

Part 3

Competitive Christianity: Sports and Spirituality

Jeff Beacham: "THE CLASH OF THE KINGDOMS--THE KINGDOM OF SELF AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD"



“Competition is an integral part of life in Western cultures. It has been accepted and celebrated as a very necessary ingredient for a successful life. However, competition ultimately is self-seeking and involves covetousness, which leads to envy, which results in all kinds of strife and war. **As we progress in these times, there is a monumental clash coming between these two Kingdoms as they compete for the souls of humanity.**”

History of Modern Sports...



- Wrestling was practiced by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia after the flood of Noah's day.
- Northern tribes introduced games and sports into Greece by at least 1000 B.C.
- Alexander the Great spread an interest in sports throughout his Greek Empire. (*Collier's Encyclopedia, 1993 ed. p. 452*)

“The Olympic games were sacred games, staged in a sacred place and at a sacred festival; they were a religious act in honor of deity. Those who took part did so in order to serve their god.” Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, p. 21

History of Modern Sports...



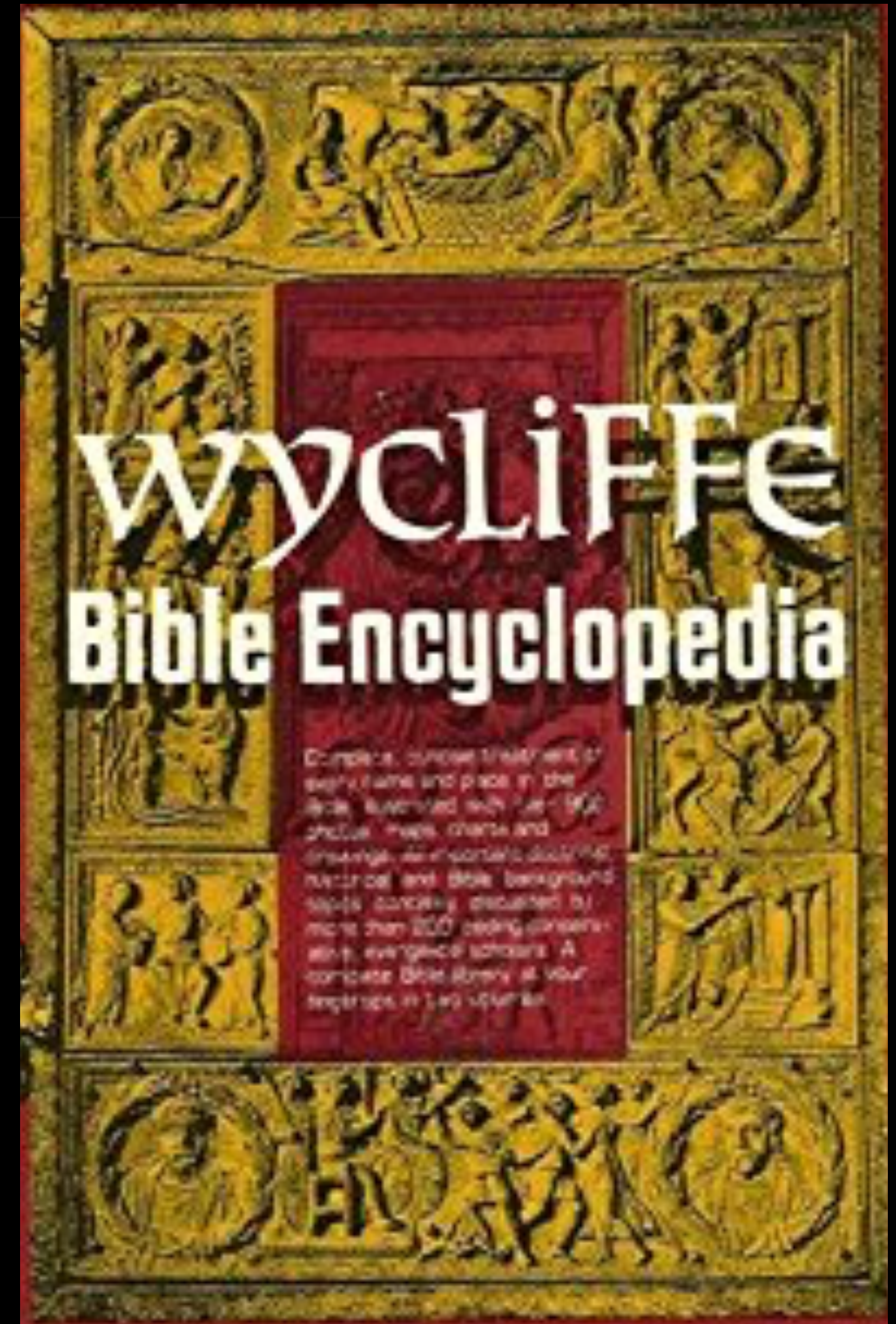
The Romans were fond of their own games, especially gladiatorial contests. Julius Caesar built a special amphitheater for shows in which animals were pitted against men or other animals. Later the coliseum was dedicated with 100 days of games. By the 4th century the Circus Maximus was continually filled with 385,000 spectators.

