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### Hostility's High Price

The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven books. In terms of sheer volume, the weightiest section is the one devoted to twenty-one letters written to early Christians. The letters functioned as encouragement, instruction, guidance, and warning. In other words, the letters provided necessary commentary on belief's application to everyday life.

Isn't it interesting that right from the start, people of faith apparently had some difficulty sorting out how to put their beliefs into practice? We are certainly no different today. The fact that Christianity has splintered into 38,000 denominations worldwide speaks for itself. Christians still differ in understanding how to live out the "Gospel truth."

Yet the plain language of some of the New Testament letters to struggling churches and their members has something to offer us even today in our search for helpful guides for faithful living. Much of the simple, frank advice which the letters contain is clearly still relevant, as evidenced by the fact that many of its phrases have been retained in our modern vernacular.

Consider, for example, the well-known counsel from the Letter to the Ephesians, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." The wisdom of that advice is being validated by medical science in some pretty amazing ways. As Rev. King Duncan has noted, psychiatrists at Duke University concluded after a thirty year study of the health and habits of over two thousand people, that those who have ongoing feelings of hostility towards others have an increased risk of illness and early death. Those who scored in the top fifth for hostility in a personality inventory were four times more likely to have died during the thirty years of the study than those who scored in the bottom fifth.

And of course, not only is hostility destructive to us physically, but as the Letter to the Ephesians would have us understand, it is damaging to us spiritually, as well. How can we maintain a relationship with a God we claim is the very source of love and life, after all, when we are busy immersing ourselves in loveless animosity and lifeless bitterness.

So this may be a good time for a self-administered hostility test as a way to diagnose our likelihood for physical and spiritual health risks. We could ask ourselves ... Who am I unwilling to forgive? What situation so angers me that I regularly rant and rave about it? Where do I feel I have been deeply wronged and deserve a long-awaited apology? What unfairness really galls me? If you can readily answer some of these questions, perhaps you are hosting some damaging hostility. Maybe you have let the sun go down on your anger a few too many times.

If that is so, then the advice from another of the biblical letters to the little church of Philippi may offer an alternative focus. It says, "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." If you thought about those things, focused on them, supported them, and enhanced their prominence in your life and your world, wouldn't your hostility quotient decline to safer levels?