

ONE

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Preacher: Chris Jones

[0 : 00] The girl says to you, I really like you but just want to be good friends. And then you discover that they've been texting and messaging your best friend behind your back and carrying on a relationship with them.

How do you feel? Angry. And the question is, when the anger flares, what do you do with the hostility?

Angry. What do you do with the anger that you feel towards this person who was before your friend? Or when you're married, your spouse has a credit card.

Maybe you've seen your mum and dad do this. And they go on a shopping trip and they load up the credit card. They just come back from the shops having spent a lot more than they were meant to have spent on the credit card. And mum or dad suddenly realises that the other one has caused the family huge problems for the next few months as they grapple with paying a debt which they're otherwise unable to afford.

And so one of them is very, very angry with the other. What do you do with the hostility? What do you do with the anger? Well, you've got your mum and dad's car.

[1 : 08] They've given it to you. You're on your red peas. And you do what you know you shouldn't have done. You've had a couple of drinks. It's not very intoxicated but you have an accident.

And the car's not covered by insurance. And you've got to go home. Well, the policeman takes you home to tell your mum and dad the story of what has happened.

They're furious. What does it take to remove the hostility? Now, I can give you Ephesians 2 in a nutshell. So let me tell you Ephesians 2 in a nutshell.

The first half which Deb preached last week is about how God removes hostility between him and people. And the second part where I'm particularly focusing tonight but I want to spend a little bit of time in the first part is how God deals with hostility between people.

So between us and God and between us and one another. And he uses a particular example to make that. So if you remember that, you've got the thruster tonight but it's quite another thing to take it to heart and apply it to yourself and what that means.

[2 : 21] So Ephesians chapter 2 is written against a background of hostility. And the hostility is on those two different fronts. And Deb preached to us last week from verses 1 to 10 which is a fantastic passage.

And in that passage, the hostility which is described is justified. It's between good people and God and it's about us giving offence to God and God being angry with us. And in verse 1 it says, Now that's a mouthful if you've never heard it before but let me tell you it's very simple.

You, me and everybody else dead in transgressions and sin. God is justifiably angry and we are described as by nature objects of his anger.

So people who have rejected God, which is the whole lot of us, are dead meat as far as God is concerned without Christ. And it's a problem because when you're dead, you can't do anything to change your circumstance.

Death is the ultimate description of helplessness. So the big message of the first half of Ephesians is what God has done about this situation.

[4 : 00] So in verses 4 and 5 he declares the great news, the great thing that God has done. He's taken the initiative, he's stepped into this situation and it says, And so it says that God has actually stepped into the middle of this hostility himself, even though it's his own anger.

He stepped into the ring, he's struck a death blow to sin and death. He died for us, he's brought us out from under his anger and we have been brought from death to life and this is described, it is by grace you have been saved.

But the second half of Ephesians is about a different kind of hostility. Hostility is something that we all understand, we participate in, we've been in both sides of it, we've been really angry with somebody ourselves, we know that experience.

And we also know the other experiences, which is quite a helpless experience sometimes, is to be on the receiving end of another person's anger. They're angry with me and I can't control their anger, they're just dumping on me and I'm feeling it and I'm crushed by it.

God has been keeping his promises and working his purposes out through the Old Testament part of the Bible, through the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob for nearly 2,000 years before this is written.

[5 : 34] And in the words of Isaiah, God's people, the Jews were meant to be a light to the Gentiles. And the goodness of God was supposed to be seen in them. And nations were intended to be drawn to the Lord God Almighty who had been so kind and faithful to his people.

People were meant to look on and say, I want to be part of that. But the reality was different. And the Jews had received all this goodness from God and instead of holding it with humility and holding it out in an embracing way to the nations, they had this great sense of entitlement and privilege.

And they're proud of the special status that God gave them. And they looked down their noses, they despised those that didn't share it. You know, we sit in church, don't we, tonight?

