

## Every Christian a Cheerleader

The Grace Factor – Part II

Romans 12:10-11

### Introduction

In our last discussion, we began to unpack some inspired advice. This advice, from the apostle Paul, gave us spiritual direction on life, liberty and the pursuit of godliness – *real* life, *genuine* liberty and *authentic* godliness.

It is in this that Paul's zest for living becomes contagious. He tumbles over himself with one statement after another on what it is like to experience this kind of Christianity. He tells us, "Here's what it looks like! Here's what it sounds like! Here's how it acts! This is life! This is true liberty! This is the genuine item of discovering godlikeness!"

### How to be a Cheerleader Christian

Listen to Paul's enthusiasm for cheering on people in verses 10 and 11 of Romans, chapter 12.

***Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;***

The apostle Paul is like a member of a cheerleading squad who stands on the sidelines of a football field with a megaphone in his hands. He is waving his arms at the crowd and leading them in chants.

This is so like Paul. He was probably the kid in Gamaliel's class who could never sit still. He probably wore his mother out. Now, he has carried that enthusiasm, which once pursued Christians, into

becoming a passionate cheerleader for the believers. He is urging them, and us, on for Christ.

ESPN ran an article some time ago about the rivalry we all know a little something about – the basketball rivalry between Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These campuses are only eight miles apart and both teams have different shades of blue for their primary color. North Carolinians are told, "Choose your blue." There are many, of course, who prefer red for North Carolina State University!

No matter who you pull for, however, you have to admit that Duke fans take their task seriously. Every fan is a cheerleader. When the games between these two teams are held in Duke's Cameron Arena, home fans, known appropriately as "Cameron crazies," are actually given instructions.

ESPN got a copy of a sheet of instructions last season. It was called a "Duke Cheer Sheet". It said,

*This is the game you've been waiting for. No excuses. Give everything you've got and we will walk away the victors. Cameron should never be less than painfully loud tonight. Please, focus on our team. Better to bring our team up than put them down. Especially coming out of timeouts, we need to be incredibly loud. During their free throws in the second half, forget the novelty stuff, just be unbelievably loud. This is a huge game. Stay in the bleachers, but go nuts.<sup>1</sup>*

I remember being invited to a game by a man who had some connections with the staff. We were four feet away from the out of bounds line on the

gym floor, in folding chairs just behind the backboard.

Painfully loud is no understatement. By the fourth quarter, I was plugging my ears, as discreetly as I could, which was impossible.

It was thrilling, however. Every positive move, every dive toward the ball, every pass was applauded. And every basket by Duke brought a roar so great you could not think. It was bedlam, and it was just a game.

I am convinced that Paul is urging the church to cheer a little more like that. Every positive move, every act of service, every sacrifice of time and effort should be backed by the love and admiration and encouragement of the body.

This is life! This is liberty! This is the pursuit of godliness!

Look at verse 10a again.

***Be devoted to one another in brotherly love .***

..

This is like saying, “Cheer one another along as if you were in the same family!”

The Greek word for “brotherly love” is “Philadelphia”. It is a combination of “phileo” for “love” and “adelphos” for “brother”. The word translated “be devoted” is also a compound word of “phileo” for “love” and “storge” for parent.

Paul leaves no loophole for the believer. Love one another like brothers and be devoted to one another as parents to a child.

This is not an option for the believer. One author said it is actually inescapable, for,

***. . . whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. (I John 5:1)***

In fact, John already made it clear,

***If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (I John 4:20)***

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote about the undeniable responsibility of the believer to love the body of Christ, when he wrote,

***Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; (I Thessalonians 4:9)***

It is the nature of the believer to cheer on another believer, just as a brother cheers on his brother and a parent cheers on his child.

Now my wife does not particularly like to travel. She especially does not like to travel without me. However, in a few weeks, she will be taking a ten to eleven hour, one way journey to Pennsylvania because our sons are playing in their homecoming soccer game. If they lived closer, she would be at all their games.

Our boys started playing soccer in CASL (Capital Area Soccer League), when they were five years old. One year, the team gave my wife a special prize for being the best screamer.

Are there any other mom’s out there like that?

When our sons graduated from high school, we attended an awards banquet. To our surprise, they called Marsha to the platform and gave her an award for faithfully and enthusiastically cheering from the sidelines.

So, whether I can come along to Pennsylvania for homecoming or not, she is going. She will put some food in the refrigerator for me – some cut up vegetables – to make sure I am taken care of. It does not matter because I am going to eat at Bojangles’ anyway! Our dog, Patches, likes vegetables. You might wonder how I know that!

### **Five arts to develop and practice**

I think the apostle Paul is encouraging us to develop the art of doing several things in this paragraph. There are five things in the five phrases of verses 10 and 11 of Romans, chapter 12, that Paul is telling us to practice.

### **Practice the art of cheering on the family of God**

1. First, Paul is encouraging us to develop the art of cheering on the family of God.

In the first phrase of verse 10, Paul says,

***Be devoted to one another in brotherly love .***

..

John would add his “Amen!” to Paul’s challenge to love the body like a brother loves his brother and like a parent is devoted to their child. He writes in I John, chapter 3, verse 14,

***We know that we have passed out of death into life, . . .***

How?

*... because we love the brethren.*

When was the last time you cheered someone else along in their faith? When was the last time you slapped someone on the back, or gave someone a hug and said, "I'm so grateful for you . . ." or, "I saw what you did . . . I'm proud of you," or, "I want you to know that your life is bringing God glory."

We are not commanded to be cheered, we are commanded to cheer. Practice the art of cheering the body of Christ.

### **Practice the art of giving the right-of-way to others**

2. Secondly, Paul is telling us to practice the art of giving the right-of-way to others.

Paul writes further in verse 10,

*... give preference to one another in honor;*

Taking the verb in its basic sense, you could understand Paul to be saying, "surpass or lead one another in showing honor to others."<sup>ii</sup>

It is as if Paul is calling the Christian to outdo each other in bestowing honor on one another; to race to be last; to desire to defer to one another.

This is quite the opposite of what the world considers the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. The top of the "food chain" is when you command the attention of others; when you give the orders; when you are the one receiving honor, right? *That is living!*

Not many have packed more living into their lives than, before his martyrdom, John the Baptist. He was a man who commanded attention; a man who single-handedly began the reformation within the nation Israel. He was the most sought after speaker; the prophet of God who was front page news in Israel.

Shortly after baptizing Jesus, the gospel writer lets us in on a private conversation between John and his key leaders,

*... they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi [teacher], He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold [look] . . . all are coming to Him. (John 3:26)*

In other words, "He's taking your place; He's taking the spotlight; He's attracting our crowd."

John then delivered the incredibly mature words that signal true greatness and true godliness,

*He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30)*

Paul says, true living; true godliness is "descending rather than ascending." True greatness is "vacating rather than occupying."<sup>iii</sup>

I finished reading, a few months ago, a book detailing the home life of Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards was the spiritual leader of the Great Awakening in New England in the early 1700's.

The book gives an insight into the home of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards. The title of the book is, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*. That's right, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*.

How many women think that is a great title?!

How many men think so? No one? That is because we are difficult.

One chapter tells the story of a Sunday morning that just as Jonathan Edwards began his sermon, the balcony collapsed. Fortunately, no one was hurt. The church was considered unsafe and a new building was soon under construction.

Now let me get to the point I want to highlight. The deacons and other officials of the church were mired down with the touchy matter of who was to sit where. Evidently, everyone had assigned seating, much like their counterparts in England.

They would fit six people to a pew on the ground floor, which was preferred, and nine people to a row in the balcony. And, note this, the closer the seat was to the pulpit, the more prestigious the seat was considered. The coveted seats were in the very front. Have things ever changed!

If you have been to some of the cathedrals in London, England, you have seen the queen's seat just below the pulpit.

So, here they were, in New England, mired down in agony, trying to determine who was more important than whom.

Edwards recorded the fact that Elihu Parsons, John Stoddard, Colonel Dwight and Seth Pomeroy toiled for hours upon hours over the seating charts and finally, this harassed committee worked out a plan that seemed to ruffle the least feathers.<sup>iv</sup>

This is exactly the opposite of Paul's passionate plea to the church. Paul says, "Look for someone else to honor," or, "Outdo one another in honoring each other."

James Boice wrote,

*Instead of thinking about other Christians and appreciating other Christians and what they are doing, our minds are usually on ourselves, and we are resentful that we are not sufficiently recognized or appreciated. Therefore we are jealous of other Christians. Great harm has been done by such jealousy. Ministries have been seriously weakened, churches have been split; valuable causes have been set back for generations and sometimes set back for good."*

What is the solution? Paul gave it again to the Philippian church when he wrote,

***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4 NIV)***

This is another way of saying, "Practice the art of giving the right-of-way to others!"

The church should be as one commentator described, "the noblest school of courtesy."<sup>vi</sup>

Practice the art of cheering on the family.

Practice the art of deferring to others the right-of-way.

### **Practice the art of excelling in your own place**

3. Thirdly, Paul is encouraging us to practice the art of excelling in our own place.

So, we should be cheering, deferring, and excelling.

Paul writes in the first phrase of verse 11, ***not lagging behind in diligence, . . .***

Literally, this is saying, "Don't be sluggish in your work; don't shrink back from doing whatever you do."

As Ecclesiastes, verse 9, chapter 10a, tells us,

***Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might . . .***

Whatever is worth doing, is worth doing right.

Within this context, Paul could very well be encouraging the believer to make sure they do not hesitate to fulfill all these directives.

You could read this text and say, "I agree with what Paul is saying. I need to learn the art of cheering on the family of God; I need to practice the

art of giving the right-of-way in honoring others. Yes, I agree with all of that!"

It is possible for a Christian to be moved to agreement without ever being moved to action.

In a broader context, Paul would be cheering on the believer to pursue diligence in dedication to whatever they happen to be gifted or talented in doing.

There is a young man in our church who is a trained mechanic. He, in fact, wants to own his own shop someday. In the meantime, he has gone through special automotive schooling where he learned every aspect of the automotive engine.

My truck had been pronounced near the end of the goal line. It was coughing and sputtering and I could not get it past 42 miles an hour. Hills were a major challenge. I would slow down to around 30 miles per hour, as it knocked terribly, and people would be backing up behind me. I was told by others that at 198,000 miles, the engine was almost gone – it was only a matter of days.

That is when I called Daniel and asked if he would take a look at a desperate case. He came to my house, climbed under the hood of my truck, and discovered that two spark plugs were completely shot and two other spark plug wires, by contact with each other, had their protective wire coating completely burned away – they were actually sparking and draining the engine of power. Four of the eight cylinders were not even firing.

Yesterday, he replaced the plugs and wires and told me to start the engine. It was amazing – steady and powerful. We were so excited; we were "high-fiving" each other in the driveway. He had discovered the problem and was thrilled to have helped me get back on the road. This morning, I made it to church in record time – within limits.

Daniel's skill and diligence did nothing less than cheer me on! That is what he is good at, and he fulfilled Paul's challenge to,

***. . . let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)***

What are you doing these days? What are you occupied with?

Do it with excellence. Do it with all your might. That is another way of saying, "Do it with everything you've got."

Practice the art of excelling in your place.

## Practice the art of cultivating enthusiasm for the things of God

4. Fourthly, Paul is telling us to practice the art of cultivating enthusiasm for the things of God.

Notice what Paul says in the middle of verse 11, . . . *fervent in spirit* . . .

Fervent is from the root verb “zeo,” which refers to, “heat; something that is boiling”. It carries the idea of having your spirit on fire for the things of God.

One translation reads, “having your spirit aglow.”

The dative case would indicate that Paul is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but to your spirit.

This verse is a challenge for the believer to pursue everything and practice everything that keeps himself hot for the things of God. And, as a zealous believer, you become a powerful advertisement for Christ and His church.

Vance Havner used to say, “One Christian with a genuine glowing experience with God is worth a library full of arguments.”

Perhaps you are thinking, “I’m not an enthusiastic personality – that’s not me.”

Paul is not talking about your personality, he is talking about your spirit. He means the spiritual nature within you that connects with the Spirit of God and develops a hunger for spiritual things and a delight in spiritual things. That connection creates enthusiasm for Christ.

I will tell you one way this works. Have you ever gone out on evangelism visits – knocking on doors, inviting people to church, asking them about their relationship with God?

Perhaps you have been trained in our Evangelism Explosion classes. If so, you will know exactly what I am talking about. Our teenagers, who just came back from the New York gospel outreach, will understand what I am talking about.

When you start out that morning or evening, you are a little timid and are perhaps afraid of being stumped, or mocked, or rejected. Then, you start talking to people – even complete strangers – and time begins to fly; adrenalin begins to pump in a way you have never felt before. Do you know what is happening?

Paul would say, “Your spirit is on fire!”

Before you know it, it is time to stop and you do not want to stop, right?

Maybe you are thinking, “I don’t know. I think I’ll wait until God makes me feel passionate about something for Him, and then I’ll do it.”

This art does not work that way. *That kind of excitement only comes with the exercise.*

You have to practice the art of cultivating enthusiasm for the things of God.

Practice the art of excelling in your place.

Practice the art of deferring or giving the right-of-way.

## Practice the art of focusing upward

5. Fifthly, Paul is encouraging us to practice the art of focusing upward.

Paul barely takes a breath in verse 11 before he moves on with the words,

. . . *serving the Lord;*

*Excelling in our work – that’s outward.*

*Fervent in our spirit – that’s inward*

*Serving the Lord – that’s upward.*<sup>vii</sup>

You could literally render this phrase, “As it relates to the Lord, slaving.” This is the word “douleuo,” which means, “to serve as a slave”.

To the English mind, the idea of slaving has a negative connotation. We talk about slaving over our work, which usually means that we work without a break, without proper pay, and it is a drudgery. We are slaving away all the live long day.

However, to the Greek mind, this was nothing more than the idea of a slave whose entire work was directly related to his master’s will. If a servant was slaving, he was doing exactly as his master wanted.

So we, as slaves of Christ, directly, fully and obediently agree with the will of our Master. This is our upward focus.

## Conclusion

Paul is cheering us on:

- to do more than belong – to participate;
- to do more than sympathize – to help;
- to do more than believe – to behave;
- to do more than be fair – to be kind;
- to do more than be kind – to love;
- to do more than perform – to excel;
- to do more than challenge – to encourage;

- to do more than earn – to enrich;
- to do more than talk – to serve;
- to do more than live – to grow.

Only fanatics want to live like this.

If we live like this, we will become cheerleaders like Paul.

Wouldn't it be something if we were known as "those Colonial crazies," or better yet, "those Christian crazies," or, "those fanatical fans" who, with all that they have and are, cheer on the things of God; cheer on the work of God; cheer on the people of God – for the glory of God.

Every Christian is a cheerleader. This is the inspired cheer sheet and these are the instructions:

- practice the art of focusing upward;
- practice the art of excelling in your place;
- practice the art of cultivating enthusiasm for the things of God;
- practice the art of giving the right-of-way to others;
- practice the art of cheering on the family of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Duke-Carolina Cheer Sheet, <http://www.ESPN.com>.

<sup>ii</sup> Douglas Moo (NICNT), Romans (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 777.

<sup>iii</sup> Roy L. Laurin, Romans: Where Life Begins (Kregel, 1988), p. 427.

<sup>iv</sup> Elisabeth D. Dodds, Marriage to a Difficult Man, (Westminster Press, 1971), p. 80.

<sup>v</sup> James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 4 (Baker, 1995), p. 1599.

<sup>vi</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, Romans, A Devotional Commentary (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 339.

<sup>vii</sup> John Phillips, Exploring Romans (Moody, 1969), p. 199.