

## Advancing the Kingdom: Shalom in Sport

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### I. INTRODUCTION

As others have noted in this volume, much theological reflection on sport has consisted of trolling through Scripture to find metaphors taken from the world of sport which are then utilized to make a point that lies outside the purpose for which the metaphor is used and ignores the point for which the metaphor appears. In this chapter I will seek to bring aspects of human behavior in sport into conversation with fundamental narrative impulses in Scripture, and especially how these show up in Paul's letters, in order to identify how we might think about sport in light of the biblical narrative.

I will focus mainly on the narrative of creation, fall, and redemption, and how Paul utilizes this narrative pattern for pastoral reflection and exhortation. Much of the material in his letters focuses on how his readers can *perform* this narrative. That is, his exhortations focus mainly on how this narrative ought to be embodied in their communities, making manifest that God has truly and decisively acted in Jesus Christ to bring about the climactic victory promised in the Scriptures of Israel by God's having exalted Jesus to the heavenly throne from which he rules the cosmos. In this light, I will reflect on how the Scriptural narrative, and especially its climax in the victory of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit to create one new people and to bring about new creation existence on earth, can provide abundantly rich resources for reflection on how sport can be an arena that announces the triumph of God in Christ, and that embodies the *shalom* of God. I will also reflect on several Pauline metaphors for Christian existence in the Kingdom of God in order to discover how sport can manifest the reign of God in Christ.

## II. ORIGINAL DESIGN: GLORY OF GOD

In order to come to grips with how human behavior is to model the triumphant salvation of God, it is necessary to understand humanity's original design. That is, we look to Genesis 1-2 in order to understand how God intended humanity to function properly. While it may seem at first sight that there is not much here for reflection, we discover otherwise when we look to Paul. Humanity was designed to be the glory of God, the image of God as a Tri-unity in the communal existence of humanity, and the entire scope of human behavior was to be the embodiment of its worship of the one true God. In this first section we will draw out how in Romans Paul makes full use of the rich description of the nature of human existence according to God's design.

### *Image*

Before we discuss how human sinfulness is described in Scripture and how it is manifested in sport, we must understand how Scripture talks about the original created design of humanity. Paul signals the original function of humanity in Romans 1:23, where he states that "all [humanity] have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." While this is often read in a "moral" sense to point to the fact that humanity can't match the moral perfection that God required, this is to misconstrue Paul's point and the creational impulse that drives his statement. Paul is, rather, pointing to the original intention of God that humanity was created to function as God's glory, to embody on earth and to reflect *in interdependent human relationships* the very character of God.<sup>1</sup> This function of humanity entailed conduct in the body that had a *telos*, behavior that pointed beyond humanity to the Creator. It was the glory of humanity to be the glory of God, to acknowledge and make manifest that the one who created and upheld all of creation, including humanity, of course, was indeed the one true God, who, confesses Paul, "is blessed forever, Amen" (v. 25).

The full range of human behavior, then, is *teleological*, so that in all that humanity did, its original design was to glorify God, to function as the glory of God, constantly pointing to the God who created the world and continues to uphold creation by the word of his power.

*Worship and Service*

The created intention of humanity is signaled by another feature in Romans that further draws out this scenario. Paul portrays human behavior as *worship* and *service*. In Romans 1:25, he states that one of the awful “exchanges” involved in human sinfulness is the exchange of “the truth of God for a lie,” in that humanity “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” We will discuss the nature of this exchange and its devastating consequences upon humanity below, but at this point it suffices to note that Paul portrays the full range of human behavior as *worship* and *service*.

Two Greek participles appear in v. 25 to elaborate what is involved in the surrender of the truth of God—ἑσεβάζθησαν (“worship”) and ἐλάτρευσαν (“service”). These participles open up a rich vision of all that it meant to be human according to God’s intention for humanity at creation. According to Genesis 2:15, Adam and Eve were in the garden to לְעַבְדָּהּ and לְשָׁמְרָהּ. These Hebrew infinitives are often translated as “to cultivate” and “to keep.” But a number of scholars make a good case that they ought to be translated as “worship” and “obey” (Cassuto 122-23; Sailhamer 44-45, 47-48; Hafemann 228). In this way, the two infinitives in the Genesis text provide a holistic vision of human conduct in God’s good creation as worship and service. Their proper care for and fructifying of creation and their honorably relating to one another were modes of human conduct that constituted worship and service to God.

