THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

AS SEEN IN ROMANS 2:14-15 AND ROMANS 1:32a

By

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INTRODUCTION

The Moral Argument for God's Existence involves two basic premises followed by a conclusion. The first of these premises states that moral absolutes or objective morals do exist. The second premise asserts that no natural source adequately explains the existence of objective morals. The conclusion of these two premises is that God is the only adequate source for objective morals, therefore God exists. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the Moral Argument for God's Existence is found in Romans 1:32a and Romans 2:14-15. This is not to assert that the Apostle Paul was arguing for God's existence in these chapters. In the context of Romans 1-2, the Apostle's purpose was not to prove that God exists but rather to assert that the whole world stands condemned before God and is in need of His righteousness. Nevertheless, in the process of showing that all men are in need of God's righteousness, the Apostle presents the first premise of the Moral Argument, the second premise by implication, and the conclusion. As such, the Moral Argument for God's Existence rests upon the firm foundation of God's revealed truth.

The paper will be divided into two parts. The first part is comprised of a detailed exegetical study of Romans 2:14-15 and 1:32a. Chapter one will begin by setting these
verses in their proper context. Chapters two through four will present a detailed study of these verses.

In the second chapter, concerning Romans 2:14, two important questions must be answered. First of all, it must be determined who "Gentiles" refers to. The second major question is the precise meaning and usage of "nature". It must be determined whether this word refers to the phrase which proceeds or follows it. It must also be answered as to whether "nature" is an innate or a learned quality.

Chapter three, covering verse 2:15, presents two important issues to be determined. The first issue is a clear understanding of what "the work of the law written in the heart" represents. The second issue which must be addressed is a clear understanding of the term "conscience". In this paper, emphasis will be placed upon determining the exact meaning of the word "conscience" in the New Testament.

Chapter four, covering Romans 1:32a, is especially vital to the contention that moral absolutes do exist on a universal scale. In this verse, the key term, τὸ δικαίωμα, will be clearly defined. Emphasis will be placed upon the meaning of this term in the particular context it is found.

The second part of this paper, covering chapters five and six will present apologetic conclusions drawn from the exegetical data. In chapter five, it will first be shown that scripture testifies to the existence of objective morals. It will be seen that objective morals are innate by nature, serve as a basis for a Natural Moral Law Theory and
find their source in God. Chapter six deals briefly with the topic of Apologetic Methodology specifically as it relates to this study, and how the presence of the Moral Argument in scripture relates to methodology.

Literature pertinent to this paper can be classified into three general areas; (1) Commentaries, (2) Lexical or Language sources, and (3) Apologetic sources. In the area of commentaries, C. E. B. Cranfield provides perhaps the best examination of Romans 1-2. Concerning lexical sources, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, edited by Colin Brown, provides excellent background studies for key words in the verses under consideration. The Loeb Classical Library serves as a primary source in developing a definition for the word "conscience". C. A. Pierce also provides an extensive study of conscience entitled, Conscience in the New Testament. In the area of apologetics, Alan Johnson's article, "Is There a Biblical Warrant for Natural-Law Theories", serves as the primary source concerning a Natural Moral Law Theory. Mere Christianity, by C. S. Lewis, serves as an excellent source on the Moral Argument itself. For a general treatment of the development of the Moral Argument, Norman Geisler's Philosophy of Religion should be consulted.

The verses under consideration in this paper will be separated into their major phrases and examined as such. A summary of each verse will follow the study of these phrases. The first question that must be addressed is a proper understanding of the context in which these verses are found.
PART I

CHAPTER I

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Paul begins his letter to the Romans with a rather lengthy salutation followed by a statement of the theme of the book. Paul first establishes his authority as an Apostle of the Lord in verse one. Paul addresses this letter to "the beloved of God in Rome" who are "called as saints", verse 7. In verse 8, Paul expresses his thankfulness for the faith of the believers in Rome. In verses 9-15, Paul sets forth his desire to go to Rome and minister to the believers there. The theme, which is found in chapter 1:16-17, can be summarized as "The Righteousness of God Revealed".

Having stated the theme, Paul moves into the second section of the book which covers chapters 1:18-3:20. In this section, it is Paul's purpose to show that the whole world stands condemned before God. Paul first addresses the condemnation of the Gentile before God in chapter 1:18-32.

In these fifteen verses Paul presents a vivid picture of the depravity of man. It is first seen that man is guilty of suppressing the truth concerning God which they innately know, verses 18-19. Secondly, it is seen that man has
suppressed the truth about God which is visibly evident in creation, verse 20. In verses 21-32, the result of man's rejection of God's truth is shown. The first result of this rejection is man's placing the creature in the position of the Creator, verses 21-23. Having done this, man is judgmentally handed over by God to the lust of his heart, resulting in sexual perversity, verses 24-27. The end of man's sexual perversity is his refusal even to acknowledge God. Having rejected God, man is given over to a depraved mind, verse 28. Man, with a depraved mind, is seen as the ultimate in wickedness, as he not only performs evil deeds, but cheers on others who do the same, verses 29-32.

After showing the Gentile as condemned before God, Paul turns his attention to the Jew in chapters 2:1-3:8. Some commentators maintain that Paul has in mind the moral man in chapter 2:1-16.¹ Yet, there are a number of good reasons for the view that Jews are addressed here. The first reason for understanding this section to refer to Jews is the special privileges of this group mentioned in verse 2:4. Murray writes:

The person being addressed is the participant of 'the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering'. While it is true that Gentiles also were partakers of God's goodness, yet the strength of the expression 'the riches of his goodness' would indicate the riches of special grace such as the Jews enjoyed in the covenant privilege.²

Commenting on verse one, Murray supplies a second reason for the view that Jews are here addressed:

The propensity to judge Gentiles for their religious and moral perversity was peculiarly characteristic of the Jew. He was intensely conscious of his high privilege and prerogative, a fact to which the apostle expressly refers in verses 17-20. Hence the address, 'O man whosoever thou art that judgest' identifies the Jew by means of his national characteristic.\(^1\)

Cranfield presents two additional reasons for this view. Cranfield states, "the way in which the name 'Jew' is introduced in verse 17 does not suggest that Paul is at this point turning his attention to a different group of people." Secondly, Cranfield writes, "the notable points of contact between 2:1ff and chapters 11-15 of Wisdom strongly suggest that Paul was thinking of just such Jewish assumptions as are expressed in those chapters of Wis. 15:2, 11:9f, 12:22."\(^2\)

Paul begins his description of the Jew by showing their hypocrisy. Though the Jew passes judgement upon the acts of others, he himself is guilty of those acts, verses 1-3. In verses 4-5 Paul points out that the Jews have paid little attention to their special place in relation to God and will suffer God's wrath as the result.

Paul next emphasizes the impartiality of God in verses 6-16. We see that God judges men individually according to their own actions, verse 6. In an especially

\(^1\)Ibid.

pointed remark to the Jew, Paul states that all sinners will be judged regardless of whether they possess the law or not, verses 12-13. It should be emphasized that verses 14-15 clearly tie in with the context and should be understood with verses 6-13 to relate to God's impartiality. Hendrickson suggests that in verses 14-15 Paul is answering a possible question concerning verse 12. In verse 12, it is seen that Gentiles will be punished despite the fact they do not have the Law. Concerning this Hendrickson states, "The objection might be raised, But is this fair to the Gentile? After all, he does not have the faintest notion about God's law. Why, then should he be punished at all?" Hendrickson further points out that the Gentiles do indeed have a type of law, one which is written in their hearts.

In the final section of chapter two, verses 17-20, Paul shows that the Jew is condemned by the Law. It is seen in verses 17-20 that the Jews took great pride as possessors of the Law. Yet, in verses 21-27 the Jews are shown to be guilty of the very same law they took so much pride in. Paul concludes the chapter by stating that a true Jew is not one who only possesses the outward signs such as circumcision but rather an inward circumcision of the heart.

In chapter 3:1-20, Paul demonstrates that the whole world is guilty before God. Paul begins by answering a question that the Jew might have concerning chapter 2:17-29. The Jew might ask, "what advantage is the law if it only

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condemns the Jew?" Paul answers that the Jew has been given the very "oracles of God" and their unbelief does not nullify God's revealed Word. In verses 4-8 it is seen that God is righteous in his wrath towards an unbelieving world.

