

Respond 'I don't want to be like those Christians' by being – CLEAR

- C** Calm and courteous
- L** Listening and loving
- E** Empathising and explaining
- A** Admitting and avoiding
- R** Respecting and researching

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

Calm and courteous

- A negative response to faith is normal – many verses illustrate this (eg John 15:18, 2 Tim 3:12, Matt 5:12) so don't be put off and stay calm.
- Be aware of any anxiety you have – and commit it to God (Phil 4:6)
- If someone airs this view then you are being given an opportunity to understand why and the basis for it – to understand the person more deeply
- Be courteous: ... to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people (Titus 3:2)
- Seek first of all to understand
 - Fools find no pleasure in understanding, but only in airing their own opinions (Proverbs 18:2)
 - Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16)
- Don't feel that you need to know all the answers, especially not immediately. Wisdom is *how* you respond more than knowing the answer
 - Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. (James 3:13)

Listen and love

- The starting point is to listen actively and well – really listen to what their challenge is, and why and what’s driving this. Find out the details of what in particular they dislike and how well informed it is.
 - Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance (Proverbs 1:5)
 - An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Proverbs 18:15)
 - My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry James 1:19
- Listen for
 - Any personal experience that is aggravated by the view or behaviour they dislike
 - Is this a real issue or a defensive strategy?
- God has one consistent strategy to reconcile us to himself: Love. Our love for God is shown in our love for others and the *way* we respond is critical. Always seek to demonstrate the character of Christ in your interactions.
- Love for the person and a desire for their blessing from the discussion is so important.
 - Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves...Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:9/10, 17/18, 21
 - Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. Romans 10:1
- Care will communicate itself by your attitude – think person not issue. Your attitude will be evident to the person and anyone with them.

Empathise and explain

- Empathise with someone who is hurting, or with their response to sinful behaviour. Be human in your conversation – echo values that you agree with (justice, kindness etc)
 - Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Romans 12:15-16

- If at issue is an inherent value of Christian faith then be ready to speak into the issue if you are able
 - Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. 1 Peter 3:15
- Explain your thinking such as it is and why, and how much you have (or haven't thought) about it – feel able to say you need to come back to them on it
- Express yourself personally
 - following Jesus is an important relationship to you! To me my following Jesus means I need to respect his views and approach
 - It allows others and other facts to speak into your views so not suggesting that you are closed in your thinking

Admit and avoid

- Be ready to admit poor behaviour or ugly views that do not fit with our faith. Sometimes people say, "Christians are hypocrites," and they are right. Sometimes faith opponents see our failures far more clearly than we do!
- Help people understand that there is a difference between being a hypocrite and simply being imperfect
 - "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn)
- The church has always known this
 - If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness 1 John 1:8,9
- Remember many issues are personal choice, of lesser importance or even unimportant – and not worth caring too much about – beware baiting!
 - And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Titus 3:8-10

Respect and research

- Respect the opportunity – not every situation is right for a full-blown discussion. You may need to simply sow a seed in response for future discussion and see if someone is open to another conversation
- How you are on social media, in discussions with friends and in your church needs to reflect God's consistent strategy for salvation – gracious, loving and patient – and will make it much easier to respond well to difficult conversations. Be careful in how you express yourself in these media
 - But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:13/14)
- This is something for us together and takes real humility and intimacy
 - Churches should feel more like the waiting room for a doctor and less like a waiting room for a job interview. In the latter we all try to look as competent and impressive as we can. Weaknesses are buried and hidden. But in a doctor's waiting room we assume that everyone there is sick and needs help. (Tim Keller)
 - Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:12
- If you don't know much about the subject – get researching to work out what you think
 - read the bible and other books,
 - scour the internet (but watch the sites!)
 - listen to podcasts,
 - talk to other Christians

All this will enable you to offer to come back to discuss it with them again