



41 November
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Can I pray for England to win tonight?

This is a question about the nature of prayer and the nature of God.

If God answered this prayer then, I would imagine, England would never lose a game. People pray about England matches even if they never pray about anything else. But there are people in Chile, Germany, the Ukraine and Scotland who also pray about England matches - though they are not praying for England to win.

So, what does God do when some of His family are praying for England and some are praying for Azerbaijan? Or some are praying for Accrington Stanley and other praying for MK Dons?

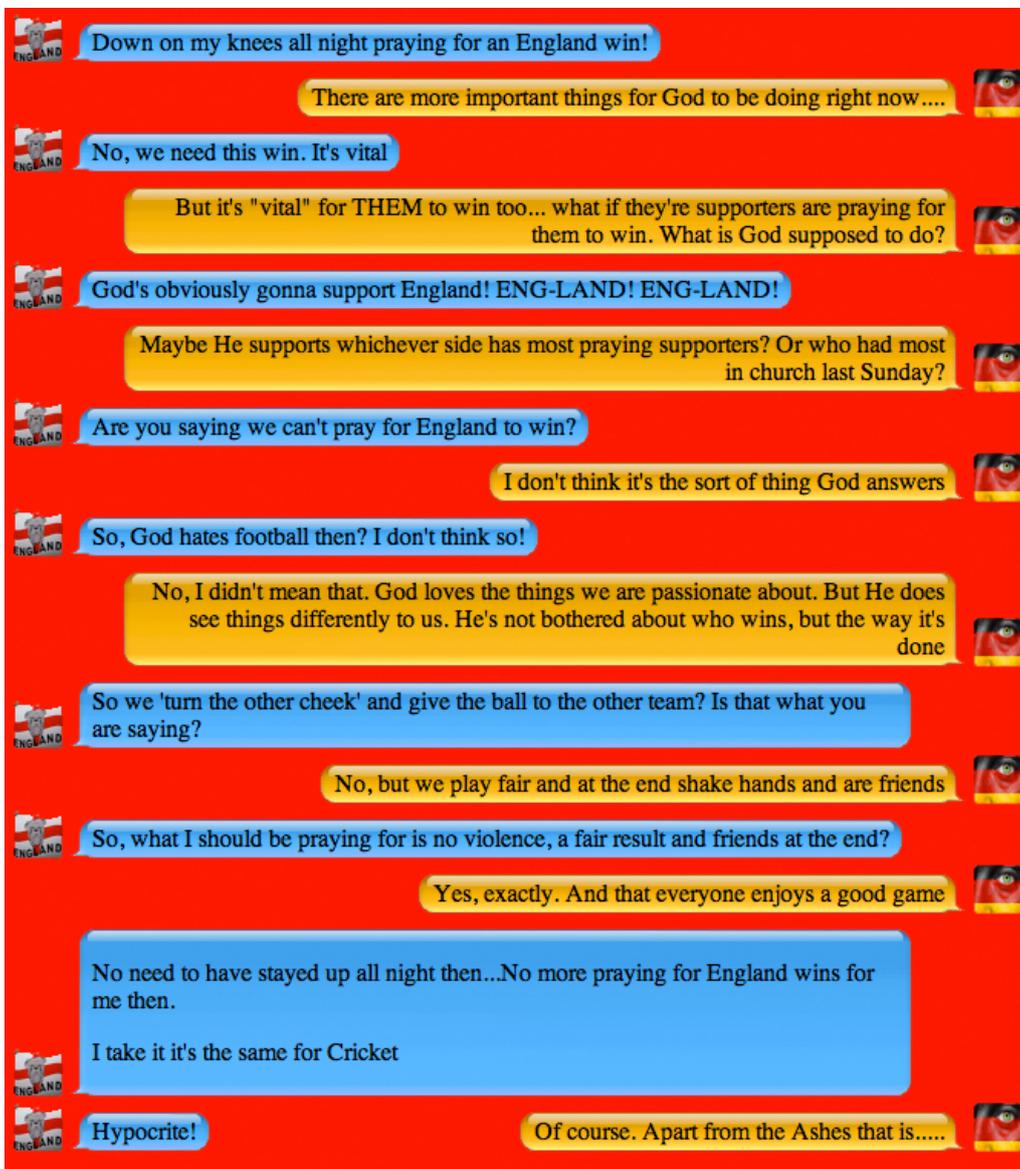
Also, are we saying the same if there was a war? Does God not take sides in wars? Well, it depends on the war and the circumstances. You see, God is for Justice, Righteousness and stuff like that. In some wars neither side has the monopoly on those things, and it's just about a few square miles of land. In that case, God is going to be answering prayers about the oppressed, the innocent caught up in it, a speedy resolution. But in other wars there is an obvious aggressor, even sometimes a clear evil that needs to be halted.

That's not the case when it is England v Hawaii at Wembley. There are no "Justice" or "Righteousness" issues. *It is just a game.*

Now, God loves the games we play. He enjoys the things we are passionate about, but we need to see them from His perspective. With God it is always about greater unity, people coming together and being more integrated... about love. However does that fit in to an international football match?

But those are the things we could be praying about. That the game is played fairly, and all see that. That each team and each player are in their best condition to play their best game. That there is no crowd trouble. That the supporters *from both teams* go home having enjoyed a good game.

I think those are the things God is interested in. The Bible talks about sport...1 Corinthians 9:24 uses the example of athletics to talk about how we should live the Christian life: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.* Getting the prize is part of sport, the prize goes to those who train hard. So we can pray that our team gets the best training, and does its best. But if we know anything about God we know that to pray that England will win is just a childish prayer. He might smile when a 3 year old prays it, He might use the fact that an unbeliever prays it to begin to work in that person's life... but when a man of God prays this way I think it might just make God groan.



But, doesn't this all take the competitive fun out of it?

No, it just means we need to keep things in perspective. If you watch the game and then end up in misery for a week after England loses (and I'm probably the only person reading this who can remember the last time England won right through to lift the Cup), then you haven't got things in balance.

Enjoy the game, even if the other team wins. Congratulate winning supporters, show sympathy to losers.

Make Jesus part of your sporting life, in *His* way, and not in *yours*.



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“If England be beaten on the river or America outdistanced on the racing path, or that America has lost the strength which she once possesses. Well, what of it? The only safety after all lies in the lesson of the real Olympia – that the Games themselves are better than the race and the prize. St Paul tells us how insignificant is the prize. Our prize is not corruptible but incorruptible and though only one may wear the laurel wreath, all may share the equal joy of the contest. All encouragement therefore be given to the exhilarating – I might also say soul-saving – interest that comes in active and fair and clean athletic sports”.

The Bishop of Central Pennsylvania speaking at London’s St Paul’s Cathedral before the London Olympics in 1908