

## How to Handle Anti-Christian Hostility

1 Peter 3:13-17

How should genuine followers of Jesus interpret the pain of persecution? What should be our take on mistreatment as Christians? How should we handle such hostility?

Jesus sets the example for us. Jesus was passionate about doing good. He was devoted to doing good, and He was always doing good.

And sometimes doing good brings favor in the eyes of others. Sometimes people smile upon us and treat us kindly when we are doing good. But not always.

**1. Being p\_\_\_\_\_ about doing good does not necessarily p\_\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_.** (3:13-14a)

Jesus' always doing good did not save Him from suffering. Jesus was not spared from pain because He "went about doing good" (see Acts 10:38). Jesus never sinned against anyone, and yet He suffered.

We, as people who follow Him, should be doing good (1 Peter 2:15 and 20, 3:6 and 11, and 4:19). We should be people who live differently from the people around us who don't belong to this Jesus. We should be known as people who do good. We should have a reputation for good deeds (1 Peter 2:12). There should be an obvious difference between those of us who believe (who "obey"—see 1:22, 3:1, and 4:17) the Gospel and those who don't.

**2. As those who belong to the Savior, s\_\_\_\_\_ for His sake should not s\_\_\_\_\_ us or s\_\_\_\_\_ our joy. Instead, we should s\_\_\_\_\_ experiencing p\_\_\_\_\_ for His name as a p\_\_\_\_\_.** We need to see the g\_\_\_\_\_ in the s\_\_\_\_\_. (3:14a and 4:12-16)

When we suffer as those who belong to Jesus, we should not be shocked. It should be no surprise to us when we experience pain as the people of God. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master." (Matthew 10:24, ESV)

We are actually in good company when we suffer for His sake: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12, ESV) If we are persecuted on account of Jesus, then we take our stand alongside the prophets, and "this is good company and quite the honor." And our Savior will not fail to reward us for our suffering for His sake.

We need to see that there is honor in the dishonor. We need to see that there is glory in the shame. We need to learn to interpret persecution for Jesus' sake as a high privilege. And not only is there honor, but there is also joy to be found in it: "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." (Acts 5:41, ESV) See again Matthew 5:11-12.

**3. Jesus' people are people of hope, and even the pain of persecution cannot destroy this hope. Persecution should not p\_\_\_\_\_ or s\_\_\_\_\_ us. We must be p\_\_\_\_\_ and p\_\_\_\_\_ when we are persecuted. We must keep doing good as Christians even when people treat us badly for doing good. When we do, we will have opportunities to share our hope with others. Those opportunities to share our hope should be handled with great care. We must explain our hope with "gentleness and respect." We must share our hope in Christ in a C\_\_\_\_\_ -l\_\_\_\_\_ way. (3:14b-16)**

If we have heard and understood the good news about Jesus Christ and genuinely believed in the crucified, risen, ascended, authoritative Lord, then we are people of hope—a hope that won't disappoint—a hope that can get us through the harshest of circumstances and the most difficult of experiences. See 1 Peter 1:3-9.

People who truly belong to Jesus are people of a different kind of hope. Our hope is not found in the blessings, opportunities, achievements, possessions, or prospects of this lifetime. We live in this world, and we may often enjoy the things of this life with grateful hearts, but our hope isn't here. The hope of our hearts is not wrapped up in this lifetime. It's anchored elsewhere. See 1 Peter 1:13. We must not draw back and go silent just because we are getting pushback. Rather than reacting in fear, blurring into the world, or bunkering our faith, we must keep openly identifying as those who believe God's promises and hope in Jesus Christ, and we must live accordingly.

Peter personally understood the pressure of persecution, the problem of fearing people instead of fearing God, and the pain of failing to "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." See Matthew 26:69-75. But in the 30 years or so since that night when Peter was a coward and denied Jesus, Peter had experienced the boldness that God the Spirit can give (see Acts 4:1-31).

When we consistently and courageously live out our hope in hostile situations, people will ask us about our hope. The good news is that we don't have to be the smartest people on the planet to share our hope. No PhD in apologetics is required to do this. We don't have to have the answers to all the questions people may ask us. And we must not be jerks as we talk about Jesus. There's no place for smugness or self-righteousness. This is not about winning arguments or having the last word or proving a point. This is about humbly sharing the hope we have.

**4. We must b\_\_\_\_\_ that it is always b\_\_\_\_\_ to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will for us, than to suffer for doing evil. (3:17)**

None of us like to suffer. Nobody prefers pain. But it's always better for us to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." (1 Peter 4:19, ESV)