

“Let Us Pr ... Play”

In an issue of Sports Illustrated, the above title was used for an article written by the back page feature writer, Rick Reilly. I normally enjoy Reilly's writing, as it is incisive as well as humorous. This particular article was no exception. Reilly mentioned that more and more youth leagues are having their athletic activities on Sunday. It is a time when coaches and parents are off of work, and as the emphasis on organized youth sports increases, time becomes more precious. A time period which was once off limits (Sunday morning) is now routinely filled with regularly scheduled games.

And, as Reilly put it, we cannot really expect the officials and coaches to take the lead in changing the trend. It happens more and more often because of the parents! After all, if the parents did not allow their children to play on Sunday, there would be no games, no matter what the league or coach wanted. In the article a denominational preacher told the coach that his son would not be able to play in the game scheduled that Sunday.

The coach seemed amazed, and so the father said, "You are acting like this is the first time anyone ever told you that." The coach's response? "It is the first time anyone has ever told me that!" I do not have the article in front of me now, but Reilly finished it in his typical humorous fashion. He said, in effect, to go ahead and play on Sunday if you want ... but if at the end of the game, with only a second left, little Suzy is on the foul line needing to make the two shots to win the game, who is going to answer your prayers?!

What is interesting is that the article is another example of a worldly person recognizing a truth which Christians sometimes are unwilling to admit. When we allow such recreational activities to come before our service to God, we are forsaking Him. It does not matter if it is "just one time" or habitual, we are part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. This is an evil trend, a trend toward secularism and away from God. The Christian should not be contributing to the trend.

I will never forget when my daughter first had to miss a tournament softball game to come to worship services. She approached one of the older ladies in the congregation, and said, "I had to miss my game to come to church." I appreciated so much the answer given. Rather than saying, "I'm sorry," the good sister said, "I am so proud of you!" My daughter walked away beaming at the praise, and with an appreciation of what it means to sacrifice for the Lord.

Unfortunately, cannot expect the world to become more accommodating to our desires to serve God. The trend is what it is, and as time progresses it

will become more difficult, not easier, to juggle all of these conflicts. Where once it was an occasional "make-up" game on Wednesday night, it is now a continual bombardment almost every single Sunday. Reilly mentioned that the trend has become even more pronounced in the past few years, though in our area softball leagues have scheduled Sunday play at least since my own daughter began playing 10 years ago.

As Christian parents, we must determine not to be swayed by our children's immature desires, and the fear that we might "disappoint" the other kids or parents. We must remember that our devotion to God must be singular and complete. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, *"And he is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence"* (1:17-18).

In the church, Christ must always come first. If we have truly counted the cost, we know this. Our lives should mirror this recognition. It should be evident in our own actions, and in our instructions to our children, as we seek to bring them up *"training and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4).

Remember the words of our Lord, as he instructed a lawyer who had asked him, *"Which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment"* (Matthew 22:36-38).

Adapted From Stan Cox