

“FOOTBALL FAITH (#2): BACKFIELD IN MOTION”

(2 Corinthians 9:1-2, 6-8)

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-I-

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: 2 Corinthians 9:1-2, 6-8 and Pray.
2. We're in the midst of a series called Football Faith in which we're connecting the biblical practice called "Stewardship" (which deals with the relationship between our money/possessions and our spiritual life) with metaphors from the game of Football.

A—The idea here is that if we can connect something our culture is *not* very passionate about (Stewardship) with something it *is* (Football), then perhaps we can appreciate it better.

B—So, the football metaphor we're connecting to Stewardship today is something called ***“Backfield In Motion”*** (or *“motion in the backfield”*).

C—And to understand this connection, let's first look at today's scripture in 2 Corinthians 9.
[Contemp. Service ONLY: Let me read it for us: ...Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-2, 6-8 (MSG)]

3. Here we have Paul writing to Christians in the city of Corinth about a financial love offering that he was collecting for needy believers in Jerusalem, telling the Corinthians to be ready to give generously after he arrives with them in the near future.

A—And I believe the key to this story is found in Verse 7, where he says...

(MSG) *“I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob-stories and arm-twisting, for God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.”*

(NRSV) *“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

B—In other words, he's essentially saying *“Take personal responsibility for your own generous giving. Don't leave it up to others, but instead choose to invest in God's work yourself, because not only will you be blessed for it, but you'll also have the satisfaction of knowing that you're sharing in the work of God, making a difference in the lives of others!”*

-II-

4. Now, with this in mind, think for just a minute about how today's football metaphor relates to the practice of this kind of Stewardship.

A—First, let's describe the phrase ***“Backfield In Motion”*** (especially for those who aren't football fanatics).

1–The “backfield” refers to the area behind the “line of scrimmage” (start line).

2–And prior to the “snap” (when the ball begins to be played), there’s not supposed to be any kind of movement or “motion” by players in that backfield – if there *is*, then it’s “illegal,” and a referee will call a 5-yard penalty against your team.

3–In fact, football rules *today* actually use the phrase “*Illegal Procedure / Illegal Motion*” to refer to this same offense. ¹

B–But by whatever name you call it, the point is that it’s not supposed to happen – players are not supposed to be “in motion” or have any kind of movement *before* the ball is “snapped,” but are instead supposed to be still – *that’s* the rules.

5. So then, in football, this phrase has to do with illegal *movement* by the players. And yet, if we use it to describe Christian *Stewardship*, then I believe it actually has more to do with the *location* of the players to begin with. Think about it with me...:

A–In football, it IS acceptable (and perhaps even desirable) to have at least *some* players stationed in the *backfield* so that they can run certain plays after the ball is snapped. ²

B–But in *Christianity*, I can’t think of any situation (in the Bible or today) in which God calls us to be stationed in the “backfield” of faith – we’re simply NOT supposed to be hanging around the “backfield,” waiting for someone *else* to make a play.

C–No. Christians are ALL called to step up to line of *scrimmage* and play ball – to do *our* part for God’s team (the church) so that it can score a “touchdown” for God.

D–[STORY OF THE RANDOM, UNWILLING SACRIFICE]

Now, I’ve told this story before, but it’s worth repeating... In a foreign land, 100,000 citizens once gathered in the courtyard of their king’s palace to hear how he was doing after a heart-attack. “*We have bad news,*” said the announcer. “*Our king will die unless we can cut a beating heart from one of your breasts that he might have a new heart. So, WHO among you will give your heart for your king today?*” And from all 100,000 voices came the reply, “*I will! I will! Pick me!*”

Overwhelmed by the response, the announcer went on: “*Since we can’t pick all of you, we will instead drop this feather from the balcony, and whoever it lands on will be deemed chosen by God to give their heart for the king.*” So, with great fanfare, the feather was dropped, and from 100,000 lips came the simultaneous sound, “*Fffffff...*”

6. Now, I believe too many Christians are just like this when it comes to the church.

A–We want great programs and ministries for our children and youth, a nice church facility in which to worship, and ministries which reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1–But when it comes to *who* among us will be willing to sacrifice deeply so that these things can happen, too few of us are willing to step up to the line of scrimmage.

2–We’d rather hang around in the “backfield,” waiting for someone *else* to sacrifice *their* gifts – Oh, we’ll put a token in the offering plate and volunteer a little time here and there, when it’s convenient, and doesn’t cost too much, or doesn’t get in the way of family get-togethers.

B–But you know, when we reach heaven’s gates, we’re not going to be asked what someone *else* did to advance the cause of God’s kingdom, but what *we* did to advance it.

1–Remember the step-chart that Tom shared with us earlier?

2–Well, we’re not going to be asked where *other* church members were on that chart, but where *we* were on it, and what steps *we* took to “grow” our faith and giving.

C–So the real question we need to ask ourselves is... “*Am I doing everything I can to support the work of God through His team (my church)? Am willing to step up to the line of scrimmage? Or, am I merely being a ‘backfield Christian,’ getting by on the bare minimum, while I look for others to do the hard work of ministry?*”

1–In fact, that’s the whole point not only of today’s scripture, but also of the second word in our “Will You Grow?” focus (“*YOU*”).

2–It means that we have to take *personal* responsibility for our *own* stewardship growth and development, rather than thinking it’s someone *else’s* job.

7. Oh and by the way, the “saints” of God that we’ll remember and celebrate in a few minutes here on All-Saints Sunday are those followers of Jesus who not only *went* to the line of scrimmage, but who played *from* there until the very end of the game we call life.

A–You see, *their* faith wasn’t just a bunch of illegal and showy “*Motion in the Backfield*” (like a lot of so-called Christianity today).

B– No. The “saints” of God stepped up to the scrimmage line and helped God’s team win.
WILL YOU?

8. [PRAYER]

9. [“ALL-SAINTS” REMEMBRANCE and HOLY COMMUNION]

ENDNOTES:

1. The following is an explanation of “Illegal procedure” (formerly known as “backfield in motion”) taken from a football terminology article: “*A penalty against the offense that includes movement by an offensive player before the snap. The penalty for illegal procedure is five yards against the offending team. Illegal procedure includes, but is not limited to: False start, Illegal motion, Illegal shift, Illegal formation*” [From the article “Football Terminology” (December 06, 2008), online at www.angelfire.com/ia3/coltsnflrules/terminology.htm].

2. But even here, *most* of a team’s players start NOT out in the backfield, but at the line of *scrimmage*.