Paul concludes this section in verses 9-20 with a quote from the Old Testament. Here it is clear that there is no man, whether Jew or Gentile, who is righteous before God. In verse 19, Paul sums up the purpose of all that he has written thus far in the epistle, "that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God."
CHAPTER II

ROMANS 2:14

A. ὁταν γὰρ ἐθνη τὰ μὴ νόμου ἔχοντα

γὰρ: As stated by Cranfield, the most likely explanation of "for" is that verses 14-15 are seen as confirming verse 13b.¹

ὁταν: ὁταν should be taken as introducing a temporal clause. Godet comments, "when it happens that, these are sporadic cases, happy eventualities."²

ἐθνη: There is considerable disagreement among commentators as to the precise meaning of ἐθνη. The word presents us with four basic possible lexical meanings; (1) a multitude (whether of men or beasts), associated or living together, (2) a race or nation, Matthew 21:43 (used in the sense of the Jewish people, Lk. 7:5), (3) in the Old Testament, foreign nations not worshiping the true God, pagans, gentiles (very often in plain contradistinction to the Jews, Rom. 3:9), (4) Paul uses of Gentile Christians, Romans 11:13.³

¹Cranfield, Exegetical Commentary of Romans, p. 155.
Cranfield lists a number of possible meanings for the first part of verse 14. These are as follows: (1) some pagan Gentiles on the basis of a natural moral law fulfill either some or all of God's law's demands, (2) verse 14 should be taken hypothetically, to underline the essential equality before God of Jews and Gentiles, (3) the Gentiles' actions indicate a secret, hidden faith, known to God only, mysteriously existing in some pagan hearts. (4) Gentile Christians are referred to.\footnote{Cranfield, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, pp. 155-156.} The second option should be rejected, as there is nothing in the context or language of the verse to indicate this as an hypothetical situation. The third option must be rejected because the whole of the New Testament rejects the concept of an esoteric or exclusive faith, cf. especially Paul's dealing with the Colossian heresey, Col. 1:9-10, 2:8, 2:3, 3:11. The fourth option must also be rejected as there is nothing in the context to indicate that the Apostle had Gentile Christians in view here. Cranfield's notion that these are Gentile believers who "did not have the law by nature" is unsupported by the context, goes against the natural lexical understanding of ἡθον, and lacks support from the church fathers. This leaves the first option, that some pagan Gentiles, on the basis of natural moral law, fulfill at least some of the law, as the only viable option.

A major disagreement among commentators concerns whether all or simply some Gentiles are described in this
verse. Lenski supports the view that only some Gentiles are described here. Lenski writes:

We do not agree with the exegesis which makes Paul's Ἐθνη equal to ἡ Ἐθνη on the plea that what Paul here predicates belongs to all Gentiles....Paul had looked around in this wicked world a bit. It still contains men who have no conscience at all, who in no way respond even to an inner law.

The view that all Gentiles are here described is firmly held by Philippi. Philippi notes that the article before a substantive may be dispensed with when an adjectival definition follows, citing Romans 9:30. Philippi contends that without the article Ἐθνη may refer to the entire Gentile world, and as a self-defined totality stand without the article (Rom. 3:9, Lk. 24-47). Finally Philippi maintains, "If the absence of the article is pressed, we must interpret, 'men who are Gentiles,' in which case their collective whole would still be contemplated." Godet agrees with Philippi's final argument as he states, "The word Ἐθνη, Gentiles, has no article: people belonging to the category of the Gentiles." Sanday and Headlam conclude that though Ἐθνη means only some Gentiles the prominent point is their character as Gentiles. Nicoll writes, "Ἐθνη is not 'the Gentiles,' but 'Gentiles as such'--persons who can be char-

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1 Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, p. 161.
3 Godet, Commentary on Romans, p. 123.
acterized as 'without law'.”¹ It can be concluded that Paul's dominant idea concerning ἔθνη is not one of number but rather of character.

Murray presents a helpful viewpoint as to the omission of the article before ἔθνη:

The omission of the definite article before 'Gentiles' may represent Paul's thought for there is no definite article in the Greek. But we are not to suppose that the reason for its omission is that stated by Meyer that there are some Gentiles who do not have the law to whom the proposition does not apply. If the Apostle meant to be restrictive and for that reason omitted the article, the reason is that there were some Gentiles who did have the law and on that account did not belong to the category of which he is speaking...there is no good reason to suppose that this does not apply collectively to the Gentiles who do not have the law in the sense defined above.²

Four observations about ἔθνη without the article should be noted. First of all, it is seen that Paul's basic idea is one of character, not number. Those who do not have the Law, yet who are by nature doing the things of the Law, are characterized as being Gentiles. Secondly, as pointed out by Hodge, ἔθνη without the article may refer to Gentiles collectively.³ Thirdly, the omission of the article may be


²Murray, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 72-73.

³Hodge states, "As ἔθνη is without the article, many would render it heathen, that is, some heathen. But in the first place, it is evident from the context that this is not what the apostle means to say. His object is to show that the heathen world have a rule of duty written on their hearts; a fact which is not proved by some heathen obeying the law, but which is proved by the moral conduct of all men. Men generally, not some men, but all men, show by their acts that they have a knowledge of right and wrong." Charles Hodge, A Commentary on Romans (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1835), pp. 54-55.
because of Gentiles who did have the Law. Fourthly, the context of chapter two indicates that all Jews and all Gentiles are being spoken of, not select groups.

τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα: There are two prominent viewpoints concerning this phrase. First, that these Gentiles are seen as having no revealed law at all. The second possibility is that these Gentiles are without Mosaic Law. Lange contends that these Gentiles are without any revealed law at all. Lange writes, "the absence of the article means not only that they have not the Mosaic Law, but that they have no revealed religious law whatever."¹ Sanday and Headlam agree as they state, "the force of μὴ is 'who ex. hypothesi have not a law', whom we conceive of as not having a law."²

The second possible meaning, that the Mosaic Law is meant here, should be preferred. Robertson states, "In 2:14, ἔχει τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα, the Mosaic law is meant, but not in ἑαυτοῖς εἰςιν νόμος."³ Hamilton agrees asserting, "the word νόμον, 'law', in the first three instances of its use in this verse refers to the law of Moses, while in the fourth use it means law in general."⁴ There are at least three reasons for


²Sanday and Headlam, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, p. 59.


⁴Floyd E. Hamilton, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), p. 44.
understanding νόμον here as the Mosaic Law. First of all, the context clearly favors this as the Mosaic Law is obviously under consideration in verses 12-13. Secondly, verse 15 indicates that Gentiles do have a type of law "written in their hearts." Thirdly, it has been observed already that Gentiles are people who are characterized as without the Mosaic Law.

B. φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν

τὰ τοῦ νόμου: It should first be noted that, "Paul says not τὸν νόμον ποιεῖν, as in verse 13, or τὸν νόμον τελεῖν, as in verse 27, but τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιεῖν." The Gentiles certainly do not keep the Law in its entirety but rather observe "particular, outward commands in it—one this, another that." 1

φύσει...ποιῶσιν: There has been some disagreement among commentators as to whether φύσει should refer to the first or second phrase in this verse. To begin with there are three lexical possibilities for φύσει; (1) natural endowment or condition, inherited from one's ancestors by birth, Romans 2:27, Ephesians 2:3, (2) natural characteristics or disposition, James 3:7b, 2 Peter 1:4, (3) nature as the regular natural order, Romans 1:26, Romans 2:14, "when Gentiles fulfill the law's demands by following the natural order of things." 2

Cranfield maintains that φύσει refers to the pre-

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1 Philippi, Commentary on Romans, p. 84.
2 Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 869.
vious clause and shows that Gentiles do not have the Law by birth.\(^1\) Cranfield has two arguments in favor of this view. First of all, as Turner points out, adverbs usually refer to preceding clauses or words.\(^2\) Secondly, Paul does frequently use φύσει to indicate one's status by birth or inheritance. In Romans 2:27, φύσει is used of circumcision by natural endowment. In Galatians 2:15, φύσει is used to describe those who are Jews by birth. Again in Ephesians 2:3, φύσει describes those who are children of wrath by birth.