Right. And for those of us who understand the salvation that we've received, it is a very great thing. But what an appalling thing to hold it to ourselves and not want to share it with others. It's the grace of God that we've come under in the first place.

So the Jews had a name for everybody else in the world who wasn't a Jew. They called them, our translation, Gentile. But in Greek, it's ethnos, the ethnics.

[6 : 55] We translate it nations. And when you use the word nations, we probably think of that as quite a good, a positive sort of translation. But for Jews to refer to the ethnos, it was a term of derision and hate.

So if you weren't a Jew, you're an ethnic. John Stott, in his commentary, wrote that the Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile.

The Gentile said the Jews were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. That's what you were made for. Is anybody here tonight from a Jewish background, if you want to say? You don't have to. My presumption is that most of us aren't. And so for the Jews, we are fodder for the fires of hell. Back here. And God said, God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he has made. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in childbirth.

[7 : 53] For that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. And until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute.

If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl or a Gentile girl married a Jewish boy, the family would have the funeral for them. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.

The separation between Jew and Gentile was seen in the temple. God didn't actually live in the temple, but the centre of the temple was the symbol of where God's name was and his place was and how he dwelt with his people.

And the Jews could come fairly close, but the Gentiles had to stand at a distance and look, stand outside the gate, stand outside the wall and look into the temple, but not come close into the temple.

And archaeologists have actually found some of the signs which were around the temple, saying, stop. And they said these words exactly, no foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure around the temple.

[8 : 59] Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his own ensuing death. Stop or die. Really interesting, you catch a glimpse of it in the book, in Acts of the Apostles, because there's a place there where Paul is in serious trouble with the Jewish authority because they heard a rumour that he'd actually desecrated the temple by taking Jews into the temple area.

Something he shouldn't, he didn't do it, but that's what they thought he did. So these guys really hated one another. And the hatred is particularly driven by the Jew towards the Gentile.

There is a state of enmity between two groups of people that God had always intended to draw to himself. Now we understand hostility.

We played with that at the beginning. We engage in it one way or another. We've been on the giving and we've been on the receiving end, I presume. When people are fighting, when they're

having a quarrel with one another, we have to be very careful when we listen to one another's stories.

Who do we listen to first? We listen to our friend, don't we? In my family, the kids when they're younger, they don't do it anymore, but they have a spat with one another.

[10:18] And sometimes they come running to mum or dad and both of them may be trying to tell their story and win their case and win you over and help you to understand why the other one got it exactly wrong and I was right.

And Kerry and I get involved and all of a sudden, Kerry and I are arguing and fighting with one another and the kids patch it up over here. And you look back afterwards and you scratch your head and think, how did I get involved in that?

And it's the same with adults. We listen to our friends. We know that they always tell us the truth. But we know that they tell us their hurts from their perspective and with their flavour.

And most of us shade ourselves in a better light than the person that we disagree with because we probably want to convince you that we're right and they're wrong, don't we?

One thing's absolutely certain. There's always another side. And sometimes it's come from a really simple thing at the beginning of one person just not understanding clearly what the other person was trying to communicate.

[11:29] I said something to a friend the other week and it muddied the waters for me and it created feelings of distress and alienation, all sorts of things. And then we talked about it. And when we talked about it, I realised that I'd distorted things in my mind and gone to places on my own where I'd got it wrong.

Ephesians chapter 2 is a wonderful chapter and verses 11 to 22 in particular because it declares that God has engaged in a great exercise in conflict resolution between people.

God is in the business of repairing and restoring relationships. And he addresses both sides of this Jew-Gentile divide one at a time.

He goes to the Gentile first, the ethnic, the ethnos. And in verse 12 he says, Now let's put ourselves in those shoes because that's us.

Before Christ, you were destitute. We were destitute. We weren't part of the covenants or the deals that God had done with people.

[12:55] They didn't know him. We were genuine no-hopers, no relationship with God's people, no relationship with God. We stood outside his promises.

