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I feel more comfortable with a list. Partly because of amnaesia. It's partly control. And then there's the bucket list which allows us to play footsie with our mortality while we try all the sweets in the shop

The Letter to the Ephesians offers us a sort of spiritual list-mania. It's not quite clear who the list maker is. But it focuses on discipleship - the things which we should leave alone - like fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, foolish talking; and then what it means to live in light of the grace given to us in Christ Jesus.

I don't know whether or not this kind of material makes you feel uncomfortable. But it bothers me. In much of my make-up, I'm a person of my times. Nobody is going to tell me how to live. I value personal autonomy. I like the freedom which secular society gives. I'm old enough to have grown up with a fair amount of religiously-shaped guilt about things. We are better off without that.

But having owned up to that, let me share with you three things which this passage says to me which I think are very important - a sort of reality check about life

The first is the importance of discipleship as the basis for belonging in the family of God. In the broadest possible terms, much of what I do in ministry and as a church leader is about moving our church from membership to discipleship. Nothing much wrong with membership - it's members who pay my stipend after all. But people who are members tend to bring with them other agendas. The negative mixing of faith with cultural and political agendas are what produces sectarianism in Scotland and Ireland. Traditionalist and conservative agendas sometimes say 'I'm going to belong on my terms or not at all'. Discipleship is very different. It is open to learning, open to people and prayerfully and vocationally open to God.

The second is that this passage mounts a real challenge to secular liberalism - to those who are so conformed to this world that they are completely uncritical of it; to those who believe that there is no spiritual or moral price to be paid for the exercise of unrestricted personal freedom. I could focus that in a number of directions. But in my life I see that price being paid by those who decide to give way to anger, bitterness, an unforgiving spirit. It is all too easy to become very dark indeed in the cause of self-righteousness and self-justification - when Ephesians reminds us that 'ye were sometimes darkness but now are ye light in The Lord.

And finally it seems to me that the starkness of the contrasts sketches a background to what is an age-old question for the community of faith - to what extent should we gradually accommodate ourselves to a changing society - or should we preserve a radical separation between newly defined societal norms and the community of faith. That is no abstract question. The same sex marriage legislation has now become law in Scotland. Research shows that many younger people simply see no difficulty with this and find the historic position of churches which say that marriage is between a man and a woman for life inexplicable. That's a neutral way of describing their view. The ages-old dichotomy between churches which are world-accommodating and world-refusing is becoming ever more challenging.

So if you hear the lists - fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, foolish talking - as just so much moralising, you may be missing the point. This is saying in its terms that there is a radical difference between those who are living the discipleship life and those who are not. The question is what that means in our terms and in our times,