuck hated to lose. We all do. But when we lose, we must learn to control our emotions.

When we win, we must learn to control our emotions, too.

I come from the state of Alabama and where Alabama and Auburn Football fans sometimes lose their minds when they lose a game. They can do hateful and mean stuff to each other just because they don't like the other's team.

A few years ago, an Alabama fan poisoned the famous Oak trees at Toomer's Corner in Auburn. The Auburn fans loved to celebrate and throw toilet paper in the trees when they won a game, especially when they beat Alabama, which isn't very often. But this man had hate in his heart, and he poisoned the trees, and they eventually died.

He later bragged about it and he got caught and was arrested and convicted.

Playing sports can be a wonderful thing, but whether you win or lose, God is interested in the attitude you carry in your heart.

The Bible says that “You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.”
Philippians 2:5

Can you say that with me? “You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.”
Philippians 2:5.

Whether you win or lose.

You see – if you are a disciple of Jesus – that includes being like Jesus even in how you play sports.

So the question is, “What kind of attitude did Jesus have?”

This past baseball season, Ty Koehn was pitching in Mounds View, Minnesota for his high school team in the semi-finals of the state baseball tournament against a team from Torino Grace, Minnesota.

The game came down to a final batter who happened to be Ty’s friend, Jack Kocon. These two players had known each other since they were young boys.

Ty struck Jack out sending his team into the finals, but instead of running to celebrate with his team, Jack jogged from the mound to home plate to hug and console his friend, who just made the last out for his team.

Only after spending time with his disappointed friend, did he go and celebrate with his teammates.

Later when asked about the moment he said, “I knew I had to say something. Our friendship was more important than just the silly outcome of a game. It just felt right.”

I think Ty demonstrated the attitude of Jesus because Jesus is concerned about people more than a game.

1. Always remember, people are more important than games.

Don’t lose a friend over a game. Don’t lose your witness over a game.

I realize games are important. No one wants to lose because you practice hard and sacrifice a lot for your sport. Emotions can run high.

But Jesus died and was raised from the dead for people, not for a game.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus loves the people we are playing against just as much as he loves us.

Sometimes we think we are the only ones that worked hard and practiced hard.

Sometimes we think we are the only ones that prayed before we ran on the field or jumped in the pool or squared off on the wrestling mat or stepped out on the balance beam or ran around the track, but our opponent and our opponent's families say prayers to God, too.

So, remember, people are more important than games.

2. God is more important than your sport.

One of the Ten Commandments says, "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3).

The Bible teaches that we are not supposed to have any other gods before the Lord. God is supposed to be number one in your life. Nothing else is to matter more than God, and nothing else is to be more important than God in our lives.

We need to be careful that our sport does not become more important than our God.

People see how you act when you play or coach or cheer. They can tell if you have the attitude of Jesus.

Nothing was more important to Jesus than being obedient to the Father.

Jesus was so obedient to God that he was willing to give up everything and obediently follow God, even to the cross.

The Bible says that Jesus, "gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." Philippians 2:5-8

One big question every family and every child that plays a sport has to wrestle with is this: "Is my sport more important than my God?"

If you are never willing to give up anything related to your sport in order to place God first, then it may be time to ask, "Is my sport more important than God?"

3. Your sport can be a place for your faith in Jesus to shine.

God wants to permeate the sport you play. God doesn't want to be left at home or on the sidelines. That's the reason why our attitude is so important.

God wants to be with you as you play and God wants to use you to influence others through your sport.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says that "we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

All of us have seen a baseball manager go out of the dugout and on to a baseball field to talk to an umpire. He goes out on the field to represent his team about some issue hoping to win the umpire over to his point of view.

Sometimes, the manager gets really angry and yells, kicks dirt, and makes a lot of noise until the umpire throws him out.

There have been some really ugly examples of how not to solve your problems displayed on national television.

Paul reminds us that you and I are Christ's representatives, so we need to reflect the attitude of Christ.

In all that we are doing, even when we play sports, coach, or cheer as fans, Paul says it is as if God is making his appeal through us. We represent Him. We are His ambassadors.

We cannot disconnect faith in God from how we act, not even when we play sports.

If we don't display good sportsmanship, people notice.

If we try to cheat to gain an unfair advantage, people notice.

If we play an illegal player people notice.

If we pretend to catch a ball when we really didn't catch it, fake an injury on the soccer field, inflict pain on an opponent with the intention of knocking him out of the game in football, taunt an opposing player, use performance-enhancing drugs, or tamper with equipment, people notice these things.

We all want to win, but the goal of sportsmanship is not merely to win, but to pursue victory with honor.

What kind of attitude do you have when you play sports? Is it all about winning or is it about winning people over with your attitude?

Today, some of you may need to change the way you are playing sports.

For some of you, your attitude may not reflect the attitude of Jesus. You might be a bad sport when you win or when you lose.

Some of you might have made your sport more important than Jesus.

Most of us can think about times when we haven't been the best ambassador for Jesus because we have placed too much emphasis on a game or who won, and not enough emphasis on building relationships with others.

Let's not let sportsmanship die.

Let's strive to have the attitude of Jesus.

If you know in your heart that you don't have the attitude of Jesus, but would like to become one of his disciples, during our next song, if you come, I will pray with you and ask the Lord to forgive you, to change your heart and give you the attitude of Jesus.