The second view, that φύσει refers to the second clause, that Gentiles by nature do the things of the Law is preferred for a number of good reasons. First, in the context of Romans 1-2 there is nothing to support Cranfield's contention that Gentile Christians are here spoken of.

Berkouwer writes:

Paul says several things about these Gentiles who were so far separated from the Jews and who, in a word, do not have Moses' law and are 'lawless'. There is no doubt that it really concerns heathens. At times it has been thought that Christian Gentiles were meant, but the arguments to prove this are so insufficient that this exegesis is obviously the result of the tendency to avoid certain problems of Romans 2.\(^3\)

Secondly, verse 15 strongly supports the concept of Gentiles doing the things of the Law by nature. These Gentiles are

\(^1\)Cranfield, *Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, pp. 156-157.


not doing the things of the Law by virtue of the fact as believers they now have revealed law. Rather, in verse 15, it is the work of the law written in the heart, and the mechanism of conscience that enables Gentiles to do the things of the Law. Thirdly, the testimony of a number of church fathers supports the view that φύσει refers to the doing of the Law. There are three church fathers in particular who understand φύσει to refer to the second clause. Archelaus writes:

And whence, then did righteous Abel and all those succeeding worthies who are enrolled among the righteous, derive their righteousness, when as yet there was no law of Moses, and when as yet the prophets had not arisen and discharged the functions of prophecy? Were they not constituted righteous in virtue of their fulfilling the law, 'every one of them showing the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness?' For when a man 'who has not the law does naturally the things contained in the law, he, not having the law, is a law unto himself.' And consider now the multitude of laws thus existing among the several righteous men who lived a life of uprightness, at one time discovering for themselves the law of God implanted in their hearts, at another learning of it from their parents, and yet again being instructed in it further by the ancients and the elders.¹

Chrysostom asserts:

But whenever he saith 'by nature', he means by the reasonings of nature. And he shows that others are better then they, and, what is more, better for this, that they have not received the Law, and have not that wherein the Jews seem to have an advantage over them. For on this ground he means they are to be admired, because they required not a law, and yet exhibited all the doings of the Law, having the works, not the letters, graven upon their minds.²


Finally, the great church father Augustine also understands nature to refer to the doing of the things of the Law. Augustine writes:

For when will they be able to understand that there is no soul, however wicked, which can yet reason in any way, in whose conscience God does not speak? For who but God has written the law of nature in the hearts of men—that law concerning which the apostle says: 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.'

Commenting on various types of laws Augustine states, "There are three laws. One is that of the Hebrews, which the apostle calls the law of sin and death. The second is that of the Gentiles, which he calls the law of nature."  

Fourthly, Cranfield admits that Paul uses ϕύσει in the sense of a natural function, 1 Corinthians 11:14. 

Fifthly, it should be noted that ϕύσει is in the instrumental case and should be understood as either an instrumental of means or manner, both supporting the placing of ϕύσει with the latter clause.  

It should also be noted that ϕύσει is not necessarily bound by Turner's grammatical argument because ϕύσει is not an adverb but a noun used in the adverbial sense. Lastly,

against Cranfield's view, the vast majority of commentators understand \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \) to refer to the latter phrase.

Before moving to the next phrase one final important point must be made concerning \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \). It is important to see that the Gentiles performed the things of the Law according to their own "innate nature." It was seen in the lexical possibilities for \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \), the word does not carry the concept of learned actions. Though it is true that the development of one's moral values involve a great deal of learning, this is not the idea in Romans 2:14. Here are people who, through an innate knowledge or ability, perform certain precepts of the Law. Harder writes:

But there are heathen who do not have the Torah but who do what the law demands, by nature, in so far as they live in accordance with their own nature. It is not as if they read off the law from the natural order—rather this reveals itself in them to be a power which brings its own realization, as their lives and actions show; their deeds prove the law of morality to be at work in their lives.¹

As Harder points out, \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \) is an internal quality not an external one.

Additional evidence for understanding \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \) to refer to innate rather than learned knowledge in Romans 2:14 is seen in the overall usage of the word in the New Testament. The word \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \) occurs in eleven verses in the New Testament, Paul accounts for nine of these verses. Of the nine Pauline verses in which \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \) is used, five occur in Romans. It is noteworthy that \( \phi \omicron\sigma \epsilon \iota \) is never used in the sense of learned

knowledge or ability in any New Testament usage. Rather, φύσει is always used to refer to that which is either natural according to birth or innate. In Romans, φύσει is used to describe the natural or unnatural sexual desires of people, 1:26, circumcision, 2:27, and the Jews as natural branches as opposed to the ingrafted Gentiles, 11:21, 24. Paul uses φύσει in Galatians to describe those who are Jews by nature or birth. In Ephesians, φύσει is used to describe those who are by "nature" children of wrath. The testimony of scripture is clear in showing that φύσει is not to be understood as a learned quality.

It is clear that these Gentiles received an innate knowledge or ability concerning morality from God. Yet, the substance of this knowledge or ability cannot be dogmatically stated. Nor can a specific time be set when this action occurs in an individual. It is entirely plausible that God places within man an intrinsic ability to form a moral knowledge as he matures. The important emphasis of φύσει is that it discounts the notion that morality is simply learned from one's culture or environment. The word φύσει tells man that morality is something which is intrinsic or innate and finds its source in God, not man.

C. δυτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσὶν νόμος

δυτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες: The meaning here is the same as in the preceding clause, the Gentiles are without the Mosaic Law.

ἑαυτοῖς εἰσὶν νόμος: This can be understood in two
ways. The first view is that the Gentiles are the Mosaic Law to themselves. McClain comments:

Their conduct proves that they have a standard of righteousness. Therefore, they 'are the law unto themselves'. (The article ought to be there). God has only one standard of righteousness—not two. The Jew does not have one while the Gentile figures out another by himself. ¹

Philippi also holds this interpretation:

But it is not to be rendered, with Luther: They are a law to themselves, but: are the law to themselves; for νόμος is always, as already observed, the Mosaic law, and what the apostle wishes to intimate is just this, that in their possession of the Mosaic law the Jews have no precedence over the Gentiles. But the apostle here characterizes the import of the νόμος from the standpoint of the Jews; what the νόμος was to them, the entire series of external commands, through relating to moral conduct, this in point of fact the Gentiles also possessed.²

The second way of understanding this phrase is that the Gentiles are "a" law unto themselves. This is the preferred interpretation. First of all, Philippi is wrong in asserting that the Jews and Gentiles have the same degree of revelation, only in a different manner. The entirety of scripture testifies to the special position of the Jews as God's chosen people. A part of this privileged position was specific revelation to the Jews. The Jews' special relation to the Mosaic Law is seen in Romans 2:17, "But if you bear the name 'Jew' and rely upon the law." Secondly, the Gentiles do not follow the Mosaic Law, but rather only observe various commands. Gifford writes:

Occasional good deeds, such as 'the law' approves, done by persons who have neither that nor any other outward

²Philippi, Commentary on Romans, pp. 84-85.
law, are sufficient proof of an inward principle, by virtue of which such persons are "a law unto themselves."\(^1\)

Based on these two arguments it must be concluded that Gentiles are merely "a law unto themselves."

D. Summary of Romans 2:14

At this point a summary of what has been said in verse 14 is in order. The group of people the Apostle was describing in this verse was identified as pagans or non-Jews. The notion that εθνή referred to Gentile Christians was rejected. It was determined that, though the number of this group was indefinite, Paul may have indeed been describing the Gentile population as a whole. In addition to this, it was noted that the emphasis here was not on the number of this group but rather they were "characterized as being Gentiles." It was also determined that these Gentiles were ones who did not have the Mosaic Law. The contention that the Gentiles had no revealed law at all was rejected because the context clearly indicated the Mosaic Law was being addressed and verse 15 showed that the Gentiles did have a type of revealed law.