We had nothing to look forward to except judgment and rejection, fodders for the fires of hell, as our Jewish enemies would say.

But it's not where God wants things to remain. And in verse 13 it says, But now in Christ you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

God has acted to bring those who were far off near. He's brought us in. And he's brought us in from a long way out. And he didn't do it by making us Jews.

We are brought near to God by the blood of Christ shed on the cross for our sins. We have been forgiven through the undeserved kindness and grace of God.

[13:59] It's a wonderful message. It's a wonderful place that we've been brought to. But this is not a hostility. This is not a divide which is about one side being really wrong and the other side being right.

Both sides have to move in their thinking and in their stance. They both have to understand God in a new way for true reconciliation to occur. And so he turns and he speaks to the Jews and he says in verse 15, Christ has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances.

that he might create in himself one new humanity in the place of the two thus making peace. And he might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross thus putting to death that hostility through it.

It's a big statement. The commandments and the laws have been abolished. That is a bombshell which was dropped by the Lord Jesus himself and it got him executed.

It's continued in the lives of the apostles and some of them are losing their lives for it as well.

Because I think if you're a Jew and you hear somebody come along and say the commandments and the laws have been abolished then what you really hear when that is said you hear something said like it's now okay to lie and steal and commit adultery and do murder and do whatever you like go for it because these guys are saying the law has been abolished.

[15 : 41] But that's not what it's about. The law has been abolished but in a sense it has been completely superseded.

Everything that the law was designed to do has been met in Christ. It has been completely fulfilled in Christ. When I was a child I'd go with my mum and do the shops in D.Y.

Deb probably did this too. Hmm. All the banks in the northern beaches were down in D.Y. even before Inghamall. That says how old I am doesn't it?

And my mum would queue up one after another at three or four different banks moving money around and she'd have me and my brother and sister in tow and we were really little and we'd go from one bank to another getting bored stiff while she waited in queues while they counted money and sometimes going back to the first bank that she started with because she had to take something back there after she'd gone to that one.

I got sick of writing on those bank slips. You don't do that anymore. You sit at home you push a few buttons on the internet we still love money don't we?

[16 : 59] We move it around we haven't got the tax for money but you do it on the internet it's all done in five minutes and you go home old ways are made completely obsolete by the new and thank God for it.

You guys and girls have got it easy. So Jesus has made the old way obsolete and even the Jews have to move ground in their understanding of this process of reconciliation.

They can't cling to the things they used to. So when Jesus died on the cross the Jews long awaited Messiah became the perfect sacrifice that never needed to be offered again. He died for the sins of his own people the Jews but he also died for the sins of people in the world who knew nothing of God and nothing of his people Israel.

He died for the nations as well. And that's why he writes in verses 17 and 18 he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near for through him both of us have access in one spirit to the father peace to the far off the Gentiles peace to those who were near the Jews the hostility that existed between them and that kept them separated has been completely extinguished and dealt with in Christ.

We have been brought together by the Lord Jesus Christ he has made us one through Jesus we have access to God through his spirit. And you get this picture of God being the most amazing reconciler bringing people who absolutely hated one another's guts together and it happened through the death of his son by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and God extinguished hostility between himself and people he removed hostility between people and people you and me that we can be in relationship again.

[19 : 08] And it's God's church that bears witness to that reality. Verse 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone and in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

You get this magnificent picture of God doing something quite glorious in building his church. People who were once deadly enemies are brought together by the blood of Christ.

Outsiders are now regarded as citizens and members with the saints. In fact it says we're built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets. That's a great description because the apostolic preaching which is recorded in the New Testament as well as the prophets of the Old Testament the scriptures anticipating the coming of Christ it's really saying in a funny way that the church is founded on the word of God.

And so word based ministry is at the heart of what we do it brings the dead to life. And the cornerstone of this magnificent building is Christ himself. We keep proclaiming the life saving message of a crucified and resurrected saviour.

We believe if you believe in Jesus you respond to that message and trust Jesus Christ as Lord you are saved. So it's talking about God's people together.

[20 : 47] This is not you just in your seat by yourself. This is us as a group of people together that God is corporately building into a spiritual building in which his spirit dwells.

I would think that before I came tonight if I asked many of you where does the Holy Spirit dwell if you're a Christian believer you would have said in my heart he indwells me and he empowers my life and that's a true thing to say.

But the language here in this passage is not focused on you and your individual experience it's focused on the powerful effect of the spirit of God being at work in the body of his people. If you understand this teaching it should completely transform the way you view church. I've got a hunch that a lot of people at 5 o'clock or 5.30 don't have the same sorts of problems as some of the people in the morning.

I think people and some of us have good theology have good Bible understanding when we read these things but our passions and our feelings lead us to places that don't really reflect it.

[21 : 59] Probably an example of that a while back talking about if you changed the church around and changed it from one direction to another and one person said but this is the church and it's so important that we've got the long aisle and why is it important that we've got the long aisle?

So it's there for us to have a long aisle to walk down when we do weddings. And the notion of church and the importance of the building anyway gets distorted and we go to funny places with it. The church of God is not the building it's a spiritual community and so the church is not the building as beautiful or as ugly as you think this is everybody will have their own opinions about what they think about the building this is a space in which the people of God gather to worship God and to encourage each other in Christ.

And if this building wasn't here or if our government said to us in a few years down the track you can't meet there you're not allowed to gather as Christians I hope that you would ignore the government at that point and maybe not come to this building because it might be dangerous for you but go and meet down in Blue Gum Forest or Beach and Park devil provide the toilets and the food but Beach and Park or somebody's home but go somewhere meet together and do the same sorts of things that we're doing tonight in this building and you see the beauty and the miracle of what God has done he gathers people from whom his hostility has been removed and from that he opens the door to relating without hostility to one another we've already said most of us don't come from Jewish backgrounds this is about us where we've come we've been brought in we are privileged outsiders who have been invited into the family by the blood of Christ maybe not so much tonight but in the morning there are so many different ethnicities which are represented in our church family and we gather as the people of God and when we gather as the people of God we gather as one because God has dealt with our hostilities in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ no one culture stands over another we need the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to make us one it's not just in house that this teaching applies or it's not just in house that this remarkable building has an impact and remember this remarkable building is a spiritual community it impacts God's world as well we as a body in the sermon on the mount

Jesus calls us to be salt and light not just as individuals but as the body of believers that we are in the world in which we live I had a fantastic time over the last week reading a book by Michael Cassidy who was the long term leader of African Evangelistic Enterprise which is the organisation that Darian and Vanessa serve with in Africa and he wrote a book he's written a number of books but one of the books he wrote was called A Witness Forever and it's an account of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy which is in the early 1990s the year was 1994 and at the beginning of April a civil war began in Rwanda that led to genocide which claimed 800,000 lives in 100 days it's one of the most appalling things that's happened in my own lifetime and at the same time South Africa was sitting on a powder keg and people believed that something similar might happen the first post-apartheid democratic election where Nelson Mandela became the president was scheduled for the end of April and one of the major black African parties was refusing to take part in the election so it wasn't just black white apartheid all that sort of stuff it was black on black and there were all sorts of groups and rivalries all over the place and the consequence could only be civil war if the election went ahead and it could only be civil war if it didn't go ahead and the world was watching and everyone knew that a bloodbath was likely now the international mediators Henry Kissinger who was really famous for his mediation in the Middle East and Lord Carrington from Kissinger was from the US and Carrington was from Britain arrived in South Africa on April 12 and these were two big world hot shots at conflict resolution and they spent no more than 48 hours meeting all the main players and they got back on their planes and they flew home on April 15 having made zero progress and with Kissinger predicting Armageddon election in South Africa election day loomed only two weeks ahead April 27 12 days in fact and still with no solution no man made solution long story many twists and turns great book to read but 12 days later when a relatively peaceful election occurred most of the secular media the people who don't give

