

Competition

In business, nothing keeps prices lower and service higher than competition. In golf or tennis, nothing causes intense concentration, effort, and improvement than competition. In High School and College, when you dated girls you had to compete with other guys for their affection and it made them even more desirable. We have had to compete for every position, every honor, and all our possessions. Competition is a daily reality in business, recreation, and relationships.

The question is, what does the Bible say about competition ? Is it good or bad ? If it is good, can you over do it ? One guy made the comment, "When I compete, I don't want to just win, I want to beat their brains out". Professional athletes today use words like dominate, rule, punish, and owning their opponents. As Christians, should our perspective and behavior about competition be different ?

The overriding principle of all human activity should come from passages like Colossians 3:17, "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus", and also Col. 3:23, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than men". Paul made us aware of our true identity in 2 Cor. 5:19-20. We are "ambassadors for Christ" in every area of our life whether in the office, at home, or even on the golf course. God has committed to us as Christians a ministry. The trick is that tension exists between doing what you are doing "heartily", but also being an ambassador for Christ. If you are trying to do your absolute best, give 100% effort, and beat the other guy, is it even possible to be a good witness and attract your opponent to Christ ?

What about some biblical examples ? The Bible gives great honor and credibility to characters such as Jacob and Joseph because of their hard work and success. Their success is attributed to the blessing of God, but God blessed their tenacity and perseverance as well as their faith. In Genesis 39-48 Joseph was able to achieve great success and a position of authority second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Because of Joseph's success, he was able to serve and glorify God mightily. In Genesis 47 his family was saved from the famine, brought to Egypt and given a large portion of land. God was behind this but Joseph had to first overcome and persevere through being sold into slavery, falsely accused and thrown in a dungeon, false promises, etc. In the New Testament, Paul often taught spiritual truths by using athletic metaphors. In 1 Cor.9 Paul exhorts his disciples to work hard, persevere, and make sacrifices. He used sports metaphors like a runner who trains hard for a race in order to win, or a boxer who trains hard with a goal in mind to win the contest. Paul's purpose was to motivate his audience to endure hardship and work hard to serve the Lord, but Paul clearly placed high

regard to hard working successful athletes who prepared and played to win. Why did Pharaoh love Joseph ? Joseph was successful. Why did Paul use athletes as examples ? Because they were winners.

Let's now return to the most important question remaining, Is it possible to be a strong competitor in business and athletics and still be a good witness and an ambassador for Christ ? Anyone who says that this is easy, or even says they consistently accomplish this may be naïve. My personal experience is there is a great tension between competition and being a good witness. I am certain that the only man who has mastered this is Jesus Christ. There used to be a group of guys that I regularly competed with in golf and I am aware that we definitely had a love/ hate relationship. I definitely had a ministry to all these guys, but at the same time they were often mad at me. When I won, the loser was often disappointed, and when I lost my disappointment was often way too transparent and vocal. Why is it so hard ? Why such tension ? Paul said it well in Galatians 5:16-26, "live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the selfish desires of the flesh". Our lives need to be directed and controlled by God's Spirit. If we are directed and controlled by our own desires, our own agenda, things will get ugly. Paul said, "the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another".

The challenge then is to prepare and compete to the best of our ability, but always as "ambassadors for Christ". The impediment to meeting the challenge is our selfishness(sin nature). The goal in meeting the challenge is to always represent Christ in every activity. As Paul said in Gal. 5:16 "walk by the Spirit" not by the flesh.