It was determined though the Gentiles did not have the Mosaic Law, on occasional or sporadic instances, they performed the things of the Law. Through a study of the word "nature", it was noted that Gentiles were able to perform the things of the Law by a type of innate knowledge or ability rather than by learned action. Finally, it was determined

\(^1\)E. H. Gifford, Romans (Minneapolis: The James Family, 1977), p. 76.
that in doing the things of the Law the Gentiles became a type of law unto themselves, not the Mosaic Law unto themselves.

To summarize verse 14 in a sentence: Some pagan, non-Jews who do not possess the Mosaic Law, do by their innate ability, perform certain sporadic precepts of the Mosaic Law, thus becoming a type of law unto themselves.
CHAPTER III

ROMANS 2:15

A. οίτινες ἐνδείκνυται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου
 γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν

οίτινες: A descriptive pronoun meaning "as people who."¹

ἐνδείκνυται: Means simply to show, demonstrate or prove something. This word is found in the Paprus de Magdola, "ἐὰν ἐνδείξωμεθα τὰ διὰ τῆς ἐντεύξεως οὕτα ἁρμῆθη, if we prove that what we set forth in the petition is true."² In the context of this verse the meaning of ἐνδείκνυται is clear. By their visible outward acts, the Gentiles prove the existence of the work of the law written in their hearts.

τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου: There are two ways of understanding this phrase. The first view is that τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου is seen as corresponding to τὰ τοῦ νόμου of verse 14. Nygren supports this view commenting:

Nor is Paul speaking of a law written in the heart; for then the heathen would indeed have the law, and that in a more intimate way than the Jew has it... He does not say ὁ νόμος, but τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου.

¹Godet, Commentary on Romans, p. 124.
Not the law itself, but the work of the law which the heathen does, is written on his heart.\(^1\)

The second view understands this phrase as signifying the whole contents of the Mosaic Law. Godet writes:

What the Gentile shows in such cases is the law itself written (as to its contents) within his heart. Paul calls these contents the 'work of the law', because all the law commanded was meant to become work; and he qualifies νόμον by the article (the law), because he wishes to establish the identity of the Gentile's moral instinct with the contents of the Mosaic Law strictly so called. But this phrase: the work of the law, does not merely designate, like that of verse 14, τὸ τοῦ νόμου (the things agreeable to the law), certain isolated acts. It embraces the whole contents of the law; for verse 15 does not refer to the accidental fulfillment of some good actions; it denotes the totality of the moral law written in the heart.\(^2\)

Though Godet is correct in asserting that ἡργον τοῦ νόμου does not refer "to the accidental fulfillment of some good actions," it is false to maintain that the Mosaic Law is here spoken of. There are four reasons why the Apostle does not mean the Gentiles have the totality of the Mosaic Law written in their hearts. First of all, it seems probable that if Paul meant to indicate the whole of Mosaic Law he simply would have written ὁ νόμος not τὸ ἡργον τοῦ νόμου. Secondly, it is false to maintain that Jews and Gentiles have essentially the same revelation from God. Though the Gentiles' revelation from God is consistent with God's revelation to the Jews, it is clear that the Jews have additional revelation, or revelation to a fuller degree. In the context of Romans 2 we see that the Jews are unique in


\(^2\)Godet, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 124.
in their relationship to God and are special recipients of His law. Thirdly, from verse 14 it has been seen that the Gentiles only sometimes fulfill some of the things of the Law, not the Law in its totality. Lastly, it is seen that in verse 15 the Gentiles are actually demonstrating "the work of the law." If the view is held that "the work of the law" indicates the Mosaic Law in its totality one is forced to conclude that some Gentiles actually fulfill the whole of the Mosaic Law. Such a view is contrary to the overall testimony of scripture.

γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν: Cranfield maintains that this refers to the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31.¹ In opposition to this view Bruce writes, "A verbal parallel to the prophecy of the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31:33; although Paul is not thinking of the New Covenant here."² The view that the New Covenant is not intended here is preferred. The context of Jeremiah 31 clearly indicates that the New Covenant is for Jews while Romans 2:15 refers to Gentiles.

B. συμμαρτυροῦσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως

συνειδήσεως: The first question presented by this phrase is whether or not to take συνειδήσεως as synonymous with

¹Cranfield, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, pp. 158-159.

Hahn understands conscience as independent of, but functioning alongside of the work of the law written in the heart. Hahn writes:

Conscience is assigned the role of awakening awareness of the law that is written on the heart. This is shown by the verb symmartyrein (bear witness with; cf. Romans 9:1 where Paul appeals to his conscience as a witness that he is not lying). Conscience appears—to put it graphically—as a court of appeal which is not able to promulgate any statutes (for only God himself can do this) but is able to deliver judgment on the cases before it. (Ed.) Romans 2:14 ff., is often taken to apply to the hypothetical case of Gentiles keeping the law without having heard of the O.T. law or the gospel.

Hahn also notes that conscience is seen as a court of appeal in the passages where Paul deals with the issue of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols, 1 Corinthians 8:7, 10:25.

A second way of understanding conscience is as an explanatory exegesis which further explains what is meant

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1 Murray writes, "Their conscience bearing witness therewith." Conscience must not be identified with "the work of the law written in their hearts" for these reasons: (1) Conscience is represented as giving joint witness. This could not be true if it were the same as that along with which it bears witness. (2) Conscience is a function; it is the person's functioning in the realm of moral discrimination and judgment, the person viewed from the aspect of moral consciousness. The work of the law written in the heart is something ingenerated in our nature, is antecedent to the operations of conscience and the cause of them. (3) The precise thought is that the operations of conscience bear witness to the fact that the work of the law is written in the heart. Not only does the doing of the things of the law prove the work of the law written in the heart but the witness of conscience does also. Hence the distinction between the work of the law and conscience." Murray, Epistle to the Romans, p. 75.

by "the work of the law written in their hearts." Tholuck writes:

It may be questioned, whether St. Paul in συνειδήσεις, and afterwards under λόγιαμόν, intends something different from νόμος γραπτός ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις. In that case, these three clauses of the verse would require to be made co-ordinate, as three distinct proofs of the fact....This is done by Luther. But although it may be defended upon good grounds the more natural way is to subordinate the second and third clause to the first. The expression νόμος γραπτός was not one of ordinary use. Paul, therefore, explains it in terms more familiar.¹

It should be noted that the second and third clauses in verse 15 are both genitive absolutes. As genitive absolutes, it should be understood that these clauses are secondary to the "visible proof" of the first clause.²

Hahn is right in asserting that conscience, in and of itself, cannot obligate individuals. Yet, to understand conscience as an explanatory ephexegesis is not to assert that conscience has an intrinsic ability to produce obligation. Rather, conscience finds its authority in the fact that it is the active expression of "the work of the law written in their hearts."

Though it is debatable whether to understand conscience as synonymous with the work of the law or merely working alongside of it, the Apostle is clearly using the familiar word συνειδήσεως to provide a clearer understanding of "the work of the law written in their hearts." As such, a proper understanding of the meaning of conscience is

¹Fred G. Tholuck, Exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Philadelphia: Sorin and Ball, 1344), pp. 80-81.

²Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, p. 166.
essential to a correct interpretation of these verses. Because of the importance of συνείδησεως we shall now examine its history, meaning, and usage employed at the time Paul used it.

C. A. Pierce provides a detailed background to the word συνείδησεως. It is first seen that συνείδησεως was one of a number of cognate words with basically the same meaning. Concerning the various forms of the word conscience Pierce cites a work by Stobaeus:

The book...comprises a catena of apophthegms culled from a wide variety of authors to illustrate this subject. There are sixteen apophthegms in all; as relevant to τὸ συνείδος this excerptor of the sixth century A.D. includes quotations which employ αὐτῷ συνείδειν τί; αὐτῷ συνίστορειν τί; σύνεσις and συνειδησία, as well as τὸ συνείδος. It is quite plain, therefore, that συνειδησία is but one of a group of cognate or similar words or phrases that may be used interchangeably to express exactly the same idea.¹

The word from which these various cognates are derived is σύνοιδα which occurs in this form only once in the New Testament.² The noun συνείδησις occurs thirty times in the New Testament of which Paul accounts for at least twenty-five uses.

As for the origin of σύνοιδα, Sanday and Headlam assert that the word is a stoic term.³ Pierce maintains that this view is false and that such a view has little evidence, is inherently improbable, and quite unnecessary.⁴ Pierce

²Acts 5:2.
³Sanday and Headlam, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, p. 64.
points out that at best only three quotations from stoic writers can be offered as evidence of a stoic origin for συνείδησις. Pierce comments:

Of these three the most vital, as it was attributed to Epictetus, is of only doubtful origin. Even were Epictetus the author beyond all possible doubt, it must still be remembered that he was four years old at the time of St. Paul's death.¹

The second quotation, that of Chrysippus, "predicates συνείδησις of every living creature--not exclusively of man--and means by it simply the awareness or consciousness which a creature has of its own composition. No moral element whatever is implied."² The third quotation by Marcus Aurelius states, "that thy last hour coming upon thee may find thee clear of conscience." Yet, the word συνείδησις is not used here, "nor does the passage hint at any definition of the derivative epithet which replaces it."³

Secondly, it should be asserted that it is highly improbable that the Pauline usage of conscience should derive from Stoicism. Paul's usage of conscience contains an element of emotion employing such concepts as fear and guilt. Yet, as Pierce points out, "for the Stoics emotions were, under all circumstances, faults; and were an emotion to be useful virtue would be advanced by means of what is wrong."⁴

Thirdly, it is quite unnecessary to claim a stoic origin for συνείδησις. It is clear that συνείδησις is not

¹Ibid. ²Ibid, p. 14. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.
specifically a philosophical or technical term particular to a certain group. On the contrary, συνειδησία was a very common word used by the common man. Pierce writes:

The group of words and phrases, then, of which συνειδησία is but one, is found again and again, throughout the range of Greek writing as a whole—not in literature only—from the sixth century B.C. to the seventh century A.D. It is used by every possible sort of writer: by philosophers and poets; by tragic and comic playwrights—and who more in touch with popular usage than the comedian; by historians and novelists; by engineers and physicians; by orators and rhetoricians; by learned critics and simple commissioners of domestic inscriptions; by writers of private correspondence. It is in fact an everyday group of words expressing a commonplace idea—truly popular, and belonging rather to folk-wisdom than to popular philosophy or, rather second-hand philosophical jargon.¹

Maurer notes that συνειδησία is used by Aristophanes and Xenophon, and that the closeness of these writers to the people "suggests that what we have here is not an invention of literature or art but the adoption of a current expression."²

It is interesting to note that συνειδησία has no real counterpart in the Old Testament. Maurer offers a possible explanation why conscience is not seen in the Old Testament:

It is an astonishing fact that the Old Testament did not develop any word for conscience. This is connected with its specific anthropology. Man is basically governed by his relation to the God of revelation, Yahweh. As the divine covenant is the all-controlling sphere for the people, so the individual is encircled by this God. The best witness to this is Psalm 139. If it is asked where this knowledge of self comes from, the reply is to be

¹Ibid, pp. 16-17.

sought, not in a reference to man, but in a reference to the God who speaks and who reveals Himself in His Word....Hence there is knowledge of good and evil only in remembering and keeping God's statutes, cf. Psalm 16:7f; 40:8; 119:11 etc. In the Old Testament the reflection of the I about itself is thus obedient listening to God. Even in contradiction, then, the I is a single person confronting the God who speaks. Conscience is hearing in the sense of willing adherence. The voice of God and one's own voice agree, not in the sense of rational autonomy, but in that of the harmony of the I with God's will. This is why the Old Testament did not develop any term for conscience. ¹

While agreeing that the Old Testament has no special word for conscience, Hahn comments:

This does not mean that the Old Testament knows nothing of the reality of a tormented conscience. But the voice of conscience possesses no intrinsic value. It is the voice of the divine judge, demanding from man an account of his dealings. The function of conscience is attributed to the heart. Thus the heart of David smote him to remind him of his guilt (1 Sam. 24:6; 2 Sam. 24:10). ²

Though conscience was a term foreign to the Old Testament, it certainly was not foreign to the Greek of Paul's day. When Paul used the word συνείδησις, he was using a word clearly understood by his readers. It is pertinent now to take the time to examine a dozen different examples of the usage of συνείδησις covering a time period between 440 B.C. to about 100 A.D. It will be seen that συνείδησις maintains a fairly consistent meaning from the late Classical period through the Koine period of the Greek language.

1. Sources of Conscience from the Classical Period

The first example of συνείδησις that will be looked

¹Ibid.
at is found in Euripides dating around 440 B.C. In his tragedy of Orestes, conscience is seen as a type of sickness. In this work, one of the characters, Merelaus, asks Orestus, who has killed his own mother, a question, "τί χρήμα πάσχεις; τίς ο' ἀπόλλυσιν νόσος; What aileth thee? What sickness ruineth thee?" Orestes responds, "ἡ σύνεσις, ὅτι σύνοιδα δείν εἰργασμένος; Conscience!—to know I have wrought a fearful deed." ¹ Here conscience has the clear meaning of knowledge of wrongdoing.

Another classical Greek writer who used σύνεσις was Xenophon, who dates to about 410 B.C. It has already been noted that Xenophon was a writer who was close to the common man. ² Concerning the duty of a soldier Xenophon writes:

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ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς, ὃς ἀνήφες, μὴ πάθωμεν ταύτα; ἀλλ' ἐπείπερ σύνισκεν ἡμῖν αὐτὸς ἀπὸ παιδῶν ἀρξάμενοι ἁσκηταὶ ὄντες τῶν καλῶν καγαθῶν ἔργων ἰσχυμένοι ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους; But, fellow-soldiers, let us not make this mistake; but, conscious that from our boyhood on we have practised what is good and honourable, let us go against the enemy. ³
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In his Anabasis, Xenophon uses σύνοιδα in the negative sense. Concerning a soldier who has failed to do his duty, Xenophon writes:

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ὡστε καὶ μεταπεμπομένου αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐθέλω ἐλθεῖν, τὸ μὲν μέγιστον αἰσχυνόμενος ὅτι σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ πάντα
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² cf., p. 28.

ἐψευσμένος ἀυτόν; I decline to go, chiefly, it is true, from a feeling of shame, because I am conscious that I have proved utterly false to him.1

In his letter, To Demonicus, Isocrates, writing around 400 B.C., presents us with an excellent example of the use of συνείδησις. Isocrates states:

Μηδέπερ τε μηδὲν αἰσχρὸν ποιήσας ἐλπίζει λήσιν καὶ γὰρ ἀν τοὺς ἀλλους λάθης, σεξυμένω συνείδησις; Never hope to conceal any shameful thing which you have done; for even if you do conceal it from others, your own heart will know.2

Again it is seen that συνείδησις indicates the knowledge of wrongdoing.

Demosthenes presents us with an extended picture of conscience in his De Falsa Legatione. Demosthenes writes:

τί ποτ’ οὖν ἐστι τὸ αἰτίον ὅτι οἱ βαδευρώται τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει καὶ μέγιστον φθεγγόμενοι τοῦ καὶ ἄτολμοτάτου πάντων ἐμός καὶ οὐδὲν μείζον φθεγγομένον τοσοῦτον ἠπέκρυψαν; ὅτι τάλαγος ἱσχυρὸν καὶ τούθαντόν ἀπεχειρέσθη συνείδηνεν πεπραγματεύοντες αὐτοῖς τὰ πράγματα καὶ τοὺ ἀπερειταὶ τὴν θρασύτητα τὴν τούτων· τοῦτο ἀποστρέφει τὴν γλῶτταν, ἐμφράται τὸ στόμα, ἀγχει, σιώπᾶν ποιεῖ; How comes it then that the most impudent men in Athens, and the loudest speakers, are overborne by me, the nervous man, who can speak no louder than another? Because truth is strong, and consciousness of corruption weak. Conscience paralyses their audacity; conscience cripples their tongues, closes their lips, stifes them, puts them to silence.3

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2. Sources of Conscience from the Koine Period