[27:07] Christians a very good run most of the secular media was talking about this event in terms of a miracle that God had intervened and talking about the glory of what had occurred two weeks before Kissinger had walked past Michael Cassidy and scoffed at him when he said I'm praying for you what happened well a lot of things happened and many of them over a period of time but God pulled the strings in quite miraculous ways to draw them together in these next 10 days and people were able to see that God brought reconciliation God ended hostility in his own way when the very best efforts of the world's biggest minds had completely failed there'd been a process which had been going on for several years where God's people a group of

Christians had hosted meetings at a game lodge in a quiet part of South Africa where over a period of time numbers of significant political leaders had come and they'd met with one another with their guns under their pillows but they'd met with one another face to face man to man and they told their stories to each other of where they'd come from and expressed their difference and talked about the things that they had been grappling with and so they could no longer hide behind their opinions and their ideologies they had to face one another as people and talk as people and many of them discovered that their deadly enemy was in fact a Christian person who shared a deep Christian faith and they became able to listen to one another because God in Christ had removed the hostility that they had with one another and the other thing that was going on there are many other things going on but one of the things going on was that the church was in earnest prayer all across the nation our people from all sides and backgrounds were praying it culminated in a weekend where 30 thousand people came and prayed in one place they wanted double that number but people with guns stopped many of them even getting there but people broke into smaller gatherings all over Africa and were praying for their nation and the crazy thing was that the rest of the world the first world was sending in their top journalists their top conflict journalists to film a bloodbath and God's people were on their knees in a most dramatic way but the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is what removes God's anger from us it humbles our own hearts when we realize how much we have been forgiven and it gives us the starting point for beginning to forgive another friends the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ should transform each one of us first so if you don't know Christ you're not in a position to be able to begin reconciling with other people because you need to have your own sins dealt with first but having had your sins dealt with it should then become the transforming power in the relationships that we have with one another I loved reading

Michael Cassidy's book it had me in tears at many points because it reminded me again that God is powerful in prayer and by his spirit to remove hostility between people even nations for us to be able to sit with a brother or sister in Christ and hear what life and the world is like for them before we begin to judge them and push our genders and our grievances on them it comes back in a really practical way it comes back into our families it comes back into marriages perhaps marriages which are struggling relationships which are struggling if you are married to a Christian person if you're planning to get married to a Christian person and I hope that you are when you marry they're not just your spouse they're also your brother or sister in Christ whom he has redeemed marriage counsellor said to me once he said they said don't stop talking and listening to one another and some marriages some relationships wither on the vine as we retreat into hurt shells and stop communicating and what happens is tenderness gets lost guilt and resentment grows but God has given us great tools in Christ for dealing with hostility and resentment and finding a true and rich reconciliation which glorifies God it's the same in our church family things happen sometimes which hurt and wound deeply wrongs occur between people how we speak what we say what we thought we withdraw from one another we no longer talk to that person and all that does is confirm the fractures but God has given us the tools to keep communicating in

Christ to love one another and to experience deep reconciliation which gives him glory he gives us the power to be able to begin to forgive and to lay aside the anger and the hostility so I want to say if God can save a nation heal and save a nation which I think he did do in South Africa not the end of the story but he certainly did back in 94 surely he is powerful to deal with hostility that we have and experience in in our families and in our church family in Ephesians chapter 2 it says in Christ Jesus we who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ we've been brought near to Christ we've also been brought near to one another and Christ binds us together or builds us together into a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit let me pray we do pray heavenly father that you would help us to grow in our understanding of what it means to be indwelt by your spirit in a corporate way we cherish you we we thank you for your mercy where you have saved us and

where individually we know something of your spirit at work within us but we pray here at St Paul's that we might know something even greater which is the power of your spirit at work in us as a body as a body that we would be a transforming influence in this community in which we live and we pray this in

[34 : 47] Jesus precious name and for his sake amen him so us