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## Competitive Christians and the Role and Value of Service

A Commentary by Jason Curry



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I am a competitive person. My colleagues, who are often Christians, compete for promotions in their careers, my friends compete in athletic events, and members of my family often compete against themselves in order to establish their "personal bests" in academic, athletic and artistic events. Even in the world of animals, we see that God has made some animals more colorful than others in an effort to help them compete for survival. The idea and reality of competition is all around us; therefore, the question that confronts the Christian community is: Does competition have any place or value within the message of Jesus Christ?

At first glance, competition and Christianity seem to be two incompatible ideas. For example, competition in the world of business may mean maximizing profits at the expense of jobs. Most people will agree that terminating people to make ex-

cessive profits is unethical and wrong (e.g., one issue championed by Occupation Nashville); therefore, competition, at least as it is sometimes expressed in business, has no place in the Christian message. Jesus, however, understands our competitive nature. In fact, he seems to sense its presence among his beloved disciples. During his final meal (i.e., The Last Supper) with his disciples, Luke says: "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest (Luke 22:24)." Jesus replied: "...he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, *as he that doth serve* (Luke 22:26)." In Matthew, Jesus explicitly says: "The greatest among you shall be your servant (Matthew 23:11 and 20:26)."

If we are like the disciples, and unable to escape our need or desire for competition, let us embrace the words of Jesus, and allow our

competitive nature to be used in service for the Lord. When doing the work of the Lord (e.g., building ministries or church membership), Christians should never compete against other Christians. We should compete against the world to bring new souls to Christ. However, if our competitive nature demands that we have the "best" singing voice, the most comprehensive educational experience, the most profitable career, and the greatest influence among our peers in both professional and personal circles, then we must also work the hardest to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to seek the Lord while he may be found (Isaiah 55:6) and to constantly rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26) so that our accomplishments may be used to the glory of God and the uplifting of humanity. Our competitive ambition should equal our Christian service. Yes, competition must be tempered by Christ so that God may smile on all that we say and do.