Moving into the early Koine period the first example that shall be looked at is found in Menander, 310 B.C. Menander writes, "ὅ συνειδητὸν ἀντὶ τί, κἂν ἡ ἄθαντος, ἡ σύνεσις ἀντὶ τῶν δεισιδητῶν εἶναι ποιεῖ; The man who hath some load upon his mind, even though he be very bold, him conscience turns into a perfect coward."¹ In the Histories of Polybius, 170 B.C., another example of the power of a man's conscience is found. Polybius describes how evil men may escape punishment by fellow man, but are unable to escape their own conscience. Polybius writes:

"τὸ δὲ τελευτᾷον οὖν κατὰ τοὺς ὑπνους ἔδεσε λήγειν αὐτοὺς ἔχειν τῶν ἡμαρτημέων ἀλλὰ ἀνειρωτεῖν ἀναγκάζοντας πάν γένος ἐπίθυμης καὶ περιπετείας, ὡς συνειδώτας ἐμαυτῶς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν ἐκ πάντων ἄλλωστοτρίτητα πρὸς σφάς καὶ τὸ κοινὸν μίσος; not allowing them even in sleep to forget their offence, but compelling them to dream of every kind of plot and peril, conscious as they are of the estrangement of everybody and of men's universal hatred of them."²

Moving closer to the New Testament era, an example of συνείδησις is found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus at about 30 B.C. In his work, Thucydides, Dionysius outlines the importance of truthfulness on the part of a historian. As a writer, Thucydides was to concern himself only with "recording the truth." Thucydides concludes that, "κράτιστον δὲ πάντων τὸ μηδὲν ἔκουσάς ψεύδεσθαι μηδὲ μιαίνειν τὴν


The most important thing of all is never to lie willingly or to defile one's own conscience."¹

The next two examples to be examined are found in Philo, 40 A.D. Maurer notes that Philo was the first "to think through theologically a doctrine of conscience."²

For Philo:

Conscience is no mere autonomous court of appeal, but a normative entity shaped by the law of God. Its task is to (convict, reprove, expose), to bring man consciousness of sin and penitence. When it is once awakened, it comes forth as an accuser, indicts, charges, and shames; on the other hand it also instructs as a judge, giving correction, advising conversion, and when it persuades it is pleased and propitiated.³

The first example of Philo's use of συνείδησις is found in his work entitled, The Unchangeableness of God.

Philo comments on the difference between voluntary and involuntary wrongdoings:

"οτι τα μεν ακουσια των δικηματων καην επιηκιστα ονταν ανυπατια και καθαρα, το συνειδος βαρων κατηγοραν ουκ εχοντα, τα δε εκουσια, και η επι πλειστον αναχηται προς του κατα ψυχην ελεγχομενα δικαιοτου, ανιερα και μιαρα και ακαθαρσα δοκιμαζεται; Wrongdoings as are involuntary, however wide their extent, are pure and devoid of guilt, for they have no stern accuser in conscience, but voluntary sins, even though the space they cover be not large, and convicted by the judge within the soul and thus are proved to be unholy and foul and impure.⁴


Here the legal aspect of conscience is clearly seen as it is pictured as "the judge within the soul."

The second example of Philo's use of συνείδησις is found in The Worse Attacks the Better. In this work, Philo describes the inner man:

οὗτος ο άνθρωπος ἐν ἐκάστοι τῇ ψυχῇ κατοικῶν τοτε μὲν ἄρχων καὶ βασιλεύς εὑρίσκεται τοτε δὲ δικαστὴς καὶ βραβευτὴς τῶν κατὰ τὴν βίον ἁγώνων, ἔστι δ' ὅτε μάρτυρος ἡ κατηγορούν λαβὼν τάξιν ἄφανως ἡμᾶς ἐνόθεν ἐλέγχει ὑπὸ διὰ τὸ στόμα ἐὼν, ἔλλαμβανόμενος δὲ καὶ ἐπισταμένων ταῖς τού συνειδότος ἴνισις τὸν αὐθάδη μετὰ ἀφηνιασμοῦ δρόμου γλώττης ἐπέσχεν; This "man", dwelling in the soul of each of us, is discovered at one time as king and governor, at another as judge and umpire of life's contests. Sometimes he assumes the part of witness or accuser, and, all unseen, convicts us from within, not allowing us so much as to open our mouth, but, holding in and curbing the tongue with the reins of conscience, checks its wilful and rebellious course.¹

Here conscience is found as the part of man which restrains him from doing evil.

Another good example of the use of συνείδησις is found in Plutarch, a contemporary of the Apostle Paul.

Plutarch writes:

ἡ σύνεσις, ὅτι συνόιδα δείγμα εἰργασμένος, ὁ οὐκος ἐν σαρκί τῇ ψυχῇ τὴν μεταμελείαν αἰμασθασαν αἰεὶ καὶ νύσσουσαν ἐναπολείπει. τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἀλλὰς ἀναιρεῖ λύτας ὄ λογος, τὴν δὲ μετανοίαν ἄντως ἐργαζεται δήκνυμεν τὸν αἰσχύνα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ κολαζωμένης υφ' αὐτῆς; My conscience, since I know I've done a dreadful deed, like an ulcer in the flesh, leaves behind it in the soul regret which ever continues to wound and prick it. For the other pangs reason does away with, but regret is caused by reason itself, since the soul, together with its feeling of shame, is stung and chastised by itself.²


A final example of the use of συνείδησις is also found in Plutarch, in his *Progress in Virtue*. Here Plutarch describes the successful man:

προκόπτειν ἁληθῶς, μᾶλλον ἔργοις καὶ πρὸξεσίν ἄνδρός
ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τελείου παραβάλλων ἑαυτοῦ, ἔτια τῶ συνειδότι
τοῦ ἐνόεσθαν διακυμένος; The man who is truly making
correct progress, comparing himself with the deeds and con-
duct of a good and perfect man, and being pricked by
the consciousness of his own shortcomings.\(^1\)

It is apparent from the examples cited that a fairly
consistent meaning can be established for the term, "συνεί-
δησις." To begin, some characteristics of conscience will
be noted. First of all, it is found that conscience is
internal and personal. Conscience is not concerned with the
acts or attitudes of others. "The σύν of σύνοιδα governs the
dative of the reflexive pronoun: the knowledge or awareness
that a man has, the witness that he is in a position to
bear—is inward. No external authority need be consulted."\(^2\)

A second characteristic of conscience is that it
refers to past acts. This is illustrated in the judicial
aspect of conscience which is seen as a judge of prior acts.
A final aspect of conscience is that it generally refers to
acts or attitudes that are negative in nature. Maurer writes:

From the first century B.C. the nouns συνείδος and
συνείδησις are used for 'conscience' quite often in
pagan Greek as well as in the Hellenistic-Jewish and


the Roman sphere....The reference is always to the moral conscience in a bad sense.1

In the New Testament conscience is found used in a variety of ways. 1 Corinthians 8:7, 12 refer to those who have a "weak conscience." Paul twice refers to his desire to have a "pure conscience." 2 In Titus 1:15, Paul states that sin may cause one to have a "defiled conscience." Yet, the writer of Hebrews shows that a defiled conscience can be cleansed by the blood of Christ, Hebrews 9:14. There are even people who appear to have no conscience at all, such as those mentioned in Romans 1:18-32. Nevertheless, a closer examination shows that these wicked people merely have a "seared conscience," 1 Timothy 4:2. Concerning this verse, Hendricksen states:

These hypocrites are described as the men whose own conscience is seared (literally, 'who are cauterized as to their own conscience'). By constantly arguing with conscience, stifling its warnings, and muffling its bell, they at last have reached the point where conscience no longer bothers them....Through their own rebellion and obstinacy, their conscience will have been rendered (and thus will permanently) seared. It will have been made callous.3

Guthrie comments:

These people have no sense of the wrongness of their actions for their conscience is seared, or 'cauterized,' according to one possible meaning of the word kauferiazo. The Apostle's description of people 'past feeling' in Ephesians 4:19 supports this medical understanding of the term.4


21 Timothy 3:9, 2 Timothy 1:3.


There are two other types of usage for συνείδησις in the New Testament that more closely parallel the use of συνείδησις in Romans 2:15. In the first instance, συνείδησις testifies of good, or the lack of evil. Examples of this use are found in Acts 24:16, Romans 9:1, and 2 Corinthians 1:12. The second usage, perhaps the most common way of using συνείδησις, that of testifying of evil, is found in John 8:9 and Romans 13:5.

