

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS—IDOLATRY

~Other Speakers G-L: Allan Halton:

I'll probably be in trouble for this one, but I commend it to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Tim Tebow is the U.S. football star who recently made quite a stir for having John 3:16 in the—the what do you call it—the blacking below his eyes. It was his way of openly declaring to all the world that he is a Christian. Tebow also bows on the field and openly prays to Jesus for help throughout the game. He thanks Him when he makes a great play.

Tebow is not the first in a major professional sport with a reputation for being a Christian, but the media have sensationalized him now, drawing worldwide attention to the man who bows on one knee and prays right there on the field. Tebowing, as it has been dubbed, is the latest fad for thousands, many of whom are not even into sports.

Tebow's fame recently went viral when he made a "miraculous" pass that won a game that landed his team in some kind of playoffs. Suddenly the sports world exploded. Did this man really have Jesus on his side? Detractors howled against him; for others, expectations were high that his team was destined for victory.

But according to the news they were soundly trounced in the first game. I didn't hear if Tebow bowed and thanked the Lord for this as well.

Now, I don't doubt that Tim Tebow is an upstanding Christian who is walking in the light he has. He has the reputation for being a clean young Christian man in a day when clean is a dirty word. That's very commendable.

But I want to ask a question. What is the difference between the kind of Christianity in which you can be involved in one of the world's greatest forms of idolatry and still be a Christian—and the kind of Christianity that totally parts ways with all that?

Here is an account of what happened during the powerful revival that swept Wales in 1905. It's from a book called, "The Invasion of Wales by the Spirit" by James A. Stewart.

A sense of the Lord's Presence was everywhere. His Presence was felt in the homes, on the streets, in the mines, factories and schools and even in the drinking saloons. So great was His Presence felt that even the places of amusement and carousal became places of holy awe. Many were the instances of men entering taverns, ordering drinks and then turning on their heels and leaving them untouched.

Wales up to this time was in the grip of football fever when tens of thousands of working-class men thought and talked only of one thing. They gambled also on the result of the games. Now the famous football players themselves got converted and joined the open-air meetings to testify what glorious things the Lord had done for them. Many of the teams were disbanded as the players got converted and the stadiums were empty....

The gambling and alcohol businesses lost their trade and the theatres closed down from lack of patronage. Football during this time was forgotten by both players and fans, though nothing was mentioned from the pulpits about the evils of football. In this country which had a general reputation of being 'football mad' the train for taking the crowds to the international trial match was found to be almost empty! The people had a new life and new interests.

One of football's sisters in entertainment—the theatre—was also abandoned at that time.

Theatrical companies made sure that they did not come to Wales as they knew that there they would go bankrupt.

What kind of Christianity is this? Teams shutting down because the players turned to Jesus? My. The stadiums empty? How awesome. And how strange! Hence my question. What is the difference between that kind of Christianity, and our brand? This. The revival in Wales brought people so face to face with spiritual reality that these other things simply could not compete. Professional sports and entertainment became exposed for what they actually are—the idolatrous and empty vanities of this world. It wasn't a matter of people being told they shouldn't be involved in such evils. Suddenly they were caught up in a current of

“love, vast as an ocean, lovingkindness as a flood...” That’s the first line of the hymn that became what was called the love song of the revival. People were broken by an awareness of the love of God as revealed in Calvary’s Cross. They abandoned their former pursuits. Why go to the games? Or the theatre? What is entertainment when you have the love of God now, and the joy of the Lord?

Yet in our kind of Christianity you can apparently take Jesus to the games or the theatre with you. Apparently He is glad to go along. Our Jesus apparently hasn’t got what it takes to beat them. So, you know how it is. If you can’t beat them you join them. If you are a movie star who becomes a Christian, now you become a Christian movie star. If you are a terrific professional football player, now you become a terrific Christian professional football player. The love of God that compelled Jesus to lay down His life on the altar of Calvary’s Cross is an embarrassment to this kind of Christianity, and entirely out of place.

I don’t think anyone who loves Jesus could knowingly get involved in idolatry. And I have no doubt in my mind that professional sports is abominable idolatry. Yet countless Christians are involved in it either as spectators or players. So it’s a matter of light—seeing that the entertainment industry—I include professional sports in the entertainment industry—has become horrible idolatry. It is enmity against the holy God, who created man to love and worship and glorify Him alone.

There’s nothing at all wrong with a friendly game of hockey or basketball, or teaching children skills in sports. But look what has happened to professional sports of every kind. Surely we see this. The money involved makes you nauseous. It’s what God did when he gave Israel the quail in the desert. They cried for flesh and he gave it to them till it came out their nostrils. It was a judgment on them. The same now. The salaries they get now are decadent, to say nothing of the multiplied billions spent advertising a lifestyle that is brazen enmity against God. My advice? Run from it! It is the judgment of a grieved and angry God. And I believe we will yet see very severe judgments in the areas of professional sports and entertainment—these idols of Egypt.

Yes, it is idolatry. When young men and women sacrifice their lives on the idol altars of money and fame, it is idolatry. Lives that Jesus bled and died for on the altar of Calvary’s Cross go up in smoke on the idol altars—sacrificed to the enjoyment of millions still in darkness. There they are by the millions—out in the stands watching the games, or in front of the TV.

The incredulous thing is, even the Christians have sold out to this. It doesn’t seem to enter our minds to consider why it is that these millions in darkness are sitting together in the idol’s temple—the stadium or the arena or the living room in front of the TV—and to ask why it is that we Christians are sitting there beside them—or playing for them.

“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...” (2 Cor.6.16,17).

You mean, like the Lord Jesus Christ, I too am a temple of the living God? But can you envision Jesus Christ Himself sitting in the stadium cheering for His team... or playing for those in the stands?