

Check Lists?

- Do you find check-lists helpful?
 - at times they can be incredibly helpful in helping you keep track of things you've got to do
 - at other times drawing up a big list of things to do can be a good way of distracting attention away from the fact that you aren't doing any of them - especially the big important one at the top of the list!!
 - my silliest one is I have a mental check-list for what should be on the breakfast table each morning!! **muesli, milk, tea, milk, sugar, toast, butter, peanut butter**
 - *that list and the two cups of tea that must be drunk during breakfast are the essential starts to my day!!*
- Lists can sometimes seem to be without structure:
 - very often I'll be writing down a number of things that need done during a week, and there is on the surface little connection between them;
 - sermon preparation, visiting, taking a funeral service, chairing a meeting, reading a book - **very diverse!**
 - *what is less clear is what is meant to hold them together - in the case of that list the call I have to serve as minister of this congregation, to serve Christ and his people here*
- Paul presents us here with a list of ways of living we should aim for and aspire to:
 - what holds them together is the stuff we've been looking at over the past couple of weeks, the **"therefore"** of the gospel
 - now he's getting down to brass tacks, spelling it out in detail.
- One aspect of the wider context of Romans that is of importance here is the general pressure there was on Christians, even before the great persecutions of later years.
 - remember Jesus and taxes? **"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's..."** Romans very intolerant of anyone claiming authority greater than their own!
 - that's the hook the Sanhedrin used to get Jesus executed in the end - a rival to Caesar's authority
- In the heart of the Empire, in Rome itself, any hint of disloyalty, and disinclination to make a sacrifice to the Emperor, to join in with the public displays and so on would:
 - not just result in **official pressure** ("we'll arrest you...")
 - but also **unofficial pressure** from friends, neighbours ("don't stand out from the crowd, or you'll bring trouble on all of us!")
- Paul's is a check-list for Christians under pressure:

Exposition

(9) Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

- **Sincere** - real, not a pretense, without hypocrisy:
 - what if I don't **feel** love? Can I just say, "I don't feel a love towards him; if I pretend to love, it won't be sincere - so I won't love him!"?
 - **no!!** - command here is to **love without hypocrisy**; the love is the given, the nature of the love is being discussed.
 - *strive towards your love being real*
- **So:**
 - "I find it hard to love Jimmy, but that is what God calls me to, and so out of glad obedience I will seek to demonstrate love to him" - **fine!**
 - "I find it hard to love Jimmy, but if act as if I do he'll like me" **or** "...but if I do others may think well of me" - **not really!**
- **Hate evil - cling to good:**
 - adopt that attitude; when you find in yourself a sinful habit or pattern of behaviour, hate it, don't tolerate it; with God's help, strive to remove it

- cling to good - hold on tight to anything that will bring good, the love of Christ to bear - whether its the "clinging on" to the habit of daily Bible reading and prayer even when it doesn't feel encouraging, or fighting the barriers that come up when you try and offer help to someone

(10) Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

- An awful lot of this check-list is about how we relate to other people, how we treat them.
 - I think I grew up with an overly individualistic view on the world;
 - for me, this is hard...
 - its hard to remember, or to make the time, to lift the phone to see how someone is doing, to keep going at the weekly task of helping a neighbour with something, to care enough to confront when something has gone wrong, to put in the extra effort to not just say we love them but show it!
 - *am I as devoted to my brothers and sisters in Christ as I am to my work, my leisure interests, my friends, even my family?*
- What is the greatest honour I can give to anyone?
 - be involved in the work of Jesus, shaping their life to present it before God's throne! Seeking their spiritual growth!

(11) Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

- That kind of devotion to others doesn't come from nowhere:
 - it comes from a vibrant relationship with God;
 - work at QTs, reading, prayer, your own pattern of devotion
 - work at church, at growing through gathering - not just the Sunday preaching, which is in many ways a solo thing - me and God's word - but also in those relationships that give reality to it - house-groups, after service conversations, prayer meetings...
- Old image of the **coal fire** - take a coal out, and it soon goes out, put it back in and it not only warms up but it keeps the others warm too!
 - *what is it that feeds your passion for the Lord? spend time doing that, or with that person!!*
- **Feed your passion!**

(12) Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

- What holds these three snippets of advice together?
 - an eternal perspective!
 - hope - there is more to this world than what I see around me, the hope of Christ's return!
 - patience - I can wait, because something better is coming!
 - and, its worth praying, faithfully, since the future matters, and God does and will intervene

(13) Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

- What we were talking about this morning!

(14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

- Upside down values of the kingdom:
 - same self-giving love as Jesus showed at Calvary

(15) Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

- People matter; get alongside them; be devoted to one another widened out to whole community

(16) Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

- Live in harmony - John Lennon and "All you need is love" song from late 60's
 - he wanted people to live in harmony - hoped it would happen if they tried hard enough!
 - doesn't work on its own because of human sin and fallenness

- But, harmony is what Jesus came to bring - harmony between God and man, harmony between humans
 - how? by doing away with pride and position!
 - **who is most important? who is most influential? who is to be avoided?**
 - tear those attitudes up - Paul was talking to slave owners, telling them to associate with slaves!

(17) Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

- Under pressure.... don't boil over:
 - what pressure cooker situations do you face?
 - to follow this advice, what can be done to relieve the pressure?

(18) If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

- Healthy realism here - not always possible!
 - but do your best; if peace doesn't reign, how can I bring it to be?

(19) Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (Deut 32:35)

(20) On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." (Prov 25:21,22)

(21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Summary statement!

What is the thread running through?

- How do you respond to those who oppose Christ and who oppose you?
 - how do you respond to evil - with good!