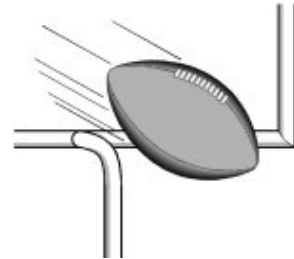


Sin, the Christian, and The Field-Goal Principle

Daryl Wingerd

For those not familiar with American football, the game is played on a 100-yard field. A team can score in two primary ways, either by carrying the ball into the other team's end-zone and scoring a touchdown (6 points), or by kicking the ball from a distance, between two vertical poles in the other team's end-zone, thus scoring a field-goal (3 points). Every good football coach knows the field-goal principle well. In order to stop the opposing team from scoring, you must keep them far away. Good "place-kickers" (as they are called) rarely miss when within range.



Christians have an opposing force seeking to defeat them—an enemy who is happy to score spiritual field-goals (rather than touchdowns) by tempting them to sin in little ways, even if he cannot always score in big ways.

Probably the best example of the way the field-goal principle works is in the arena of sexual immorality. Consider King David as an example. David let the enemy get past mid-field when he looked lustfully at the lovely Bathsheba while she was bathing on her roof-top. Then he allowed the enemy to come within easy field-goal range when he sent to have her brought to his palace. In this particular case, David gave up a spiritual touchdown when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then conspired to have her husband murdered. But David's fall into sin began by merely letting the enemy come close, and it resulted in a huge and shocking defeat.

Before anyone commends himself for not going as far as David, realize that Satan achieves most of his victories by scoring collections of field-goals. He successfully tempts men to look lustfully at women through pornography or other venues. Even when the sin goes no farther than looking, adulterous field-goals like these, while seemingly insignificant, are an integral part of the enemy's strategy. The fact is, every sin, whether big or little, serves to advance Satan's cause, which is to damage and devour. Whether big or little, sin presses *only* toward destruction. The house consumed suddenly by fire ends up in the same final condition as the one consumed gradually and secretly by termites.

My intent in discussing the destructive nature of sin is to show you the value of the distance principle—the field-goal principle—in defending against it. The best *defense* against sin is *distance* from sin. As we all know, the farther a magnet is kept from a piece of iron, the weaker the attraction becomes.

The Apostle Paul gave Christians excellent counsel for defending against sin when he said, "Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). Because our flesh is powerfully attracted to sin (and it is, even after we are born again), we should be distrustful of it. We should keep it far away from temptation, just as we would keep a hungry dog far away from the holiday ham. No dog will restrain himself if left alone in the kitchen with a savory chunk of meat. He must be kept in another room, or better yet, outside. Likewise, no man should presume that he will be able to restrain his flesh from embracing sin once he invites it into the bedroom of his mind.

Many football teams lose because a moment of carelessness or over-confidence allows the opponent to come within easy field-goal range. Once the defense of distance is gone, remaining defenses are usually insufficient. Field-goal attempts are rarely blocked. Will we give Satan the same opportunity? Will we, through our own carelessness or over-confidence, let him get close enough to succeed in his diabolical plot to destroy us?

"Flee sexual immorality," Paul commanded in 1 Corinthians 6:18. Run away from it! Put as much distance between yourself and sin as you can! A godly friend of mine actually ran to his car and drove away when approached by a scantily-clad and overly-friendly woman. Joseph wisely fled when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him (cf. Gen. 39:6-12). David, however, responded with foolish self-confidence and brought temptation (literally) into his bedroom. He did not foresee the bitter end from the beginning. He never imagined that toying with the pleasures of sin up close would lead to such horrific moral carnage. But once allowed within range, Satan struck with devastating force.

The best course to prevent falling into the pit is to keep at the greatest distance. He that will be so bold as to attempt to dance on the brink of the pit, may find by woeful experience that it is a righteous thing with God that he should fall into the pit. . . . Sin is a plague, yea, the greatest and most infectious plague in the world. And yet, ah! how few there are that tremble at it, that keep at a distance from it.

Thomas Brooks
from *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*
(first published in 1652)

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