

September 4, 2011  
Proper 18, A  
Romans 13:8-14

After a summer of relative calm and absolute tidiness – while my girls were away - I discover that at my house we are now thrown into the turmoil of the fall. It is a season of lists. There are To Do lists, and To Buy lists. There is the list of activities to register for and the list of books to get from the library. All of them, things we don't want to forget, all of them signaling to us, the list-makers in my home, signaling that we are full of good intentions. That we will do the right thing because we know what the right thing is and we have written it down.

Life becomes simpler once you have a list. You've already sorted reality into two categories – what is important enough to get on your list and what is not. After that, well, you just have to do what it says: buy school supplies, paint the front door, sign up for piano lessons. Mission accomplished.

As we finish our summer foray into the long letter that Paul wrote to the Christian community in Rome, we find ourselves showered with his lists. Last week's long list in chapter 12 included helpful advice like LOVE WHAT IS GENUINE; HATE WHAT IS EVIL, HOLD FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD. Remember Glenda reading slowly through that for us? Maybe some of you wrote one of those admonitions down to think about through the week, and slipped it into your pocket as a touchstone. Oh yeah – I'm keeping this in mind – HOLD FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD.

Today we have another list, in our last reading from Romans. Some of us will heave a sigh of relief at hearing that this is it, because Paul is not easy to understand, and this may have felt like hard work. Others of us – like me – are wishing we could finish off the whole book. There are 3 chapters that we won't even touch on, including the intriguing last chapter. In chapter 16, Paul sends greeting by name to his friends and colleagues in Rome, including women like PHOEBE, A DEACON OF THE CHURCH AT CENCHREAE and PRISCA AND AQUILA, WHO WORK WITH ME IN CHRIST JESUS, AND WHO RISKED THEIR NECKS FOR MY LIFE, TO WHOM NOT ONLY I GIVE THANKS, BUT ALSO ALL THE CHURCHES OF THE GENTILES. Who are these women? What were their roles? What was their significance in the early church and how has it been so easily forgotten? That's an important list for us not to lose.

You might enjoy reading chapters 14 to 16 on your own at home this week, just to put the icing on the cake. But today we are in chapter 13, with another of Paul's lists. We could call this one Rules to Live By. LET US LIVE HONOURABLY AS IN THE DAY, NOT IN REVELING AND DRUNKENNESS, NOT IN DEBAUCHERY AND LICENTIOUSNESS, NOT IN QUARRELING AND JEALOUSY.

LET US LIVE HONOURABLY AS IN THE DAY.... I don't know about you, but when I get to a list like this one – and there are a few others just like it in the epistles of the new testament – when I get to this list I start to feel just the tiniest weeniest bit smug. NOT IN REVELING AND DRUNKENNESS. No problem. I've got that one covered. Not a big problem for me. NOT IN DEBAUCHERY AND LICENTIOUSNESS. Got those covered too – haven't debauched in

years. NOT IN QUARRELING AND JEALOUSY. Ok, maybe those strike a little closer to the bone – but really, they aren't big causes of concern in my life. Who would I quarrel with? I'm a single parent – I make all the rules at my place.

I want to say to Paul, Thanks for the list, thanks for the Rules to Live By, but they don't really apply to me. And I want to turn the page. Nothing here, in chapter 13. What's next?

But, there is something in this passage that has been delighting me all week – ever since I began to think about it on Monday. Verse 11: THE NIGHT IS FAR GONE, THE DAY IS NEAR. LET US THEN LAY ASIDE THE WORKS OF DARKNESS AND PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT.

Let us PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT. What a fabulous image. THE ARMOR OF LIGHT. Armour is strong and hard. It is defensive. It is heavy, and cold, and loud when it gets struck by a sword. Armour is about battlefields and blood and gore. It is about rage and fury and revenge and justice or might.

And light? Light is light. It has no substance. It will not be caught. It can be measured, but not controlled. It is beyond us – it is ethereal. It is there – but not there. THE ARMOR OF LIGHT. I need some of that. I need some of that ARMOR OF LIGHT. It sounds like the sort of stuff that would keep me safe from the harms that really threaten me in my life. I'm not too tied up in knots about REVELING AND DRUNKENNESS... DEBAUCHERY AND LICENTIOUSNESS. But spare me please from any more loss. Protect me from grief. Shield us from broken hearts and abandoned hopes and the darkness of despair. Maybe ARMOR OF LIGHT could do that? Could it keep us safe?

Can anything keep us safe? In *Mere Christianity* C. S. Lewis writes this:

Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation (1).

“Love anything, and your heart will certainly be... broken.” The only way to stay safe is to avoid love. Funny about that – that C. S. Lewis talks about love. So does Paul, up here in verse 8: OWE NO ONE ANYTHING, EXCEPT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER; FOR THE ONE WHO LOVES ANOTHER HAS FULFILLED THE LAW.

It's a bit jarring – to me, anyway – to have LOVE introduced into the same sentence as THE LAW. What does love have to do with law? THE COMMANDMENTS, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT COVET' ;AND ANY OTHER COMMANDMENT, ARE SUMMED UP IN THIS WORD, 'LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' LOVE DOES NO WRONG TO A NEIGHBOR; THERE FORE, LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.

He doesn't mean romantic love, obviously. Paul is not talking about "One Day" or "Friends With Benefits." He's talking about that harder kind of love – the kind that is all intention and no emotion. All choice and force of will, all grit and determination, not dewy-eyed glances and pounding hearts.

LOVE DOES NO WRONG TO A NEIGHBOR, THEREFORE, LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW. And, I think – no, I am certain – that love is the ARMOR OF LIGHT.

I have a friend whose calling it is to live in one of the l'Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier. These are homes for developmentally and physically challenged adults, people living with multiple disabilities and deficits. Their able-bodied assistants live with them, among them, share their lives with them. My friend has lived at l'Arche almost her whole adult life.

I watch her with one of the core members, named Carl. Carl cannot talk. His face is frozen by some muscular malfunction, but he can wrench some expressions out of his hardened features. His hands are permanently curled. He walks awkwardly and painfully slowly, supported by a friend, or a walker. You would think that he was lost inside his strangely shaped body and mind.

But he is not lost. My friend can find him. She steals his walker and tousles his hair. She makes silly noises and sings in his ear. She asks him to dance. And when he is with her, Carl will laugh. He will laugh because she has taken the time to get to know him. She takes the time to see him. She loves him – and he comes alive.

That must be THE ARMOR OF LIGHT. That must be the love that changes everything. That must be the most important of the Rules to Live By. The top of the list. Choose to love. Choose to risk. Choose to be open. Choose to make others happy. Choose vulnerability. Choose to sacrifice. Choose joy. And you will find, without even noticing it, that you have put on that ARMOR OF LIGHT. Amen.

(A sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Kate Crawford at First-St Andrew's United Church, London, Ont.  
[www.fsaunited.com](http://www.fsaunited.com))

(1) C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1943 (1960), p. 123.