

Statement of Philosophy for Christian School Athletics

“And exercise thyself rather unto godliness. 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.” I Timothy 4:7b, 8

Athletic competition was in the apostles’ thoughts as they penned the Scriptures. Biblical references to physical training, competition, boxing, wrestling and running a race imply that athletic competition is not off-limits to followers of Christ. In fact, it can be legitimately included in a believer’s life.

Scripture affirms that bodily exercise does yield a certain profit, but reminds us that it pales in comparison to godliness. And yet, undertaken in a biblical manner *is* an exercise in godliness, because the believer’s body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Thus, any physical conditioning done for the development of “good soldiers of Jesus Christ” is a spiritual exercise. Lamentably, those instances in which biblical values are applied to athletic competitions are exceedingly rare. Christian schools must be the exception.

The curriculum at most Christian schools includes highly visible athletic programs that include believers and non-believers in the stands. Properly conducted, they have great potential for a Christ-honoring testimony. But there are perils which can easily destroy that testimony; perils that can cause ungodly thought and action.

Christian school athletic program leaders must be – first and foremost – trailblazers in godliness. They must serve as mentors who clearly see and avoid the pitfalls, and who warn their students and spectators of the dangers that come with organized sports.

The Peril of Imbalance

***“Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things.”
I Timothy 4:8***

America is a sports-dominated society. There are leagues for every sport, every age and every season. People fixate upon a sport, and then it proceeds to consume their time, thoughts, finances and energies, leaving little time or mental stamina for spiritual interests. Media hype attempts to elevate even the most trivial of athletic events to “Game of the Century” status. Pursuant to the hype, many players are accorded a heroic prestige that provides cover for unwholesome character and highly questionable conduct.

Christian educators have to constantly guard against the peril of imbalance. Christ, not sports, must be the all-consuming passion of anyone saved by grace. In every matter involving our bodies, this biblical injunction must be applied: “Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (I Peter 2:11). A love of sports that surpasses the desire for godliness, that usurps worship and Christian service or that rules the passions and desires, makes an idol of fleshly lust and impoverishes the soul.

Above all else, Christian athletic leaders must exemplify godliness in their personal habits, in their teaching and in the athletic programs they develop. Godliness must always be valued above athletic prowess, and athleticism is a *means* to godliness, never an end in itself. The believer's passion should be, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

The Peril of Worldly Values

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Romans 13:1, 2)

The American sports culture affirms conduct that is at best socially unacceptable and at worst rebellion against God. Those who know Jesus Christ must resist worldly thought and action, and instill respect for authority.

Officials, umpires and referees are the recognized authorities in any athletic event. Yet it has become commonplace for coaches, players and fans to show disrespect, challenging, jeering and taunting them both verbally and with body language. Coaches are expected to "work" the officials in an effort to sway their decisions. The Christian educator must shun even the appearance of this, for it violates Scriptural principle. Athletes, coaches and fans must be taught by word and example to abide by biblical admonitions, recognizing "the powers that be" (e.g., sports officials) to be "ordained of God."

Rules are essential to athletic competition, and they are authoritative. Yet players knowingly break rules, and it is deemed acceptable so long as referees do not see the infraction or choose to enforce the rule. In some circumstances rule-breaking is a game strategy, suggesting that breaking rules is acceptable, "Just as long as we win!" Disregard for law is a hallmark of the wicked, who say in their heart, "there is no God." Christian athletics must never exhibit this spirit of lawlessness by treating rules of the game as "optional."

Reflecting a cultural relativity that is devoid of God-consciousness, athletic directors, coaches, players and fans often measure conduct by purely pragmatic standards. Yet God's Word instructs that decent and orderly conduct must characterize the believer. "And if a man also strive for masteries, *yet* is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully" (II Timothy 2:5).

The Peril of Carnal Passions

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Philippians 2:3, 4

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

Philippians 4:4, 5

Temper outbursts fly in the face of multiple biblical instructions. Yet our secular culture treats them as entertaining, not only permissible but in some cases even justified. Players are encouraged to harass competitors with “trash talk”. Disrespect that is deemed wrong in any other context is valued as good strategy in the game setting.

To various degrees these behaviors and attitudes are accepted within modern sports and athletics. These models, which are prominent in professional and collegiate models, trickle down into youth sports programs for all ages. But the Christian who lives by God’s Word cannot accept any of them.

The Goal of Godliness

*“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do,
do all to the glory of God.”
I Corinthians 10:31*

Christian educators must recognize that sports programs are a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. That singular end is godliness.

Athletics provide a tool for teaching many valuable lessons in godliness. Those lessons include self-control, the value of hard work and practice, sportsmanship regardless of circumstances, consideration of fellow-competitors, and respect for authority. These opportunities for teaching principles of godly living far exceed the importance of a championship that will soon be forgotten.

“Athletes first, winning second” should be the motto of every coach. Each athlete is a complex individual with multiple needs. Each one needs to be saved from sin and self. Each one needs development in Christ-likeness. More important than physical development, spiritual, emotional, social and mental growth are crucial.

“Humble winning and gracious losing” must characterize the Christian school athletic team at the end of every contest. The true score for any event is not to be found on the scoreboard, but in divine approval. By earthly measure, the crucifixion of Christ showed Him to be the loser. But the values of God’s economy are the opposite of human thought. Christ’s crucifixion pleased Jehovah, and was the means to His exaltation to the Father’s right hand.

Adolescent energies can and should be channeled into wholesome, productive activities. Thus, Christian school athletic programs should never reflect society’s norms. Reproach must never be brought upon the name of our Savior. Instead, Christian school athletics should be characterized by lawful striving in order to provide light in a dark world, and to develop students in the image of Christ.

When an athletic contest ends with everything having been done to the glory of God, then everybody wins.

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all,
but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.
And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all
things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an
incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I,
not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and
bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have
preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”
I Corinthians 9:24-27