

John 18:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?

Analysis

If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil (μαρτύρησον περὶ τοῦ κακοῦ, martyrêson peri tou kakou)—Jesus demands evidence, not violence. The term κακοῦ (kakou, 'evil, wrong') challenges them to specify His offense. **But if well, why smitest thou me?** (τί με δέρεις, ti me dereis, 'why do you beat me?')—the present tense verb suggests continued striking.

This isn't mere self-defense but prophetic witness: Christ will not be silenced by brutality. His question echoes Job's protests against unjust suffering while fulfilling the Suffering Servant's mission (Isaiah 53:7). Even under assault, He maintains moral high ground, forcing His accusers to either produce evidence or acknowledge their injustice.

Historical Context

This moment captures the collision between Roman jurisprudence (presumption of innocence, burden of proof on accusers) and corrupted Jewish procedure where the verdict preceded the trial. Jesus's appeal to rational discourse over violence mirrors Socratic method—exposing evil through questions rather than declarations.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus model responding to physical violence with logical argument rather than retaliation or silence?
2. What does Christ's demand for evidence teach about the relationship between truth and transparency?
3. When suffering unjustly, how can you maintain both bold witness (like Jesus) and meek submission (like a lamb)?

Interlinear Text

ἀπεκρίθη	αὐτῷ	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	εἰ	κακῶς	ἐλάλησα		
answered	him		Jesus	If	evil	I have spoken		
G611	G846	G3588	G2424	G1487	G2560	G2980		
μαρτύρησον	περὶ	τοῦ	κακοῦ·	εἰ	δὲ	καλῶς	τί	με
bear witness	of		the evil	If	but	well	why	thou me
G3140	G4012	G3588	G2556	G1487	G1161	G2573	G5101	G3165
δέρεις								
smitest								
G1194								