

1 Peter 3:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

Analysis

Peter commands respectful apologetics. "Having a good conscience" (syneidēsin echontes agathēn)—maintain clear conscience before God through righteous living. The purpose: "that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ" (hina en hō katalalousia hymōn hōs kakopoiōn kataischynthōsin hoi epēreazontes hymōn tēn agathēn en Christō anastrophēn). Accusers will be ashamed when godly conduct disproves slander. Good conscience provides confidence; godly lifestyle silences critics more effectively than arguments alone. Conduct and character validate verbal defense.

Historical Context

Early Christians faced accusations of cannibalism (misunderstood communion), atheism (rejecting Roman gods), immorality, disloyalty. Peter's strategy: live so virtuously that accusations appear obviously false. Good conscience before God enables bold witness. Early apologists (Justin Martyr, Tertullian) combined reasoned arguments with moral conduct to defend Christianity. Their personal integrity and church's charity impressed observers and won converts. Modern application: Christian witness requires both verbal proclamation and moral credibility.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does maintaining 'good conscience' before God enable bold witness even when falsely accused?
2. What role does godly conduct play alongside verbal defense of faith in effective witness?

Interlinear Text

συνείδησιν	ἔχοντες	ἀγαθὴν	ἵνα	ἐν	ᾧ	καταλαλῶσιν
conscience	Having	a good	that	in	G3739	they speak evil
G4893	G2192	G18	G2443	G1722		G2635
ὑμῶν	ὥς	κακοποιῶν,	καταισχυνθῶσιν	οἱ	ἐπηρεάζοντες	
of you	as	of evildoers	they may be ashamed	G3588	that falsely accuse	
G5216	G5613	G2555	G2617		G1908	
ὑμῶν	τὴν	ἀγαθὴν	ἐν	Χριστῷ	ἀναστροφὴν	
of you	G3588	a good	in	Christ	conversation	
G5216		G18	G1722	G5547	G391	

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:12 (Evil): Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Hebrews 13:18 (Good): Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

1 Peter 2:15 (Parallel theme): For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

Titus 2:8 (Evil): Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

Matthew 5:11 (Evil): Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

1 Peter 2:19 (Parallel theme): For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

Acts 24:16 (Parallel theme): And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

Romans 9:1 (References Christ): I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

1 Timothy 1:5 (Good): Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

1 Peter 3:21 (Good): The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: