

Living as a Christian in a Hostile Environment 1 Peter 4:12-19

We live in interesting times. We do not face anywhere near the level of persecution others face, but there is growing indifference and sometimes hostility to Christianity in the West.

How should we deal with hostility and opposition?

1. Don't be surprised: we may be tempted to think 'this shouldn't be happening to me'. But Peter says 'don't be surprised'. This is what it means to be a Christian. And hostility, and our reactions to it, can test what is most important to us: what others think of us, or what God thinks.

But then Peter throws in a warning, it's a check to stop us getting carried away into a martyr mentality: 'Don't suffer as a meddler.' It is possible to face opposition as a Christian and it have nothing to do with Jesus Christ. So if you're in the situation of facing hostility, it's worth taking a step back and asking, 'what am I actually facing hostility for? Is it for the gospel, or something else, like my abrasive personality?'

2. But rejoice: And instead of being surprised in Peter says we should rejoice as we share Christ's suffering. And he gives us two reasons to do so:

a. What you experience now is just a foretaste of coming joy: You can rejoice now when you face opposition for being a Christian, because this life is just a foretaste of the joy you will experience when Christ's glory is revealed in the next life.

b. Those who are insulted are blessed – God's Spirit is present

And that is especially true when you face suffering for His sake. You can allow hostility to leave you embittered against those who treat you like that. Peter offers a different response and that is to drink deep of the Holy Spirit. And it's only through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit that you and I can find the strength and the stamina to live *with* joy and *without* compromise when we're under fire.

3. Judgment begins at the house of God. Peter isn't talking about insults and persecutions being punishment from God. He's talking about the judgment of God that sifts out those who truly believe and those who don't. Hostility is one means by which God tests and sorts people out. Persecution sorts out those who are truly Christ's and those who aren't.

4. Entrust yourself to God and continue to do good: Peter says when times like that come your way entrust your souls to a faithful Creator. Your ability to stand and to come through a time of opposition does not rest upon you, it rests in Him. It's not dependent on your faithfulness, but on His. Why does Peter specifically call God the Creator here? To make us consider all that God already upholds, and He is more than able to look after us if we entrust ourselves to Him.

And Peter finishes by encouraging us to keep doing good. If living for Christ has got us into trouble, the temptation would be to back off. Peter says, don't do that, keep going.