



The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 9

April 30, 2023

No. 18

“You Shall Have No Other gods Before Me.”

It is okay to like sports. It is another thing for sports to become your god. All over the world are ancient stadiums that have hosted all types of events. Many modern day stadiums still use the architecture designs of the old Roman stadiums. In Rome, Italy the Circus Maximus stood as Rome's largest venue measuring 2,037 x 387 feet. It could hold a crowd of 150,000+. NASCAR's largest track is the Bristol Tennessee Motor Speedway with a capacity of 146,000, but the largest venue in the world is the Indianapolis Speedway with permanent seating for 257,325 people. The largest football stadium is still the University of Michigan stadium with a capacity of 107,601. The largest soccer stadium is located in North Korea with a capacity of 114,000.

The Romans would dedicate the games and events to the gods. It is not uncommon to hear sports fans today make reference to “the sports gods”, “the gods of football” or “the golf gods”. When we follow the money” it is becomes very obvious just how much man worships his games. The global sports market consists of many subcategories. The Sports Apparel global market is estimated at \$191 billion dollars; Sports Equipment \$143 billion dollars; Athletic Shoes \$50.9 billion. (1); Sports Betting; Broadcasting; but all total it is calculated to be somewhere around a \$500-600 billion dollar global industry. (2)

The highest paid athlete in the world is the professional soccer player Lionel Messi who makes \$75 million salary/winnings and \$55 million in endorsements. Runner-up is basketball player LeBron James making \$41.2 million salary/winnings and \$80 million in endorsements. According statista.com (which is the source for these numbers), the Dallas Cowboys have the highest franchise value of any sport team in the world worth \$5.7 billion dollars.(3)

Do you want to learn one more figure that will blow your mind? The global sports market is a subcategory of the global recreation market which is estimated to be \$1,900.67 billion in 2023. (4)

It is not hard to spot from these statistics that there is a worldwide problem of offering worship to the gods of sport and recreation.

Several passages come to mind.

“... You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.” Matthew 4:10

“You shall have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:3

“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Matthew 6:24

"The first of all the commandments is: 'HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' This is the first commandment." Mark 12:29-30

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” Colossians 3:1-2

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

Very eye opening wouldn't you say?

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(1) [statista.com/topics/8468/global-sports-market/#topicOverview](https://www.statista.com/topics/8468/global-sports-market/#topicOverview)

(2) [businesswire.com/news/home/20190514005472/en/Sports---614-Billion-Global-Market-Opportunities-Strategies-to-2022---ResearchAndMarkets.com](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20190514005472/en/Sports---614-Billion-Global-Market-Opportunities-Strategies-to-2022---ResearchAndMarkets.com)

(3) [statista.com/topics/8468/global-sports-market/#topicOverview](https://www.statista.com/topics/8468/global-sports-market/#topicOverview)

(4) [globenewswire.com/en/news-release/2023/04/21/2652010/0/en/Recreation-Global-Market-Report-2023.html](https://www.globenewswire.com/en/news-release/2023/04/21/2652010/0/en/Recreation-Global-Market-Report-2023.html)

Unthinking Christians

Matt Hennecke

I recently saw an email appeal for prayers from a sister about her hospitalized brother. She wrote, he *"...is a Christian but after having been really hurt by some unthinking Christians, has not been back to church in about 40 years."*

All I can do is shake my head. How often have we heard something similar? Uncaring, unthinking, or unloving Christians drive away the very souls Christ has died to save. All his efforts, all his work, all his blood, undone. Imagine an artist creating beautiful works of art but being followed by a scoundrel who destroys the art before the paint even dries. Jesus is the Artist and He's still working on us. The paint hasn't yet dried. Are we protecting His works in progress or destroying them? We can spend hours talking about God's grace and then make one harsh, hurtful comment and all the good can be undone. Am I surprised? No. Am I disheartened? Yes.

I'm not surprised because we are *all* flawed. We *all* need help – including those who stand in judgment of others and intentionally or unintentionally drive them away. But I am disheartened because driving away those whom Christ has saved only leads to death. Life is found in Christ, only in Christ.

C.S. Lewis once wrote that when we accept Christ, the road ahead immediately branches: One way leads to love, humility, and compassion for others who, like us, are beset with sin. The other way leads to spiritual pride, self-righteousness, and persecuting zeal. Which road are you on? Do you *draw* others to or *drive* them away from Christ?

Jesus told a parable about those who were self-righteous and treated others with contempt. He said, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

Of course, the source of the problem is twofold. There are some "Pharisees" in local congregations. They feel themselves superior to their brothers and sisters. They make the mistake of comparing themselves to others rather than to Christ. They look down their noses at the flaws of their brethren, ignoring their own. Want a healthy dose of humility? Compare yourself to Christ. Ouch! This should humble even the most self-righteous amongst us.

The other source of the problem is putting our faith in men rather than in Jesus. Get ready. Your brethren will disappoint you. Your brethren will hurt you. They will say and do things that are completely unlike the Son whom they claim to follow. But Jesus won't. He will never disappoint. He will never betray. He will always do what's in your best interest. Put your faith in Him and not in men. Don't leave Him and His bride, the church, because of the harshness of the broken people He is still working to save.

Think on These Things April –May-June 2023 Vol 54 No.2