

27 AUG 1980

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"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

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The Olympic deadline set by Mr. Carter for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan to allow the country to govern itself, which Russia said was the reason for the invasion, has expired and American athletes will not be competing at Moscow. The Olympic Games boycott is still under discussion; it is really a test of values. Games are games, pleasant, interesting, stimulating and exciting but they are not the stuff out of which life is made. Our relationships are the things which we value and which bring real joy and happiness and those relationships must always be based on righteousness, that is, on fairness, on respect for other people, in doing the right thing by them. Then the relationships are smooth and happy. The Russian government's relationships are not righteous or fair; it neither treats its own citizens and foreign countries in a fair way. The difficulty of leaving the country is proof of that. Its citizens are not allowed to criticise or stand up for human rights, they are not allowed to worship in the religious way of their choice. Prison is the punishment and now a neighbouring country, Afghanistan, is not allowed to conduct its own affairs but has been occupied with Russian tanks, artillery and soldiery, just like the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

To what extent do we value righteousness in this country? The Bible says that we should love righteousness and hate iniquity. Western democracies are on trial. We ought not to confuse an Olympic boycott with a trade ban. The Olympic boycott is public and cannot be hidden from the Russian people. We ought to pray for our country and our leaders and for ourselves that we might love righteousness, that is, love to do the right thing by other people.

Prayer is powerful, prayer changes things as William Temple Archbishop of Canterbury during the war said, "When I pray coincidences happen, when I don't they don't". God honours our prayers because our prayers honour Him. It is now a time of testing for our western way of life as to whether it still lives by the Christian values on which it has been built up. So we ought to pray for one another and particularly for our leaders, including the American President, that we might love to do the right thing. It is sad for the athletes who have been training and looking forward to the games. But that is Russia's fault. It should not have invaded Afghanistan. Had the olympic committees of the world been less anxious to have the games at all costs they would have co-operated in finding an alternative venue. But they are leaving their decision till the last possible moment. To wait to see what other countries do shows that you are not acting on principle but on expediency. Righteousness doesn't require reflection or waiting. It is willing to be on its own if that unpleasant situation is necessary. Better to be on your own with the right, than in the mob with a violated conscience we are being tested. Let us pray for one another that we may want to do the right thing and that we may know what it is to have courage to do it. God answers prayer.

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