

## Thought for the Day 18th September - John Reed

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

As you may have gathered, I like sport. I have my favourites of course. If you're looking forward to heaven, you need to start watching Rugby Union, because that's the game we'll all be playing there. And we'll finally all be able to play like the All Blacks!

But there are some sports that even I find hard to watch. Not that they're offensive, or anything like that. It's just they're .... dare I say ... boring?

I know that some people find test match cricket and golf boring, for example. And it's true that they do drag out all day every day for 5 days. But I find them interesting because at any given moment something might happen. A wicket might fall, a six be hit, a hole-in-one scored, or a disastrous shot into the water resulting in a triple bogey. There's always *something* happening.

But soccer ...

I know I should love it. I have English heritage. I went to boarding school in England where watching Match of the Day on the TV in the boarding house was mandatory. I have supported Manchester United since I read the story of the Busby Babes and the 1958 Munich air disaster in an *Eagle Annual* I got for Christmas as a boy. But ... I struggle to watch a game of soccer. 90 minutes of grown men falling over pretending to be hurt and a final result of 0-0. It's just pointless.

So I was impressed when I read about the German team that lost 37-0 the other day. That's not a typo. The score wasn't 3-0, or 7-0, it was 37-0. That's a goal every 2-3 minutes. Given that it takes a couple of minutes to retrieve the ball from the net, fall over pretending to be injured, get back to halfway, fall over again, get everyone onside ... that's uninterrupted goal after goal.

How does that come about? Well, it turns out that the team, German amateur side SG Ripdorf/Molzen II, found out that their local rivals, SV Holdenstedt II, had in a previous match come into contact with an opponent infected with COVID-19. Concerned for their safety, SG Ripdorf/Molzen II didn't want to play but were threatened with a fine if they abandoned the match. So they fielded the minimum number of players you can without forfeiting (7), who walked onto the pitch, took the kick-off, passed the ball to an opposing player, and then walked to the sidelines where they stood – technically on the field, but keeping a safe distance from their opponents – for the rest of the game.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/sport/soccer/german-soccer-team-thrashed-37-0-after-socially-distancing-from-opponent-20200918-p55wss.html>

We all know about COVID-19, and the importance of keeping our *physical* distance from those who are infected – or even those who have come into contact with others who are infected. But there are also times when it is important to keep our distance *spiritually* from dangerous influences.

Here in 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul warns us not to be “unequally yoked” with unbelievers. The image is of a pair of oxen being yoked together across the neck as they pull a plough together. If they are unevenly yoked, that is they are not well-matched and pulling in the same direction with the same force at the same time, the ploughing will not go well. In the same way, Paul says, a believer trying to work with an unbeliever will experience the same problems. You don’t hold the same beliefs, goals and values, so you’re pulling in different directions. So, for example, in Leviticus 26:12 (which Paul quotes in verse 16), God told Israel that he had “broken the bars of your yoke” with Egypt so that they could be free and walk erect.

Paul then quotes in verse 17 from Isaiah 52:11, telling the Corinthians to “go out from their midst and be separate from them ... and touch no unclean thing.”

Keep your distance. Be separate. Don’t let yourselves be caught up in, or infected by, the influences of the ungodly.

I’ve often heard this cited in the context of marriage – don’t be unevenly yoked with an unbelieving spouse. But there is nothing in this passage to indicate Paul is talking about marriage specifically. This is general advice on how to live and deal with unbelievers.

Of course, this doesn’t cancel out the instructions to love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:39), or to do good to those who hate you (Luke 6:27), or to please your neighbour and build him up (Romans 15:2).

We must be a positive influence on the world around us, without letting it influence us in unhelpful and ungodly ways.