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***Romans 12 and Our Rehoboth Mission: (3) Be A Servant***  
**Romans 12:9-13, Romans 12:1**

***Service Spoilers***  
***Restoring True Service***

***Service Spoilers***

Have you ever received bad service? I remember a few years ago going to a store where the employees wore an outfit with these words on it, "How may I help you?" I went up to two ladies wearing that vest and said, "I need some help." And they both scowled at me, one said "Wait", and then she finished her conversation and asked, "Well, what do you want?"

I told her, and she actually helped me find the item I was looking for but I still left the store with a bad taste in my mouth. Her slowness to help spoiled her service. Some people think Romans 12: 9-13 is just a random series of moral commands. But really these commands aim to purify spoiled service. SO let's look at 4 service spoilers.

***Service Spoiler 1: Spinelessness***

Paul says in verse 9, "love, the love for God, must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." Don't be spineless, a jellyfish that tolerates anything. To love God sincerely means we align ourselves with his loves and hates. We don't just hate evil, but cultivate an aversion for it, an intense, super-sized hatred of it. We don't just casually hold onto good values, but cling to the good like a scared baby clings to her mother. In our culture, the media encourages you to relax your grip on moral standards. We learn to say, Every culture has their own values, who is to say what is right or wrong? Different strokes for different folks.

But Paul says, “God has moral standards. He loves right living, and hates wickedness and injustice, and selfishness. He wants us to stand up for truth, and show some spine as we promote what is right and confront what is wrong.”

Back in Seminary, I roomed with a graduate student from India. I’ll call him “AD”. AD was in the philosophy program and about 12 years older than me and I loved rooming with him and talking ideas with him. Sometimes at 10:30 he’d say, “Rob, come apart for awhile, and take some tea with me. Let us talk about God, suffering, and the deep matters of eternity.” How could I say no to that?!

Towards the end of my first year, AD told me that he was having an arranged marriage. “Next year”, he smiled, “both of us will be married.” “Cool!”, I exclaimed! But it did not turn out cool at all. His wife was of a lower caste and he treated her as an underling, ordering her around. I was alarmed by this treatment, and told AD, “Why don’t you ease up and be gentler?” But AD said this is how his culture did it. One day my faculty advisor, Dr. Roger Greenway, a former missionary pulled me aside and said, “Rob, I’d like you to confront AD about his un-Christian treatment of his wife. Tell him it’s wrong.” But I couldn’t do it. I chickened out. I was afraid to offend the tenets of cultural tolerance and so I said, “it seems to me you’d be happier together if you were gentler.”

But Dr. Greenway clearly felt that AD would only respond to a direct word of confrontation and correction. It was not the culturally correct move, but it was the spiritually correct one. When sincere love sees evil done to one of God’s daughters, love tries to stop it. Love risks confrontation and correction so that we can all grow.

But someone says, “Wait a second pastor. I’ve seen intolerant, hateful Christian’s who arrogantly tell the world what’s wrong with them. Isn’t confrontation is inescapably arrogant and offensive? No. It’s not, but you have a point. Confrontation often is arrogant, but Christ is creating a community where confrontation can be done in humble love and received with humble thankfulness. I think you’ll see what I mean when we look at

***Service Spoiler 2: Self-Honoring Service***

Paul says in verse 10, “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” If people know we are for them, that we want them to shine then they will usually be open to hear words of correction, confrontation or admonishment. Confrontation can work in a community which is committed to honoring one another. Christ is forming just that kind of community---an “Other-honoring” community.

Roman culture was just the opposite. It was self honoring, in fact, everyone engaged in the *cursus honorum*---the race for honors. Slaves raced to become freedman, freedman raced to gain the status and legal protections of citizen, citizens raced to become decurians---the class in society for government officials and priests, decurians raced to become equestrians---the class in society wealthy enough to own horses, and equestrians raced for the top rung of all---the senators.

Into such an honor crazy culture, Paul begins his letter to the Romans, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus”. Now remember Jesus was known for dying on the cross, the punishment Rome designed to most dishonor criminals and enemies of the state. So please feel the full effect of this: Paul says, “I’m not just a slave. I’m a slave to a crucified man”. As John Ortberg says, “Might as well mark your Facebook status “Loser” and hope for a date.

The NIV translates 10b, “honor one another above yourselves.” That’s a pretty good translation but misses the sense of competition found in the original words. I like the translation, “Outdo each other in giving honor”. Or as Tom Wright translates it “Compete with each other in giving mutual respect.” And so in the early church, the church was totally creative in giving honor. Such that when the church reached maximum capacity and a guest walked in, even if it was a lowly slave, the pastor would get out of his seat and gave up his seat for the guest and the pastor sit on the floor. Let me tell you that early church was crazy---crazy focused in giving honor to others.

I personally think we do try to give honor to others here at Rehoboth. But are we crazy focused, ultra-focused? Do we think about it more than whether we are getting properly honored and understood ourselves? I think it would be great if every Sunday we came to church asking ourselves this question, “Who can I honor today? Who can I compliment, encourage, offer a service to, hold a door open for?”

### ***Service Spoiler 3: Stinginess***

Paul says, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Now whether you are sharing your money, or sharing your vehicle, or your table, or offering to let someone sleep in your bed downstairs, God desires practical generosity from His servants.

