

# Many of Us Share Guilt in Exalting False God of Football

Like the people of ancient times, we still struggle with false gods.

Today's false gods come in the form of money, sexual gratification, fancy homes, political power, romantic love, financial security, our looks, impressive job titles, a collection of some sort, cars, guns and invitations to exclusive gatherings. I could go on.

But one of our biggest - one of my biggest - is sports, particularly football in Texas.

We have gotten so out of hand with football that we are putting the safety and well-being of women at risk. We do this when we do not hold football players to the same ethical and criminal standards as others.

We build impressive gladiatorial arenas for football for players from high school to the pros. AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, is the crown jewel of American football stadiums (at least until the new Los Angeles one is built).

School districts can more easily raise money for building football stadiums than for paying higher teacher salaries.

Romans 3:23 says we all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. That surely includes me, especially in regard to the false god of sports, most notably football.

Some of my earliest memories are of playing football in the yard against imaginary opponents, watching the Longhorns with Dad, attending Cowboys games back when blue collar folks could afford it, playing on teams until my knees and ankles gave out, planning Sundays around televised Cowboys games, and using countless Saturdays to consume college football.

Some of my best memories in life are from watching football with family or friends. One of the best occurred in 2012 in Waco, Texas, when I received the gift of four Baylor tickets, and one of my daughters and I took two of my grandkids to their first college game.

My grandson especially got into the moment - giving the Bear claw and chanting with gusto. We hugged and high-fived as Baylor rocked. An electric night ended with the Bears beating the number-one team in the nation, Kansas State.

Not all people have great memories from Baylor's magical run of football success during recent years.

We now know that a number of football players sexually assaulted women and the university failed to respond appropriately. Baylor has now admitted its terrible errors and is moving to clean up its act.

Baylor let football get the best of it. All of us who place too much emphasis on football success are somewhat to blame.

We expect our "schools" to win or else. It's a little different expecting professional teams to win, but schools are supposed to be about educating and preparing young people for life as healthy, productive adults. The way we often do football in Texas misses the mark.

Football has become one of our false gods.

My concern is not about competing with all of one's ability. My two heroes growing up - Tom Landry and Roger Staubach - competed at the highest level but also conveyed to the world that football ranked behind their relationship with God. They didn't just use God talk; they lived responsible, upright lives.

Baylor University is being singled out right now, but evidence throughout the country points to a football culture that is connected to violence off the field, especially against women.

I'm thankful that the National Football League is taking a stand against this. We need a broad consensus among the football-loving community and the entire nation that violence against women will not be tolerated.

People who perpetrate violence on women typically have a history of such violence.

It is important that we start early in teaching young men how to treat women in a respectful manner.

Coaches of youth and school sports are in a special position to raise the level of respect for girls among their players.

Coach Charlie Strong of the University of Texas is seeking to deal with such character issues, and he has taken a hard line with players.

Strong is starting to win and will win more, but fans are impatient. They are already bringing pressure to win at all costs, and I highly suspect many of those fans are going to church each Sunday morning.

False gods eventually destroy and devour. Football can be a great experience for players, coaches and fans, but it can also consume lives both on and off the field.

I do not expect much from non-Christians when it comes to seeking higher goals, but I do expect more from people like me who call ourselves Christians and say we are seeking to walk more faithfully with Christ.

Our lives reveal our false gods, even the ones we did not expect. Enjoy football; don't worship it and bow down at the idol of winning. Judgment always comes. Worship belongs to God alone.

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