

Romans 6:1-11

A New Life

June 21, 2026

It is always fun to watch The FIFA World Cup, once every four years, sort of like the Olympics, just for the spectacle. No matter what one thinks of soccer, or football, as the rest of the world calls it, the event itself is a sight to see.

The emotional side of it, both for the players and the spectators, is a part of its entertainment value even though I personally am not inclined to that level of excitement and passion about a game, it is interesting to watch others.

Just last week the New York Knicks won the NBA Championship for the first time in decades, and not only only in New York but all over celebrations are breaking out that reveal higher levels of intensity than what is normally seen. Communitas.

It seems to be a collective habit to place a great value on cultural events and traditions. From the arts to music and literature and on to technology; from the preservation of traditions to the development of innovations, people are attracted to what makes them feel good and sometimes live vicariously through the excellence and the accomplishments of others and sometimes being a part of the highest heights of human glory.

One affirmation that deserves making is that the World Cup is one of only a small handful of events that

unites the world, as much as is possible, brings people together. And all this centered around a sport that is not among the favorites in America or even in the world until very recently. One wonders what the world did without sport.

One wonders if all this energy is evidence of some spiritual deficit that has taken hold, a lack, that is temporarily overcome at certain times, certain events. Needless to say, many religious people, including many Christian people will be caught up in it, perhaps some of us. And then after it is over things will return to the usual state of waiting for the next big thing.

Perhaps the best way I can put it is this; that all this energy given to a sporting or cultural events a shadow side, seems excessive, that it represents placing a greater emphasis on a facet of life that is in reality of lesser importance. It may in some cases reveal an idolatry, which may be defined as placing unwarranted importance on something undeserving of it.

To treat something as if it has eternal significance when it has only temporary importance; or something of an ultimate concern when in reality it is intermediate or is of a surface level concern, something that does not deserve high importance, is idolatry. Clearly, these examples are not evil in themselves, but can consume our attention and energy and devotion in ways not compatible with a life devoted to Christ.

I was reminded of a seminary class forty years ago, which focused on Christian devotional classics. We

read Augustine's *Confessions*, and St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*. I did not relate to that one very well. We read *Little Flowers* by St. Francis of Assisi and *The Pilgrim's Progress* by the 17th Century baptist tinker John Bunyan.

I do not remember all of them, to be honest, but one that stood out was, *The Journal of John Woolman*. Born in the 1720's in New Jersey closer to Philadelphia than New York, Woolman was a tailor, an orchardist, a retail businessman for awhile, and a lawyer by the standards of his day. I don't think he ever went to law school, but he wrote out wills and other legal documents for people.

His claim to fame, although he would not have liked it to be put that way, involved his scruples about the pursuit of wealth especially as it related to the practice of slavery. At the time, not only was slavery practiced in the south, but in the north, including among the Quakers, which was his faith tradition.

He is known as a, "quiet revolutionary," because he was reserved in the expression of his convictions. When someone asked him to write a will, if they were passing their slaves to their children, he would politely decline, which caused him to lose business. Or he would speak in Quaker meetings simply offering his concerns, never in a confrontational way.

His journal is an interesting and challenging read because he betrays no political interests, doesn't mention anything associated with the lead up to the

Revolution about to take place in America. *He was concerned only with living a life devoted to God and not being distracted by worldly interests.*

By the end of his life, slavery was no longer practiced among the Quakers, and greatly reduced in the north. His concern was not only about slavery, but the spiritual danger of the excessive pursuit of selfish concerns; greed, and wealth among those who by profession of faith were devoted to Christ. He noticed the increase of anxiety, the willingness to disregard the well-being of others, and to spend life in excessive work.

The epistle reading for the day is applicable. It begins with a question. The conversation is about the grace of God. Paul has previously stated, "where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more." This phrase is a part of Paul's explanation of the gospel message, and he articulates it in Romans 5 near the end of the chapter.

The question raised is something like this, if this is in fact the case, that as sin increases, grace increases, would we, or at least can we, sin more, in order to create more grace? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? It is a rhetorical question to which the answer is clearly, "no."

The meaning of God's grace is that there is no expression or extent of sinfulness that can't be redeemed, if God has decided to redeem it. *And God has so decided.* It is not a license, but a remedy.

The explanation given involves the use of baptismal imagery that reveals part of the meaning of baptism. In this case the baptismal meaning is different from the idea of a, “bath for the soul,” signifying inner cleansing. Rather it suggests the participation of the believer in God’s life, meaning participation with Christ in his death and resurrection. It is a dying and rising.

It is also an immersion, being completely immersed in God’s life. The general idea is summed up in verse 11, “now if we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him.” It may be a long journey, with many twists and turns, but it implies a pilgrimage towards holiness that lasts throughout earthly life.

One cannot escape the world, this world with all its beauty and blessing, its contradictions and distortions. The temptation to be caught up in the world’s life is strong; its excesses and corruptions, its injustices, its brutality. If one is a believer in Jesus Christ, there will always be a struggle to manage a life in God’s life, at the same time life in this world.

I have begun by speaking of one cultural activity, involving games and athletes in the pursuit of excellence. We could also think of other things, many of which, like sports, can serve a useful purpose and are not in themselves wrongful pursuits, as long as they are kept in their place.

Other examples involve the world’s political life and issues of citizenship, which is fraught with these temptations; or the world’s economic life, because in

them good things can be done, and one can find a way to serve the larger good.

And yet there *is no* sphere in which the world’s life can’t be corrupted, distorted, overwhelmed by selfishness and greed. The message of the bible is that we are to seek to be in the world, for as long as the Lord wills it, but not to be overtaken by its values and the pursuits associated with its life.

Devotion to Christ, which is even spoken of by Paul as servitude, does not threaten us with these kinds of problems, but liberates us to the fulness of life.

We see ourselves as led toward *a new life in God*; less selfish, less anxious, less burdened by the world’s trends and values and demands; a life characterized by inner peace and humility, by compassion for others, by a strong moral compass, and confidence in God’s mercy, to the glory, not of humanity, but of God.

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