### *Community*

In manifesting the life of God on earth, the design of humanity was to model the relationships within the Trinity. According to Genesis 1:27, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” It is not merely that both male and female are important to fully manifest the image of God, but that their common life together, their functioning rightly in relationship, manifests the image of God on earth, since the intra-Trinitarian relationships are fundamental to the identity of God (Torrance).

Just as the members of the Trinity delight in each other in a relationship of eternal bliss, so, too, humanity was designed to relate rightly to God, to one another, and to the earth in such a way that they reflected the intra-Trinitarian relationships.<sup>2</sup> The Trinitarian relationships give rise to a number of relational images, such as mutual delight in each other Person of the Trinity, an eternal giving and receiving of gifts, and the delight and blessing arising from differentiation.

It is instructive to pause and reflect a bit on this notion of differentiation among humanity, since this is often troublesome. There is nothing inherently wrong with differentiation, especially since there is differentiation in the Trinity. The Son is not the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father nor the Son, nor is the Spirit the Father or the Son. In the same way there is differentiation in humanity in the created order, and this was said by God to be good.

In this regard it is instructive to consider the special election of Israel by God. Israel was chosen by God to be the nation that specially enjoyed his love and presence, but this election had a purpose—to be the agent of the love of the God of Israel to the nations, seeking their redemption and blessing. The error of Israel was to derive from their election that the Creator God loved them *more than*

the nations. Or, that God loved Israel and actually hated the nations of the world. It is wrong, therefore, to presume that differentiation among human groups or nations is an unfortunate thing in human experience. From the beginning there was difference, but this was to be manifested in a giving and receiving of gifts, appreciating difference and all that “the other” had to offer.

What is important for our present purposes is the communitarian nature of proper human functioning. While we remain in many ways captive to a Western individualized reading of Scripture, the original design of God for the proper functioning of humanity is corporate. That is, humanity was not designed to function individually, but as a corporate body.

Coming to grips with the original design for humanity is vital in order to point to what is being restored in salvation. In the discussion that follows we will take a look at how the created design of humanity has been corrupted with specific regard to sport and how God’s restoration of humanity in Christ can be embodied through sport.

### III. SINFULNESS: IMPROPER FUNCTIONING

As the narrative of Scripture progresses, of course, humanity has fallen into sin and the created purpose of God has been radically corrupted and perverted. We must press beyond a simplistic and one-dimensional portrayal of the present human condition, however, in order rightly to grasp how sport has been radically corrupted. Paul provides a robust picture of human corruption in his letters, following the Scriptural portrayal. In this section, I will analyze how human behavior has been corrupted and how this shows up in individual lives and begin to reflect upon how this corrupts human participation in sport.

#### *Image and Worship Confusion*

As indicated above, humanity was created to be the image of God, to manifest on earth the glory of God. The abandonment of this function according

to creation is chronicled in the two “exchange” statements in Rom 1:23, 25. In v. 23 Paul states that humanity has “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man” and of a variety of other things within creation. The exchange is re-stated in v. 25, where Paul notes that humanity “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator.” While commentators have noted that Paul’s critique is more or less the indictment of humanity for idolatry (Talbert 63-64; Moo 110), Paul’s discussion amounts to a thicker description of idolatry than is often recognized.

This is not a narrow reference to a perversion of cultic practice—ceremonial worship of idols instead of the one true God—but rather has to do with the broader conduct of humanity in relation to its creator. Paul is here claiming that humanity has taken on a radically different—and perverted—identity in relation to its original created intention.

Humanity has abandoned its intended function of pointing beyond itself to the one true God and instead has taken on the role of pointing to, or representing something *within creation*. No longer does humanity image God, conducting itself as the glory of God in all of its activity, but now images something in the created order—whether something human or animal. This, as Paul goes on to show, is a tragic move with devastating consequences. This exchange entails viewing the human body not as the representation of God designed to relate to others and care for creation after the character of God, but as pointing beyond itself to something within creation, or perhaps *pointing to itself* as the ultimate end of creation, which is a surrender of the true glory of humanity for shame.

This exchange is stated again in v. 25, where Paul notes that humanity has exchanged the truth of God for a lie. The dative phrase ἐν τῷ ψεύδει (“by a lie”) is usually translated so that it points to the exchange of the truth of God *for a lie*, though it is more likely the exchange or abandonment of the truth of God “by the

lie,” alluding to the lie of the serpent believed by the deceived Eve. Either way, what has been given up here is the truth of God, which is paralleled in v. 23 by the “glory of the incorruptible God,” so that “the truth of God” also appears to be a functional term, pointing to the true function of the human—the proper embodied conduct that fills out the richness of the term “image/glory of God.”<sup>3</sup>

In this light, the participles in Rom 1:25, in perhaps an allusion to Gen 2:15, again point to the profundity of the exchange by humanity. Humanity now envisions itself as representing something else *within creation*—humanity itself, perhaps, or some creature, some set of social practices that point to membership in a social class or ethnic group, or some set of ideals invented by humankind. The broad scope of human conduct is depicted by Paul, following Scripture, as *worship*, pointing to something beyond itself, the embodiment of a transcendent reality. This worshiping function has been utterly perverted in that humanity now envisions itself as the representative of, and its conduct as giving glory to, that which has no glory in itself. The crucial point to be grasped here is that humanity now embodies the reality that *the creature is the ultimate*.

The results of this exchange, according to Paul, have had devastating consequences for the human body. Because humanity, in a cosmic act of betrayal, envisions itself as the image of something within creation, God has given humanity over to the perverted functioning of the body (Rom 1:24, 26, 28). In v. 24, Paul states that “God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” In v. 26, Paul states that God gave women and men over to the degrading and dishonorable uses of their bodies, and this is epitomized in same-sex erotic relationships, which, for Paul’s inherited Jewish worldview would represent the ultimate bodily malfunction—that women and men, designed by God to relate bodily to one another and corporately to bear the image of God on earth would turn away from that intended function.

The result of this exchange and subsequent perverted functioning ultimately is the enslavement of the human body to sin and death. Paul states in v. 27b that humanity has received “in themselves the proper result of their error.” While some read this final phrase as having specific reference to some punishment for homosexual behavior, it appears that for Paul the error in view is the profound functional exchange made by all of humanity (v. 25).<sup>4</sup> As Richard Hays states, “the creature’s original impulse toward self-glorification ends in self-destruction” (*Moral Vision*, 385).

The problem, then, in Paul’s portrayal of the human dilemma, is the captivity of the human body to sin and death, and this problem affects *all* humanity. In closing out Romans 1-3, Paul makes these points forcefully. After Paul states in v. 12 that humanity no longer functions rightly but has become “useless,” he cites a litany of Scripture texts loaded with specific references to the misuse of body parts; “their *throat* is an open grave, with their *tongues* they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their *lips*, whose *mouth* is full of cursing . . ., their *feet* are swift to shed blood . . ., there is no fear of God before their *eyes*” (vv. 13-18).

And finally, in a very familiar passage, Paul states plainly that *all* humanity—both Jews and gentiles—has failed to function rightly as the image and glory of God: “for *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Humanity has utterly failed to function rightly as the image and glory of God, conducting themselves as if they were in the image of something else, whether that is in the image of some pagan deity so that humanity is debased, or in the image of some tribal god in the sense that Jews are exclusivists who judge and stand over against the rest of humanity. This exchange of worship and created function by humanity has resulted in the debasement of the human body, its inevitable corruptions, and its enslavement to sin and death.

This perversion of the fundamental human identity as image of God and the subsequent enslavement of the human body to sin and death provides a point of departure for reflection on the current state of human functioning in sport. First, with reference to the notion of “image,” we have seen that humanity no longer envisages itself as the earthly representative of the transcendent God, but as having a *telos* that points to something earthly, or to some image that is generated “from below.” This is seen in a variety of ways where athletes conduct themselves in the game in ways that identify themselves with a stereotype. Many basketball players who play in the NBA carry themselves or adorn their bodies in such ways that identify themselves with the “gangsta” culture in the United States, which serves to then reinforce this image of what it means to be a basketball player in America.

Participants in sport are no longer encouraged to embody their creational role of “image of God,” fostering fruitful relationships with teammates and opposing players, seeking to find one’s role among a number of other players and inhabitants of the space on the court or playing field. Post-fall players now embody their identities as tragic heroes, lone rangers, or worse, “free agents” seeking to establish identities *apart from* or *over against* their teammates and opposing players.

A further manifestation of the perversion of sport that flows from the enslavement of the body to sin is the placing of monetary value on an athlete. If we might utilize Foucault’s image of the body as a script, we might say that whereas the human body was intended as a script that told the story of the glory of God who exists eternally in passionately loving relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit, the human body is now a script with dollar signs indicating a finite value, one that diminishes with every passing season, or that might plummet dramatically if the body is slightly injured and rendered less useful for entertainment purposes. In modern professional sport the human body has a price

tag on it that diminishes or obscures the infinite value of the human person, and thus the glory of God and points to the glory of the professional league to which the athlete belongs, tied to it not by inter-personal covenants of mutual blessing, but by promises of future performance leading to victories over other teams, furthering profits for team owners and investors.

One of the most appalling scenes in contemporary professional sports took place in September 2006. The troubled football player Terrell Owens, a receiver for the Dallas Cowboys, apparently had not garnered enough public attention and had called a press conference to announce that he had not, in fact, attempted suicide. The press conference was held by Owens's agent, Kim Etheridge, who stated that Owens was in a good mental state and that purported rumors of an attempted suicide were untrue. After taking a number of questions and making several other statements, Etheridge said, in leaving, that Owens "has 25 million reasons why he should be alive." This statement rightly stunned reporters and commentators, but in a sense only revealed the fundamental logic that drives professional sport in contemporary America. She was merely professing that the athlete whose career she manages has a finite value as a human being, a value that is determined by his performance on the football field.

Second, and very obviously, participation in sport requires a body, and in the present fallen condition in which humanity finds itself, such participation requires a body that is, as Paul claims in Romans, enslaved to sin and death. It is an interesting exercise to consider the many ways in which athletes appropriately display this captivity through the conduct of their bodies. In baseball, when hitters connect with a pitch that they can immediately sense is going to be a home run, they pause before running to first base, standing in awe of their majestic shot. This is often meant to "show up" the opposing pitcher, as if to emphatically note that the hitter has gotten the best of the pitcher. Such triumphalistic displays often invite a retaliatory action by the pitcher who will throw a pitch at a subsequent

batter in an attempt to send the message that such displays of one-upmanship will not be tolerated. The message is: If you demonstrate bodily your dominance of me and my team, I will retaliate with an attempt to injure one of the bodies on your team.

Similar bodily displays occur in other sports, as well. In basketball, players who make spectacular plays while driving to the basket, knocking down an opponent, will then stand over their opponent in a posture of conquest and dominance. This may be accompanied by “trash talk” designed to intimidate and demean one’s opponent.

Muhammad Ali perfected this use of the body, which has been well-chronicled through photographs of his legendary fights, along with the utilization of dominating and demeaning rhetoric. After knocking down an opponent, he would often stand over one that he had knocked out, proclaiming all the while his superiority and his boast that he was the greatest in the world, unable to be defeated.

In professional football, touchdowns are not merely celebrated anymore with one’s teammates in delight over a well-executed play, but are now accompanied by taunts of opposing players and the boast of dominance over the opponent. This derision of the opponent is embodied through “getting in the face” of another player, declaring one’s superiority over him.

### *Community*

As we discussed above, differentiation in creation is not a sign of the perversion or corruption of God’s design for the world, but a fundamental part of it. God created male and female and called it good. In thus creating humanity, God was reflecting life within the Trinity—the relationship of eternal delight in the other. Further, this differentiation can be seen in the special election by God of Israel. The nation was specially chosen by God to be a light to the nations, but this differentiation was perverted by Israel’s conviction that their election proved

that they were specially loved by God *instead of* the nations, or *more than* the nations. They eventually came to the conviction that God must hate the nations because of God's special election of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

This perversion of differentiation is seen throughout Scripture, of course, in the constant corruption of community life, the frustration of the desire of God to have creation function in harmony. This corruption is also, of course, reflected in sport. First, we may consider the selfishness inherent in players refusing to function as part of a team and in their demand for their own glory at the expense of the team. Examples of this abound, of course, in modern professional sport. One entire sport that has seen the diminishing of team play in favor of individual performance is basketball, especially the type of play current in the sport's major professional league, the National Basketball Association. When the league's most famous athlete, Michael Jordan, first came into the league, he became known as a very selfish player, one whose play was so spectacular that he often left his own teammates flat-footed as they watched his individual exploits. When he was reminded one time of the old cliché that "there is no 'I' in team," Jordan responded immediately by saying that "there is in 'win'." His obvious belief was that for the Chicago Bulls to win he had to seek to score on his own, at the expense of team play. Oddly enough, it was only when Jordan learned to play his own role on a team, respecting the team play of basketball, that the Bulls began to win championships.

Another example of the corruption of community in sport is the demand for the fulfillment of the individual at the expense of an entire sport. In 1997 the golfer Casey Martin sued the PGA Tour in order to have the rules of competition changed so that he could participate in professional golf at that level. Martin had a degenerative disease in his leg, preventing him from competing according to the rules, which demanded that players walk the entire 18 holes of a round of golf. This caused tremendous upheaval among professional golfers and sportswriters,

especially since it exposed a fundamental clash of values—the value of the individual’s rights and that of a community to make its own rules for competition without interference. The precise point we are trying to make here, however, is simply that Casey Martin was demanding that the rules be changed in his own interests at the expense of the community that valued a form of competition at a certain level.

#### IV. SALVATION

The glory of the gospel, of course, is that God does not leave humanity in captivity to sin, but rather invades the enslaved condition of humanity in order to reclaim God’s broken world and set it right.

Paul begins to draw out in Romans 3:21 what God has done to rectify the situation of humanity’s enslavement to sin and death. God has acted in Christ to rectify the world. Two things are important for the purposes of reflecting on the manner in which sport can manifest the shalom of God, announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God. First, God’s setting creation right has quite specific reference to human bodies, and second, God’s salvation has an “already but not yet” dynamic to it. That is, God has acted in Christ and the Spirit to set humanity free from the domination of sin and death, but has not yet finally and fully restored creation. Present Christian existence, therefore, will manifest, by the power of the Spirit, the character of restored humanity all the while occupying reality that looks forward to the final arrival of the kingdom of God.

Paul states explicitly that the rectification of God takes place through the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) and that this rectification is effective for all those who respond to God in faith (v. 22). The rectification of God—God’s making all things right—is *in Christ Jesus*. In order to prove his point that rectification comes from participating in the faithfulness of Jesus, Paul cites Abraham, noting that he was not rectified on the basis of any sort

of deeds done that established an identity before God, but merely from his faithful response to God. What is interesting for our purposes is that Paul's utilization of Abraham in Romans 4 has specific reference to Abraham's *bodily* activity.

After making a largely negative point in 4:1-16—that God's setting right Abraham did not arise from Abraham's deeds of establishing an identity—Paul elaborates positively how it is that Abraham has rightly embodied what God desires of humanity, serving as an epitome of the human response to the promise of God to restore creation.<sup>6</sup>

Paul notes that upon Abraham's reception of the promise of God, he responded in faith despite the overwhelming immediate evidence that the promise was beyond the realm of human possibility. He regarded his own body and saw that it was about as good as dead—i.e., very likely not able to generate life—and then turned to contemplate his wife's body, also very unlikely to participate with him in generating life. But, rather than being swayed by this physical evidence, Abraham embodied truly human conduct that “gave glory to God” (v. 20), pointing back to the original intention of humanity to rightly and truly image God, to glorify God with the body.

Romans 5-8 is thick and tangled stuff, but much of Paul's discussion hangs on God's rescuing the body from sin and returning it to its proper function as the glory of God. In Rom 5:1-2, Paul states that because of the salvation that God has provided in Christ, we now participate in the *shalom* of God, which is to say that by faith we enjoy in time the inaugurated restoration of creation. But Paul goes further in 5:2b to state that “we exult in hope of the glory of God.” As we have seen, “glory” language in Romans has much to do with the original intention according to creation of God's design for humanity. Paul is pointing, therefore, to the ultimate rescue which is to come in the future of God fully restoring humanity to its intended function—that of being the glory of God on earth.

Of course, current Christian experience is much like the posture of Abraham. We participate, by faith, in the eschatological order of restoration—God’s *shalom*—but we also participate in this broken world ruled by sin and death. Just as Abraham rightly imaged God by believing the promise while being conscious of his “as good as dead” body, so we, too, rightly image God by holding fast to the promise of God to fully restore us to our proper condition while living out our days in bodies that will eventually die.

How is it that we participate in God’s rectification program? In Romans 6-8 Paul develops how it is that because of our union with Christ we have freedom from the reign of sin and death and have the power by the Spirit of God to participate in the eschatological order of restoration to the glory of God. Because of our participation with Christ, “the body dominated by sin (τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας) might be destroyed” (Rom 6:6). Sin and death have indeed become parasites on God’s good creation, including their taking up residence within human bodies. But because in Christ’s death we ourselves have died, we have been freed from the domination of sin over us. Our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ provides for our participation in God’s restored humanity.

Paul makes the same point in Romans 7:4, claiming that “you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ.” Paul’s aim here, of course is to explain how the Law did not accomplish God’s purpose of setting humanity free from the dominion of sin and death, since it was hijacked by those evil powers to do their evil work, fostering their domination over humanity instead of working for its restoration (cf. 7:2). What the Law could not do, however, God accomplished in Christ, having sent his Son in order to fully take on himself the condition of humanity as enslaved to sin in order to completely undo it. Thus Paul’s cry in v. 24, “who will set me free from this body dominated by death?” is answered in v. 25: “thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

The solution for which Paul gives thanks to God is stated plainly in 8:3. God accomplished the freedom of the body from sin and death by sending the son of God “in the likeness of sinful flesh”—that is, by the participation of Christ in our condition of having a body dominated by sin and death. And in his death, “he condemned sin in the flesh” so that the rectifying work of the Law might be fulfilled in us, “who walk according to the Spirit” (8:4).

Paul brings his argument to a climax in Romans 8:12-29, where he notes that those who participate in the life of Christ in the present by putting to death sin in the flesh and living according to the restored humanity will enjoy resurrection to a fully restored humanity in the future. Those who suffer with Christ will be glorified with him (v. 17), which points to that fully restored state wherein humanity truly and completely reflects the glory of God. That the redemption to the right use of the human body is in view is demonstrated in v. 23, where Paul states that what we are waiting for is “the redemption of our body,” and, just as Christ is the prototypical human, we are waiting to be fully restored “to the image of His Son” (v. 29).

God’s rectifying of the body takes place, therefore, through participation with Christ by the Spirit, through whom God has set bodies free from the dominion of sin and death. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the guarantee that those who are in Christ will also have life given to their mortal bodies.

## V. EMBODYING SHALOM

Now that we participate in this eschatological order of restoration by the Spirit, even though we do not yet fully experience the completion of the restored creation, how can we function in sport to make manifest the arrival of the kingdom of God? In this section I will explore a number of Pauline texts, along

with Pauline metaphors for life together in the new creation, that provide rich material for reflection upon how the *shalom* of God can be embodied in sport.

God has acted in Christ to free human bodies from the domination of sin, anticipating the complete eradication of sin and its effects in the new creation. We inhabit the Kingdom of God already, but not yet fully, and we are called to participate in that eschatological order of *shalom* while we still await its fullness. Below are some suggestions for how this can be done.

#### *Giving and Receiving Gifts*

In Romans 1:11-12, Paul writes to believers in Rome that his aim is to come to them in order that they might give and receive gifts. This is, of course, one of the most very basic Christian practices, to be sharing and delighting in one another's blessings, a true embodiment and reflection of Trinitarian-shaped community. In another passage, Romans 15:27, Paul says much the same thing, that Jewish Christians should share in the material blessings of the gentiles, since the gentiles share in the spiritual blessings of the Jews. For Paul, Christian identity entails the sharing in mutually beneficial relationships.

This notion may be easily appropriated for Christian conduct in sport, specifically the manner in which opponents view their role in relation to the other. The relationship between contestants does not need to be one in which one opponent seeks to dominate the other, or humiliate the other. We have already noted above how such seeking to dominate does not have roots in the gospel, but rather reflects something more deeply-seated in culture. This is, in fact, one of the ugliest things in sport—to see athletes dominate or humiliate the opponent. Sadly, for many this is spectacle.

For athletic competition dominated by Christian love for the other, opponents can give one another the gift of provocation unto excellence and beautiful and skillful performance, seeking to elicit the best from the other for the good of the game and the glory of God.

*Rejoicing with Those Who Rejoice*

In Romans 12:15, Paul commands his readers to “rejoice with those who rejoice.” Athletes must delight in the success of the other. It is a very sad thing indeed to see athletes who sulk after a loss in competition, but there is no need to grieve if the ultimate end of sport is the well-played game for the glory of God. Those who truly love sport as an arena in which the glory of God is made manifest can exult with those who triumph. This is not the same sort of value and attendant behavior as those who declare that “everyone is a winner,” wrongly naming the results of a game or match, along with the skill-level of participants. Such egalitarian behavior that flows from modern notions of tolerance robs winners of the satisfaction of having triumphed in competition.

But for those who compete with dignity and who lose in competition, there can also be a measure of satisfaction. As we stated above, it is a perversion of sport that the identity of an athlete is tied to their having won or lost in competition. The power of the Christian gospel is that our identity is wrapped up in all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, so our identity is secure, having been established by the promise of God of justification by faith. Further, human dignity is actually satisfied by recognizing the reality of the outcome of a game or competition. The dignity of Jack Nicklaus was greatly enhanced in eyes of the golfing public after his epic battle with Tom Watson at the Open Championship at Turnberry in 1977. Nicklaus remarked to Watson as they walked up the final hole of the championship, after it was clear that Watson had won, that “I played my best today, and you beat me.” Nicklaus was embodying truly human behavior in sport, maintaining the glory of the game and rejoicing in the masterful performance of the winner.

*Everyone Playing a Role*

In several places in Paul's letters, the well-functioning community is compared to a body (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). "Every body is made up of individual body parts," says Paul, "and each must play its role." This is, of course, common sense. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I'd quite rather be a hand and am mad that I'm not." Paul is obviously taking something from common knowledge and driving home the point that community life breaks down when people are not content with the role that they've been given. Community functions well in accordance with creational design when people play the role they were designed to play.

This has direct relevance to sport. Not only is it a canard of modern pop psychology that "everyone is a winner," but a further misuse of sport occurs when we insist that everyone can be involved in the same way. As a way of making this point, we may consider the instance of Casey Martin that we briefly mentioned above. In 1997 Casey Martin sued the PGA Tour successfully in order to be allowed to compete in PGA events while using a golf cart. He was successful, and this was made out in some circles to be a triumphal tale about how a person can gain victory over insurmountable odds. While Martin's story may indeed have been a motivation for many to pursue their dreams in the face of physical limitations, there is also a significant sense in which Martin's motivations were shaped far more by enlightenment individualist ideals than by an ethic shaped by the Kingdom of God.

Martin's refusal to accept his physical limitations caused significant dismay to some of the game's stalwarts, such as Jack Nicklaus, whose concern was not necessarily to maintain the discriminatory nature of the game but to uphold the game's integrity and the purity of competition. While Martin was trying to fulfill his lifelong dream of competing on the PGA Tour, there was also a sense in which Martin was willing to sacrifice the honor and integrity of the

game itself to do so. Nicklaus and others like him, responded quite rightly to Martin's quest.

One way to embody *shalom* in sport would be to recognize that the ultimate value is the integrity of the well-played game where everyone finds their place. Not everyone is going to play the point guard position in basketball, nor quarterback in football, nor occupy the status of the best player in the world in an individual sport like golf or tennis. But this ought not to cause any dismay, since the value of an individual is not determined *in the game*. The value of each individual is determined before God. One's value is already determined by the grace of God and only subsequently are individuals-in-community turned loose to inhabit and enjoy the game to the glory of God. Then, whether one wins or loses, or whether one's role is to enjoy sport by looking on and not participating because of physical inability or lack of skill, one's status as an individual created in the image of God remains secure.

