

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Isaiah 9:1–4

*From pastor's sermon notes ...*

### **WHY CAN'T FAITH BE A COMPETITION?**

Competition is the hot house of innovation. When inventors compete to make the best hybrid car, we end up with a better automobile. When entrepreneurs compete for our consumer dollars, we end up with better value in the choice for better quality.

Why, then, does Paul seem to be discouraging Christians who are doing what seemingly comes naturally—competing with one another—and why doesn't a little competition create a stronger church?

What would be the harm in a little “fantasy football” type approach to theology or biblical interpretation?

Please forgive me; I mean to imitate the rhetorical and sardonic techniques of I Corinthians 1:10–8 or more specifically, verse 13.

Is Christ divided?  
Was Paul crucified for you?  
Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Rather than trying to win the day or turn everything into a competition, Paul reminds us of the ultimate power Christ lived by going to the cross. In a world consumed with power and prestige, what can the cross possible mean?

The cross is the opposite of competition! The cross is admitting God is more powerful than we are. The cross says God loves us. This cruciform love is the only power which lasts, the only power which cannot be defeated, the only power which can transform life from a meaningless competition into a life of abundant and awesome meaning.

There is more to faith than moralism. There is more to faith than therapeutic comforting. There is more to faith than believing there is a God or that God is everywhere. And yes, there is more to faith than the debate between liberals and conservatives. There is more to faith than advocating for gays and lesbians or opposing their agenda. There is even more to faith than the important discipline of scriptural interpretation or to following the popular notion that experience is just as valid a guide as scripture.

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Only God's grace brings us back from the brink of despair. Only Christ can reconcile our rebellious natures with God's goodness. Faith is God's glorious gift of hope in spite of our failures and our victories.

So when we are tempted to give up on one another, or ourselves—or even God—let us return to our story as scripture tells it, and let us return to Christ as our center. As soon as Jesus becomes our focus, all that is broken is bound up and healed. When we share what Christ accomplished on the cross, we are immediately drawn out of ourselves and pushed forward into mission.

When we seek to draw lives which turn everything into nothing more than an athletic challenge, we miss the point of life—ins and outs, winners and losers, even the saved and the lost. God so loved the world that He gave His only son so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life!

That one sentence will put an end to the most bitter estrangement! It will repel the most repugnant evil; and it will restore all creation to its Creator! Including you and me.

Amen.