

Running up the Score

980116

Every year during the college football season there is a great battle to obtain the top spots in the national ranking. This is very enjoyable if you are a football fan, but the question always arises about whether a school should run up the score on a weaker opponent. Since there is no real championship game, the number one spot in the nation is determined two polls. Many times these polls are split in their decision and there is no clear champion. In order to gain the highest rating among the top group of schools, it is important for a school to show how good they are by not just winning every game, but also by outscoring them by as much as possible.

This is somewhat objectionable to those who are getting stomped 70 to nothing. We have probably all experienced this hopelessness of being that soundlessly defeated, whether it is softball or tennis or some other sport. We have also all experienced this in our battle against Satan.

Life is a sport, in a way. We are all caught up watching the struggle between Good and Evil. We see the manipulations of people as they strive to obtain what they want in life, and we see those who are just trying to get along and be peaceful consistently run into the ground. We are not just spectators, either, for we each have a terrific battle to try to do what is right. And yet, if we are really honest about ourselves, we fail so much more often than we succeed.

We are so geared to winning that we cannot abide losing. We become discouraged when we see evil win out. We are frustrated when we see the bad guys win. But the old adage, "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game," is really true even in a spiritual sense. The good guys do not have to win; they just have to be good. That is what really counts. It's how you play the game.

Because mankind is weak they are defeated by Satan again and again. We have a sinful nature; we cannot be perfect even though this is God's wish. This leads to the very important point: **1) by yourself you cannot win; you aren't even competitive.** There is no way that you can go one on one with Satan and win.

But God since promises us strength, can that enable us to win? I'm afraid not. Thus, the second point, **2) with God's strength, you still can't win; you still aren't really competitive.** Just remember Paul's struggle, which he discusses in Romans 8:16-23. He ends up doing what he knows is not right, even though he tries his best. Paul calls his a "body of death" in verse 24. Christ nowhere promises to make us perform perfectly. What he offers is something else entirely.

This brings us to the final point, **3) with God's grace, you are declared a winner in spite of the score.** Now it doesn't matter if you are competitive or not. Now what really matters is how you play the game, not how high your score is. God "accounts us as righteous," and we are given credit for scoring enough points to win no matter how many our opponent scores.

Imagine the picture that I am trying to describe: the wily Satan, cheating and taking advantage of us at every turn, is shocked when we are declared the winner and champion! The victory celebration is ours and he is totally excluded.

To illustrate this how this works in practice, let me tell you that in a certain category in my life I have been keeping count. Each one to me represents a victory over Satan in something that I once thought was impossible for me to do. It doesn't matter so much how many times I lost; what matters is the times I won. The score so far is Satan: infinity; me: 1000+. This sounds like a resounding defeat, but for me this is okay. I just want to do as much damage as I can. I'm there more to make a stand for Good than I am to win. And I can feel good about it because I know that God will ultimately be victorious.

The final word is that we don't have to win every battle: we just have to be Good.

© Copyright 1998, Heard Lowry