

Romans 2:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

Analysis

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts—οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν (hoitines endeiknyntai to ergon tou nomou grapton en tais kardiais autōn). Ἐνδείκνυμι (endeiknymi, "demonstrate/show forth") means Gentile behavior evidences internal moral knowledge. Γραπτόν (grapton, "written") parallels Jeremiah 31:33's new covenant promise—law written on hearts, not stone tablets.

Their conscience also bearing witness—συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως (symmartyrousēs autōn tēs syneidēseōs). Συνείδησις (syneidēsis, "conscience") literally means "co-knowledge," internal awareness of right and wrong. It συμμαρτυρέω (symmartureō, "testifies with/alongside"), serving as moral witness. **And their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another**—internal moral dialogue where λογισμοί (logismoi, "thoughts/reasonings") prosecute and defend.

Paul describes universal human experience: an internal moral tribunal where conscience convicts or acquits. This validates moral accountability even without Torah. The "law written in hearts" anticipates the new covenant (Romans 8:2-4, Hebrews 8:8-12), but here describes general revelation. Conscience proves humanity's moral nature as God's image-bearers, though sin corrupts conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7, Titus 1:15), requiring Scripture's objective standard.

Historical Context

Greek ethics heavily emphasized conscience and reason as moral guides. Stoic philosophers like Seneca and Epictetus taught that reason discerns moral truth. Jews countered that only Torah provides reliable moral knowledge. Paul synthesizes: Gentiles do have moral knowledge (conscience), but it's inferior to special revelation and corrupted by sin. Both testify to God's existence and character (Romans 1:19-20), rendering all humanity 'without excuse' (1:20, 2:1).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. When does my conscience 'accuse' me—convict me of sin—and do I listen or rationalize away its testimony?
2. How has my conscience been shaped by Scripture versus merely cultural conditioning or personal preference?
3. If Gentiles have the law 'written in hearts,' how much more should I, with both Scripture and the Holy Spirit, pursue holiness?

Interlinear Text

οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν
Which shew G3588 the work G3588 of the law G3551 written G1123 in
G3748 G1731 G2041 G3551 G1123 G1722

ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς
hearts their also bearing witness their G3588
G3588 G2588 G846 G4828 G846 G3588

συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν
conscience and one another G240 G3588 their thoughts
G4893 G2532 G3342 G3588 G3053

κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων
the mean while accusing or and excusing
G2723 G2228 G2532 G626

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 5:11 (Parallel theme): Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

Titus 1:15 (Parallel theme): Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Job 27:6 (Parallel theme): My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

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

1 Timothy 4:2 (Parallel theme): Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

2 Corinthians 1:12 (Sin): For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by

the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

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

Acts 23:1 (Parallel theme): And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Ecclesiastes 7:22 (Parallel theme): For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

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