

The Cultural Slide

Super Bowl XLIV was the most watched football game in modern history. According to the Nielsen Company, an estimated 106.5 million people watched the New Orleans Saints defeat the Indianapolis Colts in Miami.¹ People from around the globe watched the event. An amazing 62 percent of those in the United States, according to the ratings, watched the event. That was an all-time record. People watched not just to see the teams, but they were also drawn to the million dollar commercials, and the half-time show. It was great entertainment.

Some watched the game at church Super Bowl parties that sported big-screen televisions. Some may not know that they violated federal law by showing the game on 55-inch plus screens. In 2008, the NFL issued a warning to churches that showing the game in church is illegal. The Washington Post reported,



Slipping Down The Cultural Slide

The NFL is pulling the plug on big Super Bowl parties—complete with halftime prayers—that have become a popular tradition at many churches, saying the churches violate copyright law by showing the game to the flock on large-screen TVs. Current law bans public exhibitions of the game on screens larger than 55 inches. “Doesn’t the NFL have enough money already?” one disgruntled pastor quipped to the Washington Post.²

1. The Washington Post (<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/tvblog/2010/02/more-than-100-mil-watch-saints.html>)

2. Newser (<http://www.newser.com/story/17903/nfl-nixes-super-bowl-church-parties.html>)

Under strong protest from churches,³ the NFL eventually relented and issued guidelines that would allow churches to show the game, but the event could not be referred to as a “Super Bowl” game, the game had to be shown on existing equipment that was normally used, and churches could not charge money, except to cover the cost of the party.

This year, it was reported that “the minister at Loveland Church in Ontario, California plans to sport a New Orleans Saints jersey when he takes the pulpit this morning in a

sanctuary decorated like a football field.”⁴ The pastor planned to preach “a sermon on ‘How to Develop a Championship Attitude’ with a tailgate party that promises to have worshippers home by kickoff.” The church’s evening service was cancelled so that the “faithful” could watch the Super Bowl games at home. What happened to those who wanted and

needed to hear the Word of God taught?

Another church offered two opportunities for the “faithful.” Those who desired to attend the regular Sunday evening service could. Others were given the opportunity to attend the church sponsored “Super Bowl” party that would occur in another building if they brought a non-Christian. This was deemed to be okay since it was for the purpose of evangelism. Consequently, some attended the regular Sunday

3. The Washington Post (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/20/AR2008022002772.html>)

4. The Sun (http://www.sbsun.com/news/ci_14348086)

evening service while others attended the Super Bowl party. When did they share the good news about Jesus - before the game, at half-time, during a commercial, one of the plays, or after the game? Maybe this was friendship evangelism and nothing was said at all?

Still other churches cancelled both the morning and evening services on Super Bowl Sunday. The rationale justifying cancellation of the services was once again - evangelism and family time. The “faithful” were encouraged to invite neighbors and friends, and the stated purpose was to share Jesus Christ.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER. But there is one nagging question. Are the “faithful” doing this because they are motivated to share Jesus Christ with others on Super Bowl Sunday, or are they motivated to watch the Super Bowl and have found a way to justify missing the Sunday evening church service? Are they really strongly motivated to share Jesus with others? I know one church that repeatedly tried to motivate its people to reach its neighborhood for Christ, but less than one percent of the congregation would volunteer to participate. But when Super Bowl Sunday arrived, many were eager to stay home and watch that game. Were they eager to share Jesus with others? If so, where was the enthusiasm for evangelism the rest of the year? The experience of this church is not unique. What does the behavior of these “faithful” demonstrate about what is truly important to them? Is Jesus more important than a football game? We can only conclude that the Sunday evening service got in the way for some and they made a decision. It was not the teaching of the Word of God but their own comfort and enjoyment that governed their decision. Many of the “faithful” have joined the culture, and Jesus is less important than watching a bunch of men throwing and running with a pigskin ball. Many of the “faithful” across the nation are accommodating themselves to their culture.

THE CULTURAL LANDSLIDE. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. There is a much more serious spiritual problem. The “faithful” are sliding down the cultural landslide faster and faster. Many churches do not even have evening services any more. Many preachers find preaching two services to be very taxing. Since many of the “faithful” prefer to stay home

and watch the television, do something else that is entertaining or recover from the week, the Sunday evening services of most churches today have been cancelled and other churches are moving in that direction. It is the rare church now that has an evening service. It has become culturally acceptable among the “followers of Jesus” to stay home Sunday evenings. This would not have been true fifty years ago.

One can read some of the great preachers of the eighteen and nineteen hundreds and it is common to read their decry of the lack of spiritual appetite of the “faithful.” Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Dr. J. Vernon McGee painted pictures of “spiritual babies” who wanted to be entertained and had lost a strong desire to learn the Word of God. The “faithful” thought they knew everything of the Word of God but they did not understand how little they really knew. What would these pastors think now?

This is only the tip of the iceberg. The real problem is the iceberg - the absence of a strong love for the Lord Jesus and a desire to know Him more. The latest trend is for the “faithful” to stay home from church on Sunday mornings for a variety of reasons: a child’s birthday, visitors from another city, sporting events, work on an “important” project, some additional work for the supervisor in order to get ahead, discouragement, or some other reason. Many consider these to be acceptable reasons for staying home now since many other Christians are doing it. These same individuals will go to work on Monday and get involved in a variety of other activities throughout the week, and stay up late Saturday evenings. When Sunday morning rolls around they are tired. Sunday seems to be the day for some of the “faithful” to recover - at home. It is an issue of choices. No one wants to be a Pharisee and impose some arbitrary standard on the “faithful,” but isn’t there something wrong with this picture? Leaders should set the example. The culture is winning and the “faithful” think it is okay because “most” churches, leaders, and members are leading the way - everyone is doing it. In some churches the leaders have set the example and the “faithful” are following.

CONCLUSION. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus told the crowd,

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these

things will be added to you. Matt 6:33 (NAS95S)

Jesus' point is simple. If we put Him first, then He will give us everything else that we need. Some Christians wonder why their spiritual life is a disaster, disappointing or discouraging. Frankly, they should not be wondering. They should understand. They have chosen other things that are less important than Jesus. They just need to evaluate the way they treat Jesus.

Throughout the gospels Jesus called His listeners to give up everything for Him. He repeated His call for obedience and commitment. Repeatedly in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus called His disciples to deny themselves and follow Him (Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-28). Jesus used phrases like carrying your cross. The cross was a symbol of death. Jesus used it to tell those listening that they had to be willing to die to themselves and follow Him. Is choosing a Super Bowl game over Jesus dying to self in favor of Jesus? Jesus has called us to love Him first and foremost above everything. In Revelation 2:4 God rebuked the church in Ephesus with these words,

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Rev 2:4 (NAS95S)

Then God called them to do those deeds that they did when they first came to Him. I wonder what Jesus is thinking when He sees some of the "faithful" making the decisions they are making? Granted some isolated decisions are good and proper. But the pattern of life is screaming loudly.

There is a great hymn with a line that reads, "He is everything to me." Unfortunately, for some the words should be changed to "He is something to me" or "He is almost everything to Me." Jesus is not everything to many of the "faithful" any more. Jesus is just one thing. Something else is more important.

The only remaining question is, "Is Jesus just something sentimental to us or do we really love Him?" For some it is time to get on our knees and confess our sin. Some are simply lukewarm (Rev. 3:15-16).