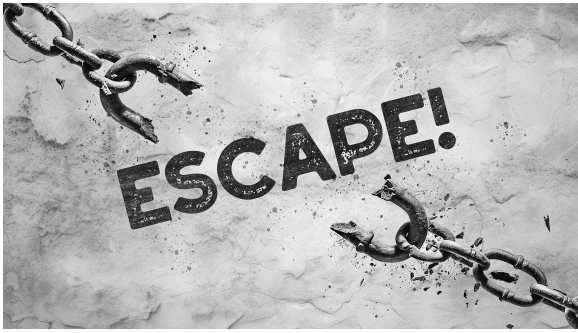




10 ways Christians should respond to opposition

By David Gundersen

Outrage. Fear. Confusion. Anger. Nostalgia. Withdrawal. Many of the ways we Christians respond to opposition are far from ideal.

Peter knew what it was like to face opposition, to lash out in anger or draw back in fear, to be restored in love, then to step out boldly with gospel courage. It took him years to learn, but with Jesus beside him and the Spirit within him, he did. Later in life, he wrote a letter—1 Peter—to fellow sufferers, and taught them how to respond as a Christian to opposition.

Here are 10 things Peter says will help us deal more patiently with our opponents.

1. Don't Be Surprised

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Pet. 4:12)

This isn't new. It isn't strange. It's normal. Paul promises that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). "In the same way," Jesus reminds us, "they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12). Don't be surprised. God certainly isn't.

2. Calm Your Outrage

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. (1 Pet. 3:14)

The constantly outraged Christian is a sad sight. Don't respond to opposition with that toxic blend of fear and anger. Respond with grace and truth. The words "outrage" and "courage" both have the word "rage" in them. Yet they're totally different attitudes. We need less reactionary outrage and more courageous love.

We need less reactionary outrage and more courageous love.

3. Repent When Needed

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. (1 Pet. 4:15)

Sometimes Christians aren't respected because we're not respectable. Sometimes the world says, "Christians are hypocrites," and they are right. Sometimes our opponents see our failures far more clearly than we do. If you're a racist, you need to repent. If you hate gay people, you need to repent.

If you're rude or gossipy or arrogant at work, don't get all blustery and claim "persecution" when a coworker calls you on it. Let's own our sins, and repent when needed. Jesus will forgive you and change you—he'll even save you if that's what you need—and the world will appreciate the rare example of humility.

4. Keep Loving Each Other

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly. (1 Pet. 4:8–10)

When a community faces challenges, we're tempted to turn against each other. Like Euodia and Syntyche, we who've labored side by side in the gospel sometimes end up toe to toe in some intramural battle (Phil. 4:2–3). We need to guard against this temptation, especially when opposition heats up. If our battle isn't against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12), our battle certainly should never be against each other.

5. Love Your Enemies

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called. (1 Pet. 3:9)

Ultimately, it's never us versus them. It's Jesus for all. It's the gospel for all. It's grace and truth for all. The best way to imitate Christ is to treat people well when they wrong you. Loving your enemies, whether individual or collective, means treating others like Jesus has treated you.

6. Trust God and Do Good

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Pet. 4:19)

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (1 Pet. 2:15)

Keep doing kingdom work. Keep serving each person you meet. Keep loving everyone who crosses your path. Don't try to silence the critics and skeptics by yelling louder. Trust God and do what's right. Remember that example is the loudest voice in every room. God will take care of us, so keep calm and carry on.

Evangelism means difficult conversations, but we should never be difficult people.

7. Share Your Hope

But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. (1 Pet. 3:15)

In a world like ours, if your life is marked by grace and truth and love and integrity and hospitality and Christian warmth, people will eventually ask what's wrong with you. So develop "gospel fluency," and stay ready to answer people's questions and challenges. If you're a Christian, you have a mesmerizing hope. Be prepared to share it.

8. Be Respectful

Yet do it with gentleness and respect. (1 Pet. 3:15)

A rude evangelist is a bad evangelist. As you share Christ with people, always be respectful. Evangelism sometimes means difficult conversations, but we should never be difficult people. Avoid verbal fights, be gentle, and "show perfect courtesy toward all people" (Titus 3:2).

9. Remember Your Christian Family

Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Pet. 5:9)

We're not the first ones, the last ones, the only ones, or the main ones who are suffering. In the West, most of our micro-suffering would barely register among so many brothers and sisters abroad. We should remember, with prayer and sympathy and great respect, the countless others who endure so much more opposition than we do. Even when we face legitimate challenges to our faith, we're in good and noble company.

10. Look to the East

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Pet. 5:10)

Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:13)

Darkness has never stopped the dawn. So we have every reason to fix our eyes on the far horizon. We have every reason to hope that God "will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" us. We have every reason to anticipate our "eternal glory in Christ." Jesus is coming back. So when the night deepens, stay on the trail, and look to the east.