

“The List”

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Romans 12:9-21

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I’m not very fond of lists. You know, the kind tell you what to do and where to go. Some call them an itinerary. And I don’t get too thrilled about Honey-do lists either. You know, the kind that say “Honey, do this”, or “Honey, do that”. I guess I don’t function very well around a list of things I need to accomplish or a list of things I need to do on a given day. Lists seem so limiting; so regimented. I think part of my anxiety is that at the end of the day, few of the items on my list ever get completed. I am haunted by the thought, “You didn’t complete the list. You didn’t measure up again.”

Now that you know how I feel about lists, perhaps you can better understand how I feel when I read Romans chapter 12. [9] “Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. [10] Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. [11] Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically. [12] Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful. [13] When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night. [14] If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. [15] When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow. [16] Live in harmony with each other. Don't try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! [17] Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. [18] Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.

[19] Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. [20] Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." [21] Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Romans 12:9-21

Do you see it? It's a list; a rather long list; a very difficult list. It's the thing of nightmares; the list that never goes away. It's a list the Apostle Paul calls each and every Christian to follow day by day. And the idea of carrying this list around wherever I go and whatever I do is positively overwhelming. Even though I know these "Rules for Christian living" are really to my benefit, I can't help but feel haunted by the idea of yet another uncompleted list.

Look at what we are called to do:

1. Be sincere in your love for others.
2. Hate everything that is evil and hold tight to everything good.
3. Love each other as brothers and sisters.
4. Honor others more than you do yourself.
5. Never give up.
6. Eagerly follow the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord.
7. Let your hope make you glad.
8. Be patient in times of trouble and never stop praying.
9. Take care of God's needy people.
10. Welcome strangers in your house.
11. Ask God to bless everyone who mistreats you, not curse them.
12. Be happy when others are happy, be sad when others are sad.
13. Be friendly with everyone.
14. Don't be proud and feel you're smarter than others.
15. Make friends with ordinary people.
16. Don't mistreat someone who has mistreated you.
17. Try to earn the respect of others.
18. Do your best to live at peace with everyone.
19. Do not try to get even. Let God handle that.
20. Don't let evil defeat you, but defeat evil with good.

I might be able to do five of these; ten on a good day, but all 20? And the list starts over the very next morning! But perhaps we've failed to realize is that this is not a "To Do" list, but a "Be" list. It's a list of who we should become; Transformed each and every day by the renewing of our minds. **"Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."**¹ Say Paul in verse 2.

Maybe that's why some people struggle with this list, or others like it; their view of what it means to be Christian is all wrong. Looking at the many lists found in the Bible, they figure they must accomplish them in order to make God happy. But you know as well as I that no matter how hard we try to DO these things, there

¹*Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997 . Tyndale House: Wheaton, Ill.

are just too many days when the list is not fulfilled. As so, we lead fitful lives; voices echoing in our minds “You didn’t complete the list. You didn’t measure up again”. Are we left to live with the realization that these things are hopeless? That there is nothing we can do to earn our Father’s favor? That for these few short years of our life, we’ll be haunted with God’s disappointment? Well, yes, but only if we measure ourselves by what we do.

Paul begins this chapter with the idea of presenting ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice. And, no, he’s not suggesting we burn our bodies upon some altar. He is suggesting, however, that we would sacrifice who we are; putting to death that human nature which keeps us from becoming the person in this list. And the renewing of our mind must happen daily. It happens by simply giving yourself over to God at the start of each day. We need not pray, “Lord, help me to do the things on this list”, but simply ask “Lord, help me to become this kind of person”. And if we allow Him, God will transform our mind into the person we discover within this list.

For those of us who can’t keep the list, there is comfort in knowing that God understands. He knows we will fail from time to time. And His love is not conditional on getting all 20 items marked off the list. There is no list you can keep that will warrant God’s love. God’s love is surely not based upon what we do, but in who we become.

As you look over this list in Romans 12, do you see yourself in any of these things? Are they there all the time, or just every now and then? Remember to daily ask God to transform you, and little by little, you’ll find yourself becoming the list. It’s a transformational process that takes time and constant effort. And one day, as you look back upon your life, you’ll find that instead of filling the list, the list has filled you.