Stinginess comes in part from a mindset that “my stuff is mine---Mine” with a capital M. I worked hard for it, and only under special circumstances will I part with it.” Gary Thomas’ wife once asked him to share their new family van with a large, poor family at church who hardly ever went on a vacation. Thomas struggled with this request. “I’d do it God if I had extra money to cover possible damages or if we had another car, but this is all we’ve got and

I've been trying to keep the miles down." Thomas writes, "The Holy Spirit then confronted me, "SO you will only give when it doesn't cost you. Once sacrifice is involved you say, "Hold up". Guess what happened? Thomas gave up the van for the weekend.

I really relate to this story. I'm willing to share excess but I want to stop short at the point of sacrifice. But Paul reminds me, "God desires your whole life to be a living sacrifice---so that your home, your table, your car, your talents, even your books are at God's disposal to achieve God's purposes." About 5 years ago someone from the community asked me, "Pastor, do you have any good books about giving?" I was tempted to say, "No. Not at all. I hate that topic." But actually I had a great book for her by Miroslav Volf called "**Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving**". But at first, I didn't want to give this book on giving to her. Then I realized if I didn't give it to her, I'd always feel guilty looking at this book that teaches me to give up stuff to God's people when they need it." So I gave up the book, the gloomiest giver you ever did see!

The Lord gives good things to you and I so we will give good things to His people. To be His servant means to be His channel of blessing. So each week think about your things, your opportunities, your blessings and consider how God might want you to share them with others.

#### ***Service Spoiler #4: Sloth***

The final service spoiler is sloth---or spiritual sluggishness. Paul says, "Never be lacking in zeal but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord." The word for fervor literally means boiling. Paul is saying, "Be an on fire, red-hot, boiling over, enthusiastic, bonkers for Jesus Christian" and don't let it slip. Don't let your love for Jesus grow cold. Now let's be clear that spiritual fervor can take many different forms. For some it might involve shouting and dancing and speaking in tongues. For other Christian's it might involve quiet and kneeling and chanting.

Here in Romans 12, Paul is not so concerned on how zeal looks, rather he's concerned as to where zeal leads. "Keep your spiritual fervor—serving the Lord." Zeal leads to service. One of my favorite stories of zealous service is about William Booth, the founder and general of the Salvation Army. In his mid-80's he learned he would soon be blind." The General tried to wrap his head around such a huge fact. He asked his son, "You mean, I shall never see your face again?" "No father", replied Bramwell, "Probably not in this world".

Then Booth reached out and held his son's hand and said, "God must know best!  
(Pause) "Bramwell, I have done what I could for God and for the people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and for the people without my eyes."

Amazing! That is true Christian zeal. Now there is a servant of God. If you could take a spiritual radar detector and point it at General Booth's spirit---you'd see it boiling over. That is zeal for God, for his kingdom, for his cause. May we all acquire that kind of fire!

But probably some will say, "Not so fast pastor. I think zealous Christian's are what is wrong with the world. I don't want people boiling over with their religious zeal. In fact, I don't even really want religious simmering. Is there a comfortably temperate setting? Yes. The Bible calls it lukewarm and in Revelation 3 Jesus says that he finds lukewarm Christianity so disgusting that he's ready to spit it out of his mouth. The answer to bad zeal is not less zeal, but rather better zeal based on our knowledge of Jesus and the gospel.

### ***Restoring True Service***

It turns out all these service spoilers can be freshened and purified in the same way. For Paul Better service comes from looking back and looking forwards. First we look back at what Christ has done for us. Paul says in Romans 12:1, "In view of God's mercy, present your

bodies as living sacrifices.” Looking at the cross should make us simultaneously courageous to speak the truth but also humbled to speak it, after all we’d be nothing without Christ’s amazing mercy. When God’s amazing mercy is in view, then we realize that we have no right to say, “I’m better than you.” A deep view of God’s mercy will always make us better servants.

But in addition to looking back, we also need to look ahead. Notice Paul says in verse 12, “Be joyful in hope.” Sometimes the itch to join the race for honors comes from a deep inner fear that we will amount to nothing. But Hebrews 2 says Christ died for us in order to bring us to glory. On Judgment Day, God will say your name, and claim you as His own and reward you for even the least service. Relax, you will amount to something. Keep that hope before your eyes and your itch for worldly honors will slowly drop away. Hope teaches you that the new home Jesus is making for you is far better than the present one. You will be rich one day, so you can afford to share a book, a tool, some money with God’s people in need now.

Do we struggle with a sluggish or slothful spirit now? Don’t give into despair. Keep struggling. Be patient. Pray for fresh enthusiasm. Our energy levels are only somewhat under our control. Jesus knows that and has given us the Holy Spirit to counteract that. “I call things that are not as though they are. I can make barren things fruitful, and cold things, hot and boiling by the Spirit I’ve promised to give you.”

If we set our mind on what the Spirit desires, He will make us more zealous and He will also set before our eyes the great hope of a resurrected body. Your future body will burn bright with love and boil over with zeal. And in that glorified body we will serve him and reign with him for all eternity. Amen.