“The only concerted, sustained, and ultimately effective voice of opposition to the Roman games came from a minority group, the early Christians...They abhorred the paganism, the cruel bloodshed, the worldly associations such activities entailed.” William J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World*, p. 335

Early Church Practice...

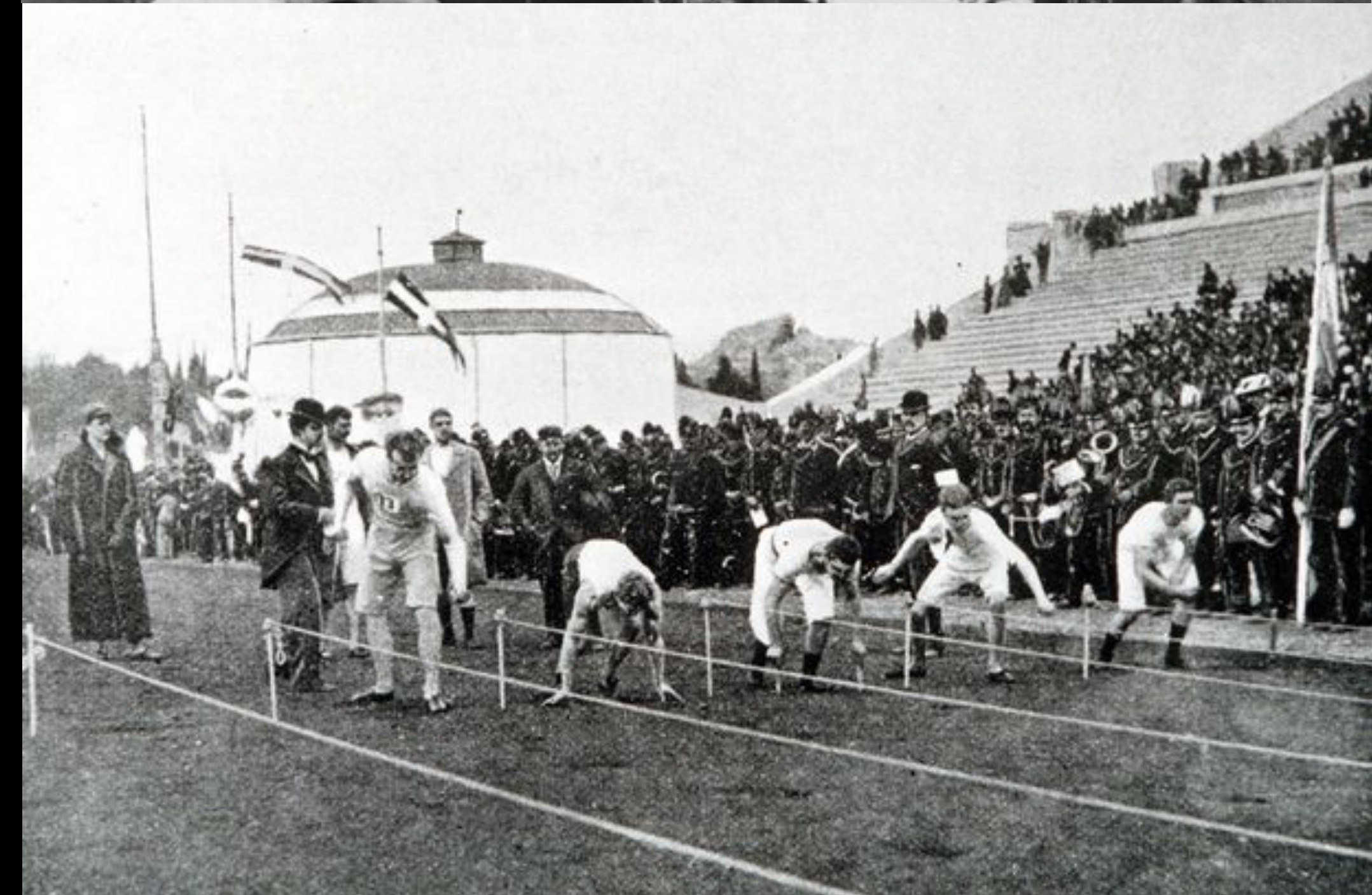
“The leaders of the early Christian churches condemned the forms of amusement that associate themselves with pagan religion and which controverted the Christian ethic... Tatian, Tertullian, and Clement denounced the games and similar amusements because of idolatry, immodesty, and brutality.”

Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, “Games”, p. 654, by Hubert L. Drumwright and Philip C. Johnson



A Modern Revival of the Greek Olympic Games...

The Olympic games were abolished as pagan in A.D. 394 but were revived in modern times in 1896. Sports and athletics were widely condemned by many religious denominations in America until the later part of the nineteenth century, about the time of the revival of the Olympics.



What happen to the outcry of God's people in 1896 & after as they did in the early church during the Roman games?



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William J. Baker, Sports in the Western World, p. 335

Like many other truths, Protestant denominations gave up the early church stance on competitive sports in the late 19th century.



The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the few movements left that still holds fast to that position.

General Conference Annual Council - 1988

Statement on “Activities With Elements of Competition”



God's Plan:

1) *A Better Way*. The ideal is cooperation and unity in God's Church, as illustrated in I Cor 12:12-31, where the parts of the Church, as symbolized by the parts of the body, work together for the good of the whole. There is sympathetic cooperation; there is no rivalry.



God's Plan:

2) *God's Plan for His Work.* "Character-building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now . . . Never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today . . . God's plan of life has a place for every human being. Each is to improve his talents to the utmost; and faithfulness in doing this, be the gifts few or many, entitles one to honor. In God's plan there is no place for selfish rivalry" (Ed 225, 226).



A Balanced Approach to Life:

Seventh-day Adventists believe that man is an integrated being whose physical, mental, spiritual, and social needs are interrelated and interdependent. They are concerned with the total development of each individual, feeling that every person needs consistent and appropriately planned physical exercise. To meet this need, at the turn of the century, Seventh-day Adventist institutions, generally located in rural areas, offered ample opportunities for physical exercise.



A Balanced Approach to Life:

Today institutions operate in ever more crowded environs with shrinking opportunities for useful work as a means of recreation. In addition to this shift from a rural to an urban society, occupations demanding physical activity have decreased, tensions have multiplied, and leisure time is increasingly dominated by sedentary entertainment such as radio, television, and movies. In order to compensate for these changes, a carefully balanced approach to physical activity must be encouraged in the Church's schools, churches, and other institutions.



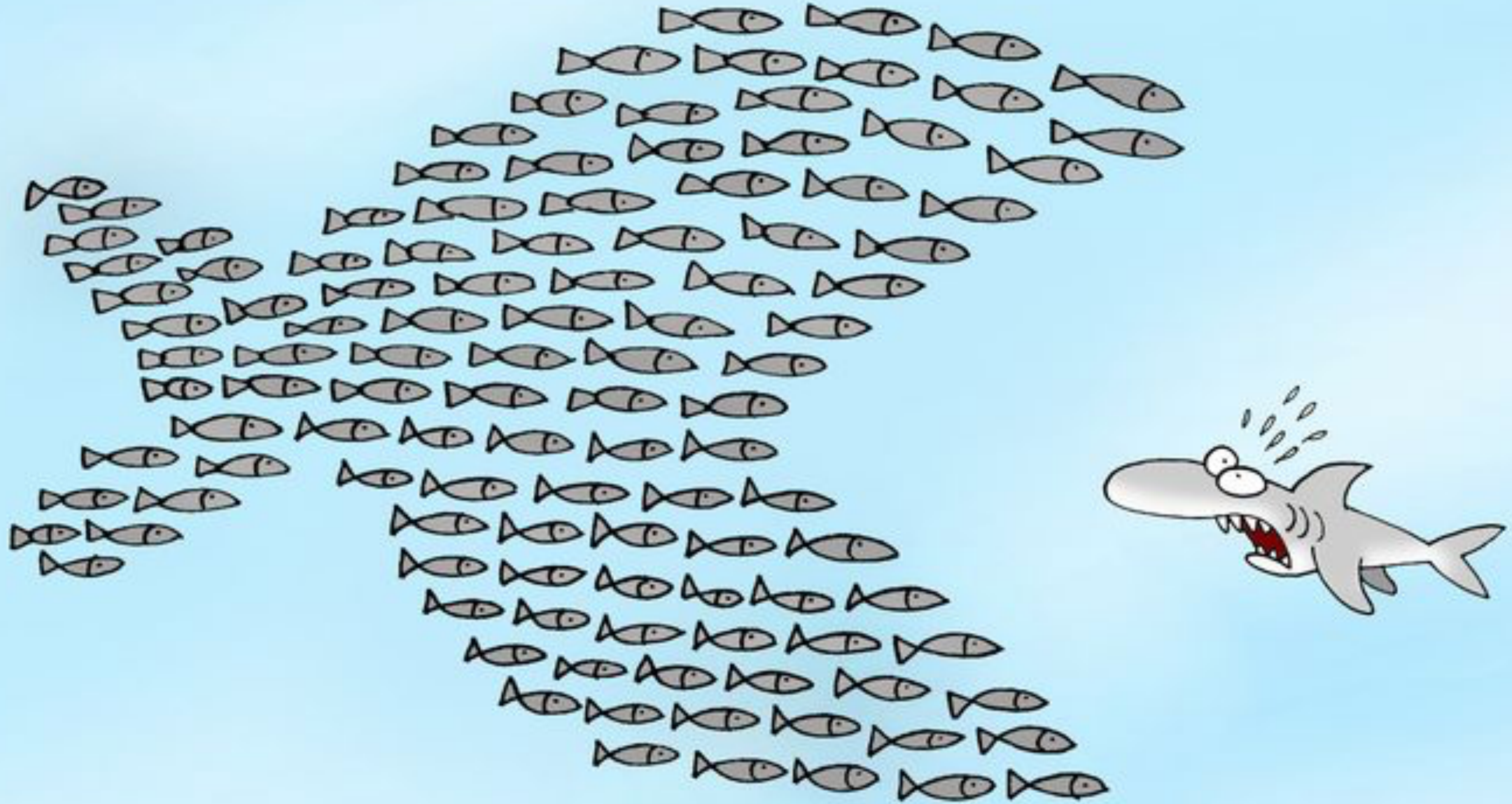
A Balanced Approach to Life:

In any church or school situation involving organized physical activities, the results can be beneficial if the following ideals prevail: cooperativeness, helpfulness, selflessness, a cordial spirit, playing for enjoyment rather than only to win, and observing the rules in spirit and not merely in letter.

“Recreation, when true to its name, re-creation, tends to strengthen and build up” (Ed 207). It will not foster selfishness, rivalry, hostility, strife, love of dominance, love of pleasure, or unwholesome excitement.



Cooperation





Teamwork

best choice



Purposes and Goals of Church Activities:

All the programs and activities of the Church should contribute to the **development of a Christ-like character and effective witnessing.** They shall foster the attainment of the following:



Purposes and Goals of Church Activities:

1. The full development of Christian love and unselfish consideration of others (1 Cor 13).
2. Mutual respect and fellowship among believers, as illustrated in the figure of the church body as a unit (1 Cor 12).
3. Emancipation from selfish rivalry and the development of the higher experience of cooperative endeavor.
4. The development of a healthy body, mind, and spirit.
5. Provision for and implementation of wholesome social relationships.



Purposes and Goals of Church Activities:

6. Inspiration for and direction toward the acceptable worship of God. Mutual respect and fellowship among believers, as illustrated in the figure of the church body as a unit (1 Cor 12).

7. The encouragement of individuals to work toward the highest and best of which they are capable in all worthy pursuits. The development of a healthy body, mind, and spirit.

8. Activation of the enormous human resources of the Church for soul-winning.



Specific Situations:

In keeping with the foregoing statements of purpose, the following are recommended to minimize the use of rivalrous competition as a motivational tool within the Church:

1. Exposure to commercialized, highly competitive activities shall not be encouraged.
2. Satisfying alternative activities which avoid unwholesome competitive involvement shall be sought.
3. In the development of incentives for individual action, participation, and personal advancement in the work of the Church, the program shall be so structured that individuals will relate to a standard of performance rather than to a system which involves interpersonal, interchurch, and interinstitutional rivalry.



Specific Situations:

In keeping with the foregoing statements of purpose, the following are recommended to minimize the use of rivalrous competition as a motivational tool within the Church:

4. While giving recognition to the efforts or achievements of individuals or groups, it is important that it shall be done in such a manner as to give God the glory for the success of the endeavor rather than to foster glorification of individuals.



Specific Situations:

In keeping with the foregoing statements of purpose, the following are recommended to minimize the use of rivalrous competition as a motivational tool within the Church:

5. A program or activity shall be arranged to provide some level of success for every individual, helping to preserve individuality, identity, personality, and constant dependence on God. Each participant shall receive some degree of recognition. Any such recognition shall avoid extravagance and extreme differences.



Specific Situations:

In keeping with the foregoing statements of purpose, the following are recommended to minimize the use of rivalrous competition as a motivational tool within the Church:

6) In recognizing achievement, consideration shall be given to improving the recipient's efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the Lord.

7) Internal school grading procedures shall reflect the personal growth and development of the individual student and his mastery of the essential requirements of his discipline rather than his relative standing alongside peers.