From the extra-biblical and Biblical uses of συνείδησις that have been seen, a general New Testament meaning for συνείδησις can now be formed. An excellent definition of συνείδησις and its cognates is supplied by Cranfield. "The basic idea conveyed is that of knowledge shared with oneself—so, in particular, these expressions denote a painful knowledge shared with oneself of having done wrong."¹ Thayer defines συνείδησις as "the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending the one, condemning the other."²

συμμαρτυρούσης: The meaning of συμμαρτυρούσης is to bear witness with, or bear joint witness.³ In this context, it is the conscience that is bearing joint witness with the works of the Gentiles, as to the existence of "the work of the law written in their hearts." Meyer writes,

¹Cranfield, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, p. 160.
³Ibid, p. 596.
"the σύν in συμμαρτυροῦσης, which is not a mere strengthening of the simple word...but denotes the agreement of the internal evidence of conscience with the external proof by fact."¹

Whether conscience is taken to be synonymous with "the work of the law written in the heart" or not, it is clear that conscience is seen as a joint witness with ἐνεκείκυνται. Philippi writes, "two witnesses, then, testify to the Gentiles possession of the law: first, their acting in accordance with law; secondly, the existence of conscience in them."² Along the same lines, Sanday and Headlam note:

This phrase is almost exactly repeated in chapter 9:1. In both cases the conscience is separated from self and personified as a further witness standing over against it. Here the quality of the acts themselves is one witness, and the approving judgement passed upon them by the conscience is another concurrent witness.³

C. καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγοροῦντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν: There are two ways of understanding this phrase. These thoughts may be understood as either an exchange between Gentiles or a dialogue between the thoughts themselves. One indicates an external exchange, the other only internal.

Liddon understands thoughts in reference to an ex-


²Philippi, Commentary on Romans, pp. 85-86.

³Sanday and Headlam, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, p. 60.
change between different men. Liddon writes:

Observe the contrast between οὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως and μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων: the latter expression occurring here only in St. Paul, to contrast the mutual judgement of the thoughts of different men, with the personal and individual tendency of conscience. ἀλλήλων must be referred to ἔθνη not λογισμοί, as is plain from its necessary antithetical correspondence with οὐτῶν.¹

The second view, which understands thoughts as an internal process within the individual, should be preferred. Shedd writes, "λογισμοί, 'reflections', the term denotes the reflex action of the mind whereby it turns in upon itself, and reviews its own agencies."² Sanday and Headlam agree as they comment, "the λογισμοί are properly 'thoughts' conceived in the mind, not 'arguments' used in external debate. This appears from the usage of the word, which is frequently combined with καρδία."³

There are at least three reasons why "thoughts" should be understood as internal in nature. First of all, this phrase is a genitive absolute and is best understood as explaining the previous clause, which entails the internal debate of conscience. Hendrickson supplies two additional reasons for this interpretation:

Does this have reference to thoughts between Gentile and Gentile, or to thoughts between (or among) them-


³Sanday and Headlam, Exegetical Commentary on Romans, P. 61.
selves? Probably the latter, for: a. The modifier 'between themselves' stands closer to 'thoughts' than to Gentiles. Unless there is a good reason otherwise, it is best to link modifiers with words that stand closest to them. b. It is indeed a fact that the thoughts that fill the mind as a result of the operation of conscience operate independently.1

κατηγοροῦντων: This word means to accuse, assert, make known, affirm or bring to charge in court.2 The term κατηγοροῦντων may be understood in either a legal or non-legal sense. Here, as in Matthew 12:10, the legal aspect is clear. In Romans 2:15 an individual's thoughts are seen as accusing him of wrongdoing.

ἡ καὶ ἀπολογούμενων: ἡ καὶ can be translated "or even" and indicates that the conscience finds more to accuse than excuse.3 As it was mentioned earlier, conscience is basically negative in nature. ἀπολογούμενων means "to defend oneself." Thayer writes, "to defend a person or a thing, Romans 2:15, where according to the context, the deeds of men must be understood as defended."4

What is found in the final phrase of verse 15 is a description of conscience at work in the inner man. Here conscience is seen as a rational, reflective action of the mind concerning the deeds of man. Maurer writes:

In conscience two egos are in juxtaposition and opposition in one and the same person, knowing and evaluating the same facts but from different standpoints. These two egos are controlled by different immanent or trans-

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1 Hendrickson, Romans, p. 98.
3 Lange and Fay, Epistle to the Romans, p. 102.
cendent orders. The one order, in virtue of its quality of truth, goodness, and beauty etc., is affirmed and is to be affirmed; it contains within itself an imperative, an 'ought'. The other is a factual but negated force which destroy the good order by falsehood, evil, and disorder etc. The ethical elements of tension within the one person result from the different natures and operations of the orders. But the conflict begins only when there is acquaintance with disorder.¹

D. Summary of Romans 2:15

At this time, it is helpful to stop in order to summarize the predominate points of Romans 2:15. First of all, it should be asserted that the main thought in this verse is that Gentiles have "the work of the law written in their hearts." It was seen that "the work of the law" did not represent the whole contents of the Mosaic Law. Rather, this phrase should be understood to represent the general moral precepts of the Law. It should also be noticed that this phrase was a verbal parallel to the prophecy of the New Covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 31:33 but that the New Covenant is not referred to here.

In this verse, there are two witnesses to the fact that "the work of the law" is indeed written in the hearts of Gentiles. It was seen that the moral acts of Gentiles give evidence of the existence of a moral law in their hearts. The second witness to the existence of this moral law is the operation of conscience.

It was seen that conscience is understood by some commentators as synonymous with "the work of the law" but

perhaps is better understood as the active expression of "the work of the law." The notion that conscience was a stoic term was rejected, noting that this was a common Greek word used by the common man. It was noted that, because of the Jews' special relation to God's law, conscience did not have a real counterpart in the Old Testament. Having looked at a number of examples of the use of conscience, some general characteristics were developed. It was first seen that, conscience is internal and personal in nature. Secondly, that conscience generally refers to past acts. Thirdly, that the predominate use of conscience is in the negative sense. Having looked at a number of examples of conscience in the New Testament, a basic New Testament meaning was given. Conscience was defined as "knowledge shared with oneself" especially "a painful knowledge shared with one's self of having done wrong."¹

It was determined that the final phrase of Romans 2:15 referred to the internal debate of man's thoughts. It was seen that the predominate thoughts of a man's conscience is the accusation of having done wrong. Yet, on occasions conscience does find a defense of one's actions.

To summarize this verse in a sentence: The Gentiles prove the existence of "the work of the law written in the heart," first by their moral actions, and second by the function of conscience which is seen as an internal debate of thoughts, some which accuse, less which defend, the acts of men.

¹cf., p. 36.
CHAPTER IV

ROMANS 1:32A

A. Contextual Considerations

As was mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the context of Romans 1:32 is very important in respect to how this verse relates to the Moral Argument for God's Existence. In the contextual study, this verse was included in the section covering 1:18-32 where Paul's purpose was to show the Gentile world as condemned before God. Concerning the connection of verse 32 to the preceding verses, Godet comments:

Verse 32 is connected with the previous verses because: (1) Judging with a view to approve, verse 32, is not the same as judging to condemn, 2:1-2; (2) On account of the obvious relation between the terms of verse 32: 'though knowing the judgement of God,' and those of verse 28: 'they did not keep God in their knowledge'; (3) The uniform sense of the pronoun πίπτων, as people who, forces us to seek in the description of verse 32, the justification of the judgement described from verse 28.¹

In these verses Paul presents a vivid picture of the wickedness of the Gentile. Paul describes these Gentiles as idolators, sexual perverts, and depraved men who are filled with all unrighteousness. Yet, in the very next breath, Paul states that these Gentiles "know the requirements of God."

¹Godet, Commentary on Romans, p. 112.
Two questions must be answered concerning this phrase. First of all, what type of knowledge is Paul referring to? Secondly, what is meant by the "requirement of God?"

