

Unearthing Gospel Gold

Crossings Seminar

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“Football Fandom: The Idolatry of College Football”

by Bill White

- Step 1: I had made an idol of my beloved college football team: The Maroon Bulldogs of Mississippi State University. “Hail State! Go to hell Ole Miss! S-E-C, S-E-C, S-E-C!!!”
- This was evidenced by the inordinate, idolatrous amount of *time, talent, and treasure* I gave/devoted to my team relative to the amount of *time, talent, and treasure* I gave/devoted to Jesus Christ. For example, the amount of time I spent any given week reading about college football and MSU, listening to sports talk radio, etc. versus the amount of time I spent reading the Bible, praying, listening to God, etc. Or, for instance, the amount of money I spent on college football: season tickets, MSU clothing, parking, tailgating, travel to games, the Bulldog Club, etc. versus the amount of money I gave above my tithe to the ministries of Jesus Christ.
- My thoughts, words, and deeds bore witness to the world that Mississippi State sports, especially football, was THE most important thing in my life.
- Step 2: Even worse there was something underlying this: misplaced faith. Unwittingly, I was “fearing, loving and trusting” my favorite college football team to give my life meaning and purpose; this, instead of “fearing, loving and trusting” Jesus Christ.
- When Mississippi State lost a game I was miserable! I couldn’t sleep. My thoughts would be consumed by replaying the game over and over again in my mind, analyzing what went wrong. My heart ached. My stomach hurt. I would be depressed. And whether we won a game or not I was obsessed daily with what was happening with my team: injuries, getting ready for the next game, recruiting, etc. The fact is I was sin-sick. The way, truth and life for me was MSU football, not Jesus.
- Step 3: If someone or something did not intervene on my behalf, when my “judgment day” came, I would be found to be with faith in Mississippi State sports instead of faith in the God who loves me and comes to me in Jesus Christ. In other words, because my faith was in something other than Christ, come my judgment day, I was doomed. My Maroon Bulldogs could not save me from judgment under God’s Law, from the consequences of my sin, from the devil, or from death.

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Step 4: BUT someone had intervened for sinners such as I. By his life, death on the cross, glorious resurrection, and his ascension, Jesus has overcome the power of sin, death, and the devil for all time. Anyone who hears Jesus’ word and believes God who sent him has eternal life and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

Step 5: Jesus offered the “sweet swap” to me personally, i.e. Jesus came to me and freely offered to exchange true faith in him for my idolatrous, misplaced faith. The Holy Spirit worked this gift of faith within me, reconciled me to God, assured me that I was forgiven of my sinful idolatry and misplaced faith, and called me to a new life in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

Step 6: Having received God’s gracious gift of true faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit empowered me to repent, empowered me to be a new creation. As Saint Paul proclaims, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Hence, I now “get to” put enjoying college football and my favorite team in their proper place and perspective, namely, acceptable recreation as opposed to idolatry. I “get to”—and I want to—spend ***more*** of my time, talent, and treasure on Jesus than I do college football.

Moreover, God uses me now to lovingly invite others to identify the idols in their lives and to seek God’s grace and power to repent of them.