#### *Honorably Using the Body*

We have already spoken of how the body has been corrupted by sin and death and how this affects sport. After having explored several metaphors for how salvation is to be embodied by the people of God and the relevance of these for sport, let us now return to consider the human body and how it can be imagined to be conducted to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

If the Christian gospel is the story of God's rescue of creation and Paul accesses this narrative to speak about the rescue of the human body and its restoration to proper and honorable functioning, then athletes in sport will refuse to conduct their bodies in ways that demean or dominate the bodies of opponents. Further, athletes will refuse to seek victory at the expense of the bodily injury of opponents. One of the most pathetic corruptions of contemporary sport, at least in North America, is the notion, prevalent in both professional basketball and football, of victory through bodily harm of the opponent. Physical play in

basketball has gotten to the point that those who drive to the basket will fear being injured physically by bigger players. In football, it is becoming more accepted to put hard hits on skilled quarterbacks in order to gain an advantage. Such strategies ensure victories but dehumanize contestants in games.

The game is honored by being well-played, not merely through victory, and contestants are given dignity through play that manifests skill and creativity, not through dominating and demeaning opponents. Therefore, if the ultimate end is the well-played game, then a vital means to this end is the honorable treatment of one's opponent. If the ultimate aim were indeed victory, then whether or not one's opponent is honorably treated becomes irrelevant. But for *shalom* to be embodied on the playing field, players must refuse to seek the injury of an opponent in order to gain an advantage.

One final reflection on the human body is important. In Romans, Paul seamlessly moves back and forth between individual and corporate dimensions of body language, sometimes speaking about the human body and other times speaking about the corporate body. In the same way, modern athletes beautifully fill out sport as they consider their bodies and the corporate body, consisting of all those on the playing field, to be of equal importance. It is not right to seek the over-valuing of my own body at the expense of the corporate body. Selfless play that is driven by the ultimate valuing of the sport and the game above any individual player manifests and embodies the *shalom* of God and the reign of God over sport.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent discussion of the addressee in Scripture as the interdependent community, see Raschke 151-58. This gets beyond the polarizing discussion of whether or not Scripture has in view merely the individual or the community. Cf. also Volf.

<sup>2</sup> For a rich development of these three relationships and how they relate to the image of God, see Wittmer.

<sup>3</sup> Most commentators view "the truth of God" as having to do with God's revelation of God's own attributes and character. Dunn (63), for example, claims that God's invisible nature and his character are in view. If this account of the phrase "the truth of God" in v. 25 has any merit (that is, it has to do with the true functioning of humanity, rather than an abstract truth from God, or about God), it may help to inform the suppression of the truth in unrighteousness in v. 18. This is typically regarded as the suppression of certain things that should have been known by humanity, but perhaps this, too, may be better read to point to functionality, speaking of the culpability of humanity in abandoning their proper created function as being in the image of God. Corroboration for this sense of the truth suppression may be found in v. 18; this is done through ungodliness and unrighteousness, which appear to be active pursuits by humanity. Further corroborating this vision of the plunging of humanity into idolatry are other notes that point to how the abandonment has occurred. In v. 21, Paul says that even though they knew God, they did

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not honor God as God, indicating a rich account of worship. Again, this is not merely cultic perversion, but a holistic vision of life, in which humanity, in the totality of life, was meant to honor God and lift up his name. In v. 21b, there is the focus upon creation viz. anything transcendent in v. 21b, alluding to Ecclesiastes and the futility of human pursuits if the eschatological horizon is ignored. Further, in v. 28 there is the refusal to acknowledge God, which again isn't necessarily cultic.

<sup>4</sup> It is unlikely that the statement of Paul in v. 27b is pointing to some immediate bodily condition. He most likely has in mind the enslavement of the human body to sin and death, which he develops throughout chapters 5-8 (cf. Grieb 28-31; Ward; Gaca; Hornsby). Cobb and Lull (44-45) suggest that the error that is most immediately in view is the idolatry in v. 25, and the giving over to degrading passions results in the penalty in themselves, which is the enslavement of the human body to sin and death. See also Hays "Awaiting"; Martin; Fredrickson.

<sup>5</sup> This sentiment comes to fullest, and most tragic, expression in Jonah, where the prophet is angry and demands to die at the sight of God's mercy to a pagan nation.

<sup>6</sup> "The story of Abraham is the story of 'the gospel of God' (1:1) in miniature: God's faithfulness bringing forth human faithfulness" (Grieb 46).