B. οἴτινες τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγνόντες

οἴτινες: Should be translated "who" and refers to the wicked Gentiles described in chapter 1:18-32.

ἐπιγνόντες: ἐπιγνόντες means to know exactly, completely, through and through. Commenting on this type of knowledge, Thayer writes, "to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know thoroughly, to know accurately, know well, 1 Corinthians 8:12, Romans 1:32." This type of knowledge is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 13:12 which states, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, just as I also have been fully known." The word "know" occurs twice in this verse. In the first instance, the general word for knowledge, γνῶσις, is used. In the second use of the word "know," ἐπιγνόντες is used, and a complete or full knowledge is indicated. In his commentary on Colossians, Lightfoot comments on the difference between ἐπιγνώσις and γνῶσις. Commenting on chapter 1:9, Lightfoot states:

The compound ἐπιγνώσις is an advance upon γνῶσις, denoting a larger and more thorough knowledge....So too St. Paul himself contrasts γινώσκειν, γνῶσις, with ἐπιγινώσκειν,


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\[\text{πίγνωσι, as the partial with the complete, in two passages, Romans } 1:21, 28, 1 \text{ Corinthians } 13:12.\]

Concerning the type of knowledge \(\text{πίγνώτες}\) conveys, Schmitz comments:

Phrases such as 'know God's decree' (Rom. 1:32), 'know the law' (Rom. 7:1), 'know his will' (Rom. 2:18; Acts 22:14), do not imply a merely theoretical knowledge, but the recognition that it applies to the person individually and demands his obedience.

It is clear from the New Testament examples of \(\text{πίγνωσι}\) that the Gentiles, even the most wicked ones, possessed a very clear and complete understanding of "the requirement of God."

The second question must now be addressed, that of the content or meaning of the "requirement of God."

\[\text{τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ: τὸ δικαίωμα is that which has been deemed right by God as to have the force of law.}\]

Meyer comments, "\(\text{τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ, that which God as Law-giver and Judge has ordained; what He has determined, and demands, as right.}\)"

Commenting on this phrase Schrenk writes:

In Romans 1:32 (\(\text{τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ \(\text{πίγνώτες}\)\)}\) the reference is to the knowledge of God's statutes or ordinances which obtains among men, so that the corruption of worship and sexual life and the general disintegration of society are worthy of death. In Paul's eyes it is important to emphasize that there is for the Gentiles a

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recognizable divine order which is to be embraced, not as a sum of commands, but as the one divine will.\footnote{Gottlob Schrenk, "δικαιώμα" Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 10 vols., ed Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 2:221.}

Lenski provides a rather complete definition of τὸ δικαίωμα in the context of the first chapter of Romans:

God's δικαίωμα is his judicial righteous finding, call it verdict, ordinance, or law. Paul is not speaking of it as it is embodied in the Mosaic law but as it is ineradically embedded in the human conscience. Let men do what they will, fight against it if they will, it clings to them, not merely in their γνώσεις but in their ἐπιγνώσεις because they are moral creatures, because they are therefore, accountable. And this is God's δικαίωμα, the right as a general verdict or law established by him alone ('of God' here too is cause, author, source) that is impressed upon man's inner consciousness. Man's natural sense of justice is the reflex of this divine ordinance. By naming it as God's, Paul goes back to the ultimate source, God himself. Men may deny that their sense of justice, the conviction that such are not fit to live, is the contents of God's own righteous ordinance and may try to explain this sense by means of evolitional, sociological hypothesis and regard it as the consensus of the human herd which developed so that the antisocial were abolished. That, however, is only reprobating God from the consciousness, verse 28.\footnote{Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, pp. 124-125.}

C. Summary of Romans 1:32

The message of Romans 1:32 is clear and simple. This verse states that all men, even the most wicked, know the requirement of God. It was noted in the study of ἐπιγνώσεις that this knowledge is a clear and complete knowledge. It was also seen that this knowledge concerned the requirement of God. The requirement of God was defined as what God has ordained and determined as right. To summarize
this verse in a sentence: All men fully and clearly know what God has decreed as right and wrong.

D. Relation of Romans 1:32 to Romans 2:14-15

It is important to note that the truths of Romans 1:32 and Romans 2:14-15 are complimentary with each other in respect to the Moral Argument. While Romans 2:14-15 states that Gentiles carry out certain precepts of the law by nature or innate ability, Romans 1:32 shows that this fulfillment of the law is not merely by some type of instinct but by a conscious knowledge of what God has decreed as right.

Whiteley comments:

A verse which has received less attention than it deserves is Romans 1:32. 'They know well enough the just decree of God, that those who behave like this deserve to die, and yet they do it; not only so, they actually applaud such practice.' This makes it quite clear that the Gentiles had conscious knowledge of what God had laid down. When in Romans 2:14 we are told that they 'carry out its precepts' we can be sure, in the light of Romans 1:32, that the Gentiles are not just obeying the law by mistake: their occasional obedience (hotein, 'when', in Romans 2:14 suggests that obedience is the exception) like their general disobedience, is a conscious reaction to a known divine command.  

It should also be emphasized that while Romans 2:14-15 can be argued to refer to only some Gentiles, Romans 1:32 states that all Gentiles have a moral knowledge of what God has decreed as right and wrong. Lastly, it should be pointed out that while Romans 1:32 states that Gentiles know the requirement of God, Romans 2:14-15 explains that this moral knowledge finds its active expression in the conscience of man which serves as a moral judge of his actions.

PART II

CHAPTER V

OBJECTIVE MORALS

This chapter will begin by noting the importance of the existence of objective morals to the Moral Argument. Following this, it will be shown that scripture presents at least three evidences for the existence of objective morals. Three important observations concerning objective morals will be presented. First of all, it will be seen that objective morals are innate by nature. Secondly, it will be noted that objective morals serve as a basis for a Natural Moral Law Theory. Thirdly, it will be asserted that scripture presents God as the source of objective morals.

Before beginning, a word about terminology is necessary. In this paper, the word "objective" rather than "absolute", is used to describe morals. Concerning this distinction, Trueblood states:

It helps greatly, in the effort to avoid confusion in these matters, to omit the word 'absolute' and concentrate, instead, on 'objective'. Absolute is, unfortunately, a word with emotional overtones, which hinder understanding, especially by the suggestion of changelessness. We are not wise enough to know much about the changeless, but we do have, as human beings, a peculiar flair for trying to ascertain the objectively real. The objective reference which is inherent in all ethical judgement is fully consistent with a species of relativity,
in that the precise relationship to the objective order is different in each particular situation.¹

A. Importance of "Objective" Morals

As was mentioned in the introduction, the first premise of the Moral Argument asserts that objective morals exist. Geisler notes the importance of an objective moral law, "The moral argument rests heavily on the objectivity of the moral law, a premise which has not gained universal recognition."² As Geisler mentioned, one of the central attacks on the Moral Argument is the denial of objective morals. It is proposed by opponents of the Moral Argument that morals are merely the demands of society upon the individual.³

Francis Schaeffer comments on this type of morality:

Hence, what is left may be worded in many different ways in different cultures, but it is only the relative—that which is sociological, statistical, situational—nothing else. You have situational, statistical ethics—the standard of averages—but you cannot have morality.⁴


²Norman Geisler, Philosophy of Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 120.

³Such a view is proposed by J. L. Mackie. Mackie writes, "If we stand back from the experience of conscience and try to understand it, it is overwhelmingly plausible to see it as an introjection into each individual of demands that come from other people; in the first place, perhaps, from his parents and immediate associates, but ultimately from the traditions and institutions of the society in which he has grown up, or of some special part of that society which has had the greatest influence upon him." J. L. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1982), p. 105.

It is sufficient to note here that the existence of truly objective morals is vitally important to the Moral Argument for God's Existence.

B. Scriptural Testimony to the Existence of Objective Morals

1. Moral Actions of Gentiles Testify of Objective Morals

In Romans 2:15 the Apostle states that man has a moral law or standard written upon his heart. The first evidence of such a standard is seen in the actions of pagans without written revelation from God. The scripture asserts that, in doing the things of the law, Gentiles demonstrate (ἐνδείκνυται) the existