

Weekly Encouragement

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Tebow Redeeming Football

By Rev. Peter Eng



I really don't like American football because what the game stands for irks me. I kept an open mind when I first came to America in 1983 and watched a football game in the freezing rain and snow with Lily and our friends who brought us there. They are wonderful friends, the game was fairly entertaining, and we enjoyed ourselves just choosing a side to root for them.

But the bad conduct of footballers is legendary. This bad impression has been affirmed constantly over the years. They are overrated, idolized, proud, and courted by educational institutions with incredible scholarships; and they make obscene amount of money as pros, only to engage in depraved behavior. One recent example is Michael Vick who indulged in the cruel sport of dog fights.

When my children went to high school, I began to understand why this is so.

American Football is the star sport (like soccer for the rest of the world). There is nothing wrong with that. But the American educational institutions elevate the sport to obscene levels. The Color Guard is there to perform for the football game. The Marching Band is there to play during the intermission. The Cheer Leaders are there for them. Everything is subordinate to football. The system creates bad behavior. As a group, their behavior is offensive to the Christian faith. Not only are school activities subordinate to football, even churches support this idolatry. I categorically reject American Churches that suspend their worship services to worship the football game.

I absolutely forbid my children to play or support football in any way. They may not play football, may not be in the Color Guard, or Marching Band, or Cheer Leading for football games. Some schools make it a requirement for musicians to be in the Marching Band before they go to the next level. I would not allow my children in the Marching Band for any reason, even if it prevents them from moving up.

Last year, I heard about Tebow, the footballer, and his kneeling in public. I brushed it aside and decided to wait a little longer to see if it is just some publicity stunt. As it turns out, it is not. Tebow is the real deal. I don't care if he is a great footballer. Americans do enough of that caring. What caught my attention is that Tebow is redeeming American Football.

Tim Tebow's mother, Pam, was urged to discontinue her pregnancy. She almost lost him several times in pregnancy. But she persisted. Tim grew up in a Christian home and played football. He is now a pro footballer. That is also no big deal. But when he began to give God the glory for his success, and to live a Christian life in the midst of the depravity of American footballers (as a group, even though I am sure there are many decent folks), he first attracted media scorn, then media opposition; and as he persists, he is now gaining media respect (in some quarters).

Tebow would kneel down in the field and pray or give thanks to God for his success. This pose is now called "tebowing." [Urban dictionary: tebowing (vb) "to get down on a knee and start praying, even when everyone else around you is doing something completely different."]

He is single and lives a chaste life. He is saving himself for marriage. He does not squander his money. He is a strong normal Christian. Not a weak nominal Christian. Tebow's favorite verse is John 3:16, and providentially, he did something in the game that added up to 316. Now John 3:16 is among the most googled words.

Tebow's achievement is no mean feat. I understand that his football prowess is what brings him prominence. It is not his football ability that is most praiseworthy. The football successes mean little in light of eternity. Tebow's achievement is his Christian life in the midst of a sport that urges everything contrary to Christian faith. His persistence in Christian testimony is beginning to make an impact.

The football fraternity is a tough place for Christian living. Tebow made it. God is infinitely wiser than I am. God does not have the emotional baggage I have about footballers. And if God should choose Tebow to redeem football, it is to his own glory.

Christians everywhere should support Tebow as an example of someone who uses what God gives him, remains strong in the faith, and acts as light wherever he goes. Tebow holds the gospel light to shine where it is darkest.

I am not suggesting Tebow is the new American saint. All believers must rightly give God the glory for every success. All believers are spiritually susceptible to attacks by the devil who seeks to destroy us. Tebow has demonstrated himself to be a Christian, and as long as he is trying, and giving God the glory, he is faithful.

Tebow is an example for Christians everywhere. He is good in a sport that is soaking with lust, money, and power. Are you in a very unchristian environment? Ask God for the grace to live uprightly as Tebow. God can also use you to redeem an institution that is opposed to Christian values.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.