

Fantasy Football to the Glory of God

It was draft night, and I was on vacation in the middle of the wilderness in Maine. No internet service where I was staying. No coffee shops open past sundown. No bed-and-breakfasts willing to have a stranger sit in their lobby for three hours until midnight for “an important internet meeting”. No way to do my online draft. So, as any fantasy football faithful would do, I got into the car with my wife and we drove slowly through neighborhoods - with a laptop computer trying to tap into someone’s Wi-Fi. “No, officer, we’re not from around here...um I’m sitting in front of this person’s house with my car lights turned off because...” Ok, that last part didn’t happen, but I was ready for it.

Eventually, I did my draft over the phone with a gracious friend (thank you, Seville), and all was well, except my soul. As I went to bed that night, our Lord convicted me about the lengths I would go to fulfill this silly love affair of mine. My faith felt shallow at that moment as He convicted me that, if my drive to seek Him was characterized with the same passion I had just displayed for the imaginary pigsaw, it would be recorded in the annals of church history.

So I began to think...how can someone who loves Christ and wants to live for His glory take part in this imaginary quest for Fantasy glory? The following are some of the questions I processed, my conclusions, and some encouragements for anyone who takes the time to read this.

First, we need to ask the question, “Can playing Fantasy Football be a sin?”. I certainly think so. The consuming competition, the accumulation of useless knowledge, and the wasting away hours of our Lord’s time in trade attempts, waiver-wire research, and game-day worship most certainly can become idolatrous and sinful.

We must ask then, “*Can* a follower of Christ still play fantasy football?”. I must confess that at times I wrestle with joining the Amish and forsaking all that is mutually enjoyed by our culture. I am not yet convinced, however, that this is the answer that most glorifies Jesus. I believe the Scriptures clearly teach it is possible to participate in leisure activities in a Christ-exalting manner (1 Cor. 10:31). We have great freedom in Christ, and this includes enjoying the good gifts of God in times of labor and times of leisure.

A better question might be, “*Should* a disciple of Jesus play Fantasy Football?”. Regarding areas of freedom, we are reminded that “all things are lawful, but all things are not profitable...” (1 Cor. 6:12). The answer must then be “maybe”, if it is profitable to Christ, His kingdom, and you.

How then can we glorify Christ and still enjoy this opportunity to play imaginary General Manager and assemble imaginary teams to defeat our very real friends upon the imaginary gridiron? In the following lines, I present some exhortations in a spirit of grace. I do not intend these to become legalistic rules to bind the heart, but rather grace-filled guidelines to free the soul and honor our Lord. Prayerfully consider these suggestions and allow the Spirit to lead you in the way He desires you to go.

1. Be aware that any good gift from God can quickly become perverted into an idol. Satan tempted our parents in the Garden of Eden and our Lord in the wilderness with good things from the Father in an attempt to turn blessings from above into idolatry from below. In light of this, in your leisure, Fantasy Football or not, remember the warnings of scripture to "...keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn. 5:21) and "my beloved, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). Our tendency is to be drawn toward this mundane, flesh-fulfilling world. So, in whatever form the temptation comes, be watchful to defend your heart (Prov. 4:23). If our Lord ever convicts you that you should refrain from this blessing because it has become an idol, "do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19) and be willing to surrender your team as a burnt offering to the Lord.

2. Remember that we are called by our Lord to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). This means that in everything we do, we ought to be kingdom-minded. Be intentional to use draft parties, game watching, and any winnings you may receive to cultivate fellowship and further the Gospel. If you have people in your league who are not near our Lord, use this as an opportunity for them to see the Gospel at work in your life (Mt. 5:16). I'm not necessarily suggesting you wear your Jesus jersey to the bar on game day to do evangelism, but I encourage you to pray for wisdom, creativity, and courage to use this season for the furthering of God's kingdom.

3. Remember that the players we enlist to score imaginary touchdowns each week are real people created in the image of God who desperately need us to intercede on their behalf. Some of the most heartbreaking interviews I have ever seen came from the players who have blessed my team with Fantasy titles. Several years ago, I witnessed an interview of Tom Brady following one of his Super Bowl victories. During that interview, he explained that he was thankful for winning, but that it just wasn't enough. When asked what he thought he was looking for that would satisfy him, he replied "I wish I knew. I wish I knew." We know the One his soul searches for is Jesus. Let us pray for the people we enlist on our teams. As Paul said, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) and "make supplication for all men" (1 Tim. 2:1). Pray for the believers on their teams who proclaim Christ to them, pray for the chaplains of those teams to have favor with the players for Christ's sake, and pray for God to bring the Gospel to them.

4. If you are playing for money, be careful because "the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Winning money can do weird things to people. It can tempt them to lie, cheat, steal, and make lop-sided trades against feeble-minded opponents. All money we have is the Lord's and, because of that, we will give an account for how we use it. If you are going to pay an entry fee, pay for trades, or whatever else your league requires financially, be careful to remember that it is the Lord's money you are using. Can you use some of His resources for your enjoyment? I believe there is a small, God-glorifying place in our budgets that can be dedicated to personal enjoyment. Do not let this become a place of stumbling however. Prayerfully set a budget for this area of entertainment, sacrifice something else to make room for it, and use most of your resources to fulfill the Great Commission.

5. Guard the time God has given you. When I awake in the morning, it is much easier to use the time before work to look at Fantasy articles or watch ESPN's Sports Center (for the fourth time) than to step away and draw near to my Maker. We are free in Christ to take time for retreat from the daily battles of life, but be ever-mindful of the flesh's desire to claim its rights and to turn

times of rest into times of self-serving rebellion (Haggai 1:3-4). We have few moments upon this earth; let your rests be intentional. One way I am trying to use my desire for Fantasy football to increase my desire for Jesus is committing before the Lord and my co-manager (my wife) that I will not look at my roster, their stats, scores, or Sports Center until I have spent at least 30 minutes with my Lord. This may mean my lunch hour is invested in Bible study rather than eating... some things are just that important (John 4:34). I encourage you to pray for God to help you produce the self-control and passion for Him that only the Spirit can give.

So fellow Fantasy ballas, draft well, trade well, win much, but “whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Your fellow servant of the King,

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