

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 ὦ καταλαλῶσιν
conscience Having a good that in 3739 they speak evil
G4893 G2192 G18 G2443 G1722 G3739 G2635

ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιων, καταισχυνθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες
of you as of evildoers they may be ashamed 3588 that falsely accuse
G5216 G5613 G2555 G2617 G3588 G1908

ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν
of you 3588 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: