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**Outdo One Another in Showing Honor
& Live in Harmony with One Another**
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Mark 9:33-37
Romans 12:9-16

The Gospel of Mark 9:33-37 (NRSV)

“Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ **But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.** He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ Then he took a little child and put the child among them; and taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”

Romans 12 is one of the truly great chapters in the Bible. I could preach from it for three to four months and not get to everything that it contains, explains and illustrates about living the Christian life. Verses 9 through 21 are filled with one important command after another. Listen to *Romans 12:9-16* (NRSV), “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; **love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.** Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **Live in harmony with one another;** do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.”

As we continue our series on the “One Another’s” I want to focus today on two that are contained in this passage: **Outdo One Another in Showing Honor & Live in Harmony with One Another.** “Outdo one another in showing honor,” is found in the second half of *Romans 12:10*. If you were following along in a different translation as I read, then your translation may have used different words or phrasing. Notice the differences between these common translations:

- NRSV and ESV: “**Outdo one another in showing honor.**”
- NKJV: “...in honor giving preference to one another.”
- NASB: “...give preference to one another in honor;”
- NIV: “Honor one another above yourselves.”
- NLT: “...take delight in honoring each other.”

If you ponder the meaning of those phrases—like “giving preference” or honoring one another “above yourselves”—you end up with a very similar picture. “**Outdo one another in showing honor.**” At first, it probably sounds funny to think of “outdoing” each other in something like showing honor, as though we’re competing with each other in how well we’re living out biblical commands. The idea of the Greek verb is that of **taking the lead in something; being out front. If we think of honor as showing appreciation and**

esteem, a pretty good paraphrase for this command is **“take the lead in showing appreciation and esteem.”**

How good would you say you are at “taking the lead in showing appreciation and esteem”? Often times we think of ourselves falling short of the standards of faithfulness of the people we meet in the Bible like the Apostles, but I’m going to show appreciation and honor you this morning by telling you that this is one area that many of you are better at than the twelve apostles. You know how I know this? As the song I learned as a little boy taught me, “The Bible tells me so.” In the passage from *Mark 9:33-37* that Jerry read for us earlier, what had the disciples done? **They had argued with one another about who was the greatest. This is the exact opposite of what Paul tells us to do in *Romans 12*.**

The disciples were not taking “the lead in showing appreciation and esteem.” Instead they were trying to attract attention to themselves and talk about how great they were, how faithful they were, how many people they’d healed or brought to Christ, how many demons they’d cast out, how many people they’d fed, who was the best speaker. If that wasn’t bad enough, if you look in your Bible at *Mark 9*, what did Jesus do right before the disciples started arguing about who was the greatest? Look at *Mark 9:31*, “He was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.’” “Are you kidding me? How messed up are we humans? Jesus tells the disciples he’s going to be betrayed and killed and what is their response? **To argue about which one of them is the greatest!** Unbelievable. Poor Jesus. And if that’s not bad enough, it happens again! In *Mark 10:33-34*, Jesus tells the disciples for the **third time**, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.” And what happens next? You’re not going to believe it. James and John, two members of his innermost circle, ask to be seated at Jesus’ right and left in glory. No empathy, no compassion, just “we want you to do whatever we ask of you.” C’mon, man!

Two times Jesus tells his leadership team, his friends, the core of his movement, that he’s going to be betrayed and killed. **And two times the response of the twelve is to try and outdo one another in gaining or seeking honor for themselves—the exact opposite of what Jesus was doing in offering himself as a suffering servant and the exact opposite of what Paul says we’re to do in *Romans 12*.**

How did Jesus put up with them? The answer is the same way he puts up with us! Are we really that different from the Apostles? One thing we have to give the Apostles credit for is that **they allowed these unflattering and unfavorable stories about themselves to be told, shared and even recorded for the benefit of everyone else’s faith (although by the time the Gospels were written many of them had been killed so they weren’t around to object).** If you look at so much of what passes for human interaction, we find ourselves in a daily competition to assert ourselves that we are greater or better than someone else. From school to social media to sports to so many other areas, we believe we’re

competing with others to assert that we're better. There are grades in school to tell us who is better. There are award shows in the entertainment and music industries seemingly every week, so they know who is the best. Sports keep score so we know who wins and who loses. Politicians fall all over themselves claiming they, their party, their country is the greatest. In our culture, we're a long way from outdoing one another in showing honor. We're a long way from taking the lead in showing appreciation and esteem. But that's what we're supposed to do as Christians and in the church.

If we want to be more like Jesus and less like the disciples were before Christ's death and resurrection, if we want to be faithful and live how Paul tells us we're supposed to in *Romans 12*, then there are at least three things to do so we can take the lead in outdoing one another showing appreciation to others.

First, we need to get our relationship right with God to help us better relate to and interact with others. We need to understand, that we can't do what Paul urges us to do in *Romans 12:9-21*, unless we've first done what he says in *Romans 12:1-2*. Until we present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice and allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will not be able to discern or do God's will consistently in our life. The real source of quality relationships with others is full commitment to the Lord that transforms our identity and our sense of self. This is not a single moment in time, but a life-long process. If we want our interpersonal relationships to be better, we can start with our relationship with God, understanding who we truly are as a child of God. Recognizing I'm not competing with any other person. I am my own greatest opponent; I don't need to put someone else down to feel better about myself. Taking time regularly in silence and solitude is helpful in this regard because it gets us away from the non-stop noise of TV, radio or social media, which unless we're careful and discerning tends to make us angrier, more distracted and less peaceful and content. There is not a lot out there in the media or from our leaders that encourages **outdoing one another in showing honor. They seem to do precisely the opposite of what the Bible tells us to do.** Ironically, the people who are the most insecure and the most fearful are the ones who feel the need to constantly talk about how great they are (and usually they're not). People who are truly great are the ones expressing gratitude and appreciation for others and thanking others for their expressions of kindness, generosity or encouragement. **First, we need to get our relationship right with God to help us better relate to and interact with others.**

Second, seize opportunities to honor, affirm and express appreciation to others. Don't miss opportunities to show appreciation to others when those opportunities present themselves. The opposite of showing appreciation is being ungrateful, and that's a character trait that we don't want in our lives. We don't want to take people or their kindness, service, love, or generosity for granted. We don't want to be selfishly focused on ourselves 24 hours a day. When we express appreciation, we're letting someone know how much she or he means to us, or how thankful we are for something that they did for us. Seize opportunities like that because it's the right thing to do—not to mention that such gestures go a long way in building a great friendship or relationship with someone. How do we do this? Here's a very practical

suggestion: make it a goal to honor every person you have a conversation with during the course of a day—take “the lead in showing appreciation and esteem,” because we don’t want to have the reputation of being ungrateful or cheap whether with money or with showing honor, appreciation and gratitude. We want to have the reputation of being generous people—people who show appreciation when acts of service are performed for us. I’m personally deeply grateful, and I know David and Barbara are too for every single person who volunteers, serves and gives of their time, treasure and talent at BBC so we can do all that we do. Thank you all! Your service is a gracious gift to all of us.

A third way to Outdo One Another in showing honor is to **take the initiative. Don’t simply respond to the initiative of others. One of the characteristics of Christian behavior is that it’s proactive, not reactive.** In other words, I’m not supposed to treat you merely in the same way that you treat me, so that if you treat me poorly, I will treat you poorly in return. Rather—and we all know this from the Golden Rule—I am supposed to treat you the way that I would want you to treat me whether you actually treat me that way or not! So, if a person has never shown appropriate appreciation to you, you don’t have to let that fact stop you from showing appreciation and esteem to them. I’m not talking about fake flattery. I’m not talking about twisting or exaggerating the truth, but situations when appreciation and esteem are truly deserved and appropriate. When they are, express it. Don’t let a good thing go unsaid when it can be said.

We often miss out on the life-giving power of encouraging words because we leave them unsaid. You might think about how much you appreciate someone, and you might think very highly of them, but how often do you express that to them? Again, we’re not talking about fake flattery, but faithfulness in obeying the command in *Romans 12:10*. Faithfulness to take the initiative, to take the lead in showing appreciation, not simply to return such expressions when they are given to you, but to be the one who will plant life-giving seeds for the soul through words of appreciation, gratitude and thankfulness. We of all people should be known as a grateful people because we know that every good thing we have is a gift from God. We know to give our appreciation and esteem to the Lord. Let’s make sure we don’t fail to give the same to the people who bring God’s good gifts to us.

Some of you may be thinking, what about the **living in harmony with one another** part of the sermon. I didn’t forget. It isn’t long and it’s a question not a statement. If we as followers of Christ did everything, we could to outdo one another in showing honor to one another, how hard do you think it would be to live in harmony with one another? I’m guessing it wouldn’t be hard at all. We have to remember how to live in harmony, which Paul tells us immediately, **“Do not be haughty, (arrogantly superior and disdainful), but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.”** People who have healthy, Christian relationships avoid these behaviors. People who regularly display these behaviors clearly have not surrendered themselves to Christ nor are they filled with the Spirit.

Paul tells us in *Romans 12:5* that God views us as members of a body. “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” **In the body relationship**

we don't compete; we cooperate. Each of us has a different function, but our differences do not make anyone better or worse than another. The reason is that, whatever our gift or function, each of us contributes. Each of us is necessary.

How then are we to evaluate ourselves? We're each to focus on using our own gift to serve others. We find fulfillment not in comparing ourselves with others, but in being ourselves and using whatever talent God has given in ministry. No longer do we have to argue about who is the greatest, or fret if we're more important than someone else. We're each important. It's impossible to overestimate the impact of this perspective on ourselves and on interpersonal relationships. When we adopt God's perspective, I am released from jealousy. I can find fulfillment in being who I am, rather than wanting to be like someone else. My friendships are not distorted by status. I'm awed by no one and look down on no one. I appreciate others for themselves without feeling they must be different or like me.

Learning to take God's view of others as members with me in a body where cooperation, not competition, is valued initiates a whole new way of relating to others that is unlike anything the world knows. This is crucial for building a loving community. To see others and ourselves as God does, as valuable contributing persons in a family of faith is a way of **honoring one another that enables us to live in harmony with one another.**

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. *Romans 12:9-16* is a portion of Paul's instructions to the Christians in the first century church in Rome about how to conduct their everyday lives. Do we read these instructions as instructions to other people, or directly as instructions to us? Why? Is this how we read instructions in other Biblical texts? (For example, *Exodus 20:1-17*; *Leviticus 12:1-8*; *Matthew 5:38-48*; *1 Corinthians 8:1-13*.) What criteria do we use to determine whether Biblical instructions apply to us today? Why do we use those criteria?
2. *Romans 12:9* says "let love be genuine"—literally, "unhypocritical" or "not play-acted." What is the difference between genuine and "play-acted" love? What will be the effects on a community where people's love for one another is genuine? Where it is play-acted? Have we ever been recipients of these kinds of love? When? Do those experiences give us any insight into this instruction?
3. What is "honor" (in *Romans 12:10*, the word can mean literally an estimate of something's value or price, but also is used in places referring to social value, respect, etc.)? How do we show honor to others? To whom do we show honor? Why? Are there people to whom we do not show honor? Why? What do we think it means, practically, to "outdo one another in showing honor"?
4. What do we think it means to "serve the Lord" (*Romans 12:11*)? Do we think of some activities as "serving the Lord" and others as not serving the Lord? Which ones? Why? "Serving the Lord" is linked in this verse with "zeal" and "ardor." What does that tell us about "serving"? Why does it tell us that?

5. What does it look like to “contribute to the needs of the saints,” or to “show hospitality to strangers” (literally, to “pursue the love of foreigners”)? Are these instructions about attitudes, or about activities? Are there any limits on these attitudes or activities? What are they, do we think? Why do we think that? How do we “contribute” and “show hospitality,” practically speaking?