Specific Situations:

In keeping with the foregoing statements of purpose, the following are recommended to minimize the use of rivalrous competition as a motivational tool within the Church:

8. Since rivalry and many selfish attitudes can originate in the home, it is imperative that parents cultivate in their children attitudes which will avoid a pattern of selfish rivalry in later life.



Organized Physical and Recreational Activities

Objectives of Physical Activities:

1. To improve the physical development and the body function of the participant.
2. To achieve mental and intellectual development by the use of strategy, decision under pressure, and organization of thought necessary to function successfully.
3. To develop the character to include self-discipline, self-reliance, emotional control, respect for the rights of others, and moral and ethical conduct based on Christian ideals.

Organized Physical and Recreational Activities

Objectives of Physical Activities:

4. To provide proper physical experiences and recognition of achievement that will contribute to self-discovery, emotional stability, and cooperative social relationships.
5. To develop the spiritual qualities and social traits that make up a good citizen with Christian morals and ethics to guide in human relationships.

Organized Physical and Recreational Activities

Objectives of Physical Activities:

6. To develop recreational skills that have a beneficial function as activities for leisure time throughout life.

7. To develop safety and self-defense skills that will increase the capacity for protecting oneself and assisting others in daily activities and in emergencies. Training in the martial arts and physical activities which emphasize aggressiveness and competitiveness are to be avoided.

Organized Physical and Recreational Activities

Objectives of Physical Activities:

8. To promote a love for nature and the out-of-doors and a realization of the contributions one can make toward living a happier, more abundant life.
9. To aid in the development of a philosophy of life that includes proper attitudes and practices in regard to the care of one's body. This balanced approach to physical, mental, spiritual, and social development has been and may be promoted through such activities as the following:

Organized Physical and Recreational Activities

Activities to Strengthen Wholesome Wellness:

A. Outdoor recreation and nature activities such as swimming, cycling, horsemanship, skiing, canoeing, gymnastics, gardening, hiking, camping, rock collecting, scuba diving, spelunking, and other recreations.

B. Avocations such as ceramics, rock-cutting, auto mechanics, agriculture, woodwork, leather craft, sculpture, and photography.

C. Formally organized and properly directed intramural programs involving participation of all team members desiring to take part.

Intramural and Recreational Activities:

Intramural means "within walls," and such activities are confined to and among individuals of each specific church, school, or institution. When properly conducted, they will develop character, physical fitness, and wholesome group interaction. To ensure the wholesome benefits that may be derived from an organized program of intramural and recreational activities, the following objectives are recommended:

Intramural and Recreational Activities:

Recommendations for Intramural:

1. A committee of representative leaders and participants should be established to plan and control organized recreational activities in any church, school, or institution.
2. Directors of physical activities should be aware of the participants' need for a balanced program which should include recreation from sources other than organized sports.

Intramural and Recreational Activities:

Recommendations for Intramural:

3. Excesses in team and crowd reaction should be avoided and qualified officials should be in charge to ensure a wholesome spirit of participation.

4. Team participants should be rotated periodically to de-emphasize rivalry.

Interscholar Sports

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is opposed to interschool league play (commonly known as varsity athletics) in its educational system. The major rationale for this is:

- 1) The inherent hazards of competitive rivalry have the potential to be exaggerated in interorganizational events.
- 2) The commitments of time, personnel, and finances are usually disproportionate to the number of individuals able to participate.

Conclusions:

1. Christians should function with the highest motives in their quest for athletic excellence.
2. Occasional friendship games or matches involving institutions at joint social gatherings are not classified as intermural or interschool athletics.

Conclusions:

3. All people have talents--some more, some less. God expects faithfulness in service regardless of talents or pay (Matt 20:1-16). Even though talents are distributed differently, God expects individuals to develop what they have to the best of their ability; and they will be given responsibility according to their faithfulness. The Scriptures remind us, "Whatever you are doing, put your whole heart into it, as if you were doing it for the Lord and not for men, knowing that there is a Master who will give you your heritage as a reward for your service" (Col 3:23, NEB).

Validity:

This official statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Nairobi, Kenya, October 7, 1988.



Web Source:

Go to: www.adventist.org and do a search for “competitive sports” or “statement on competition”.

<https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/o/activities-with-elements-of-competition/>

COMPETITION VS. COOPERATION

By Perry W. Buffington, Ph.D.



Which works better, competition or cooperation? The answer, without equivocation, is cooperation. Although most people are surprised by this, scientists have repeatedly verified it in hundreds of studies since the late 1800s. Yet big business, the educational system, the health-care community, and most parents continue to encourage competition, almost totally neglecting the power of cooperation.

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None of these groups realizes that unabated competition may be costing billions of dollars in sales and overall decreases in human achievement. Furthermore, researchers have shown that too much competition may cause poor health. Yet we continue to hold the cherished belief that competition (not cooperation), to paraphrase Sigmund Freud, "is the royal road to success." If in fact competition brings out the "beast" in us, then research demonstrates that cooperation surely brings out the "best" in us.

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This finding has been held in virtually every occupation, skill, or behavior tested. For instance, scientists who consider themselves cooperative tend to have more published articles than their competitive colleagues. Cooperative businesspeople have higher salaries. From elementary grades to college, cooperative students have higher grade point averages. Personnel directors who work together have fewer job vacancies to fill. And, not surprisingly, cooperation increases creativity. Unfortunately, most people are not taught cooperative skills.





The Prophet Before Perry: She Knew Long Before Science...



“Some of the most popular amusements like football and boxing have become schools of brutality. They are developing the same characteristics as did the games of ancient Rome. The love of domination, the pride in mere brute force, the reckless disregard of life, are exerting upon the youth a power to demoralize that is appalling.”

- Education pg 210 & 211

Heart Question:

Do you want the **best** or the **beast** to come out of you?



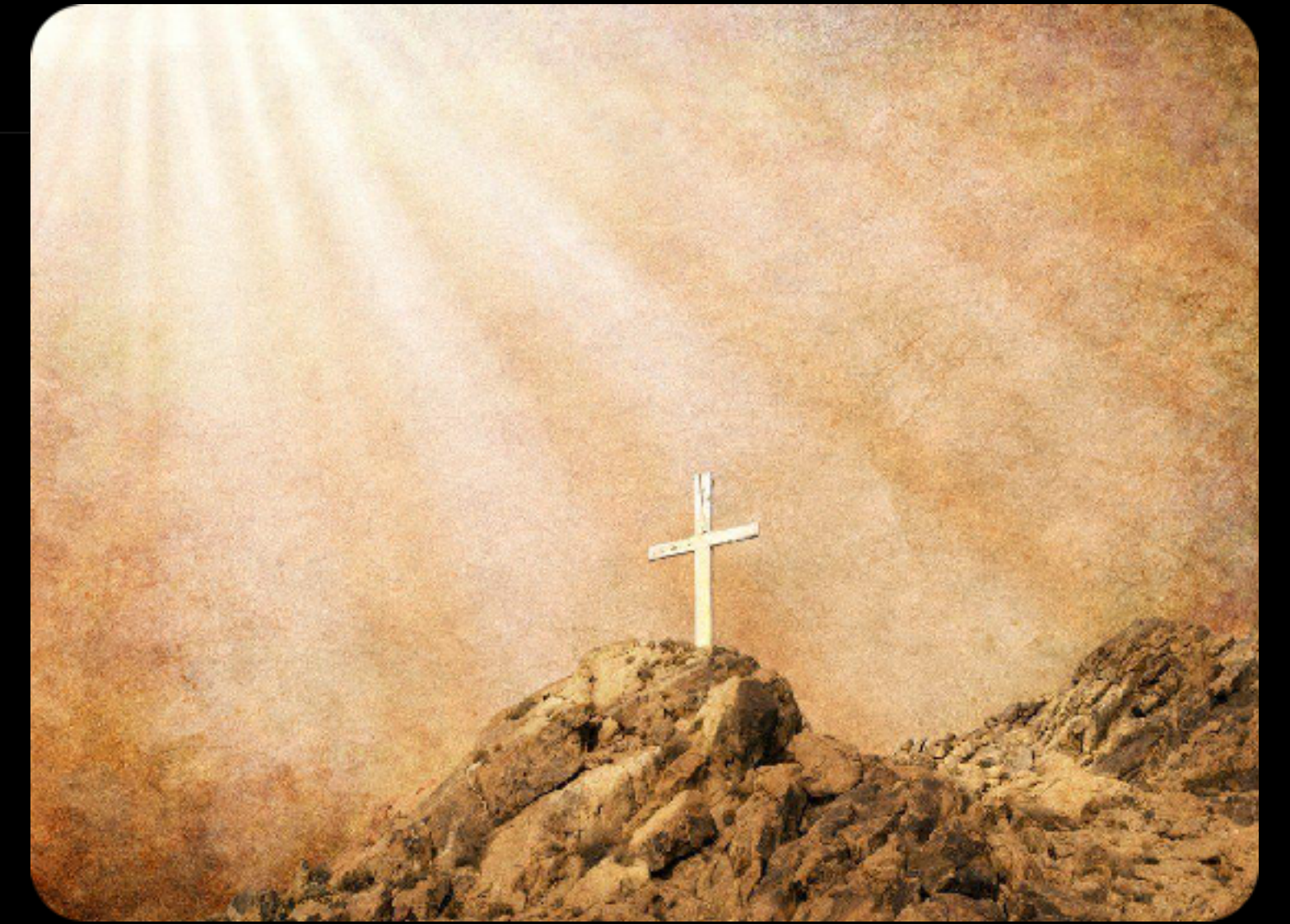
Spiritual Takeaways:

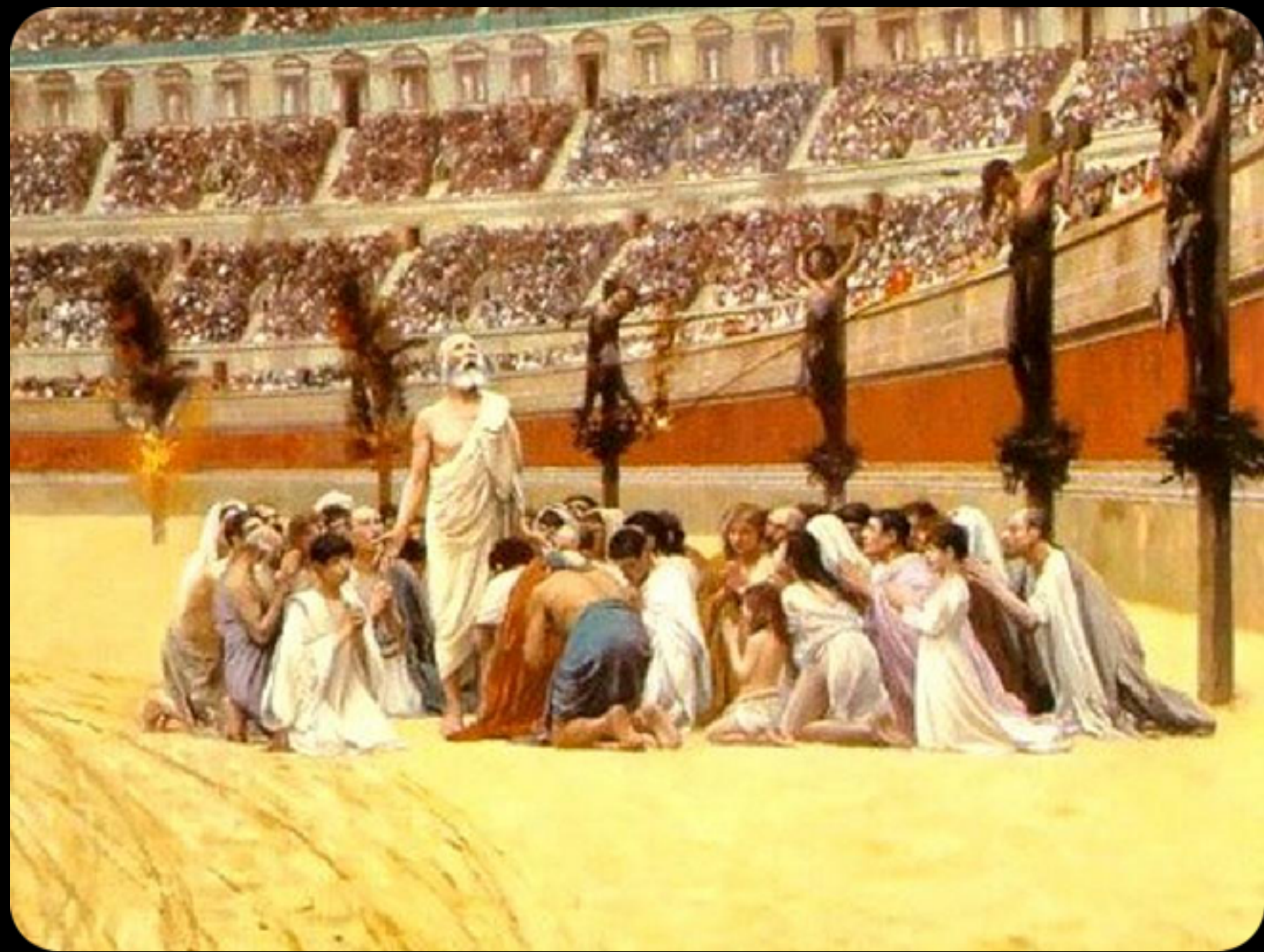
1. Cannot use the enemy's methods to teach the Lord's principles.

2. If you want to be incrementally better, be competitive. If you want to be exponentially better, be cooperative.

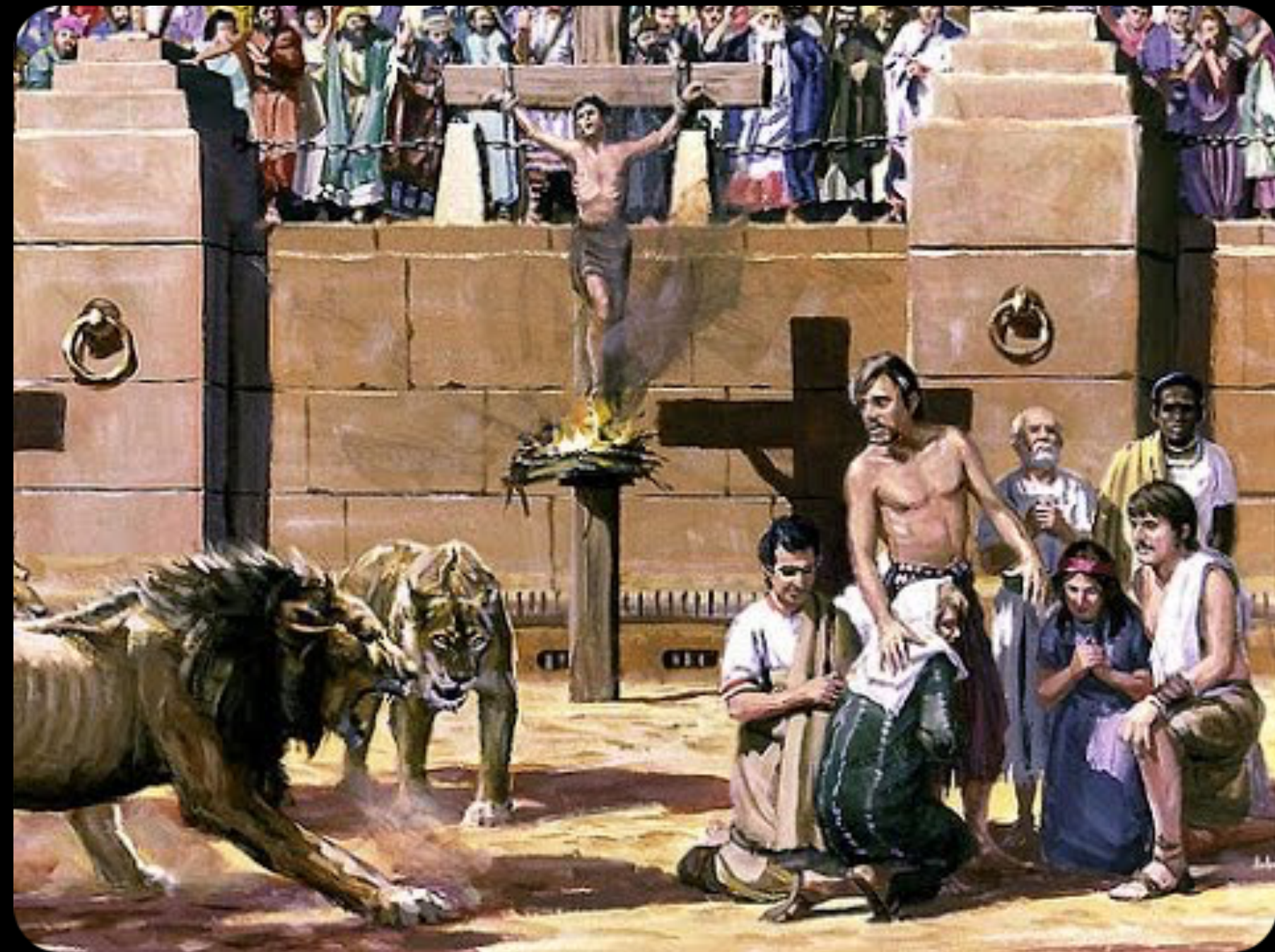
3. Trying to be number one and trying to do a task well are two different things. *Alfie Kohn from; No Contest: The Case Against Competition.*

4. Do not hold the delusion that your advancement is accomplished by crushing others. - *Marcus Tullius Cicero*





In the early church, who was it who cried out against the dangers of competition and violent sports?



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William J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World*, p. 335



In the final moments of earth's history, where are God's people who are taking a faithful stand on the truths that impact our eternal destiny, our characters in this life, and our witness to the world for Christ?

**The Seventh-day
Adventist Church**



Jeff Beacham: "THE CLASH OF THE KINGDOMS--THE KINGDOM OF SELF AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD"



“Competition is an integral part of life in Western cultures. It has been accepted and celebrated as a very necessary ingredient for a successful life. However, competition ultimately is self-seeking and involves covetousness, which leads to envy, which results in all kinds of strife and war. **As we progress in these times, there is a monumental clash coming between these two Kingdoms as they compete for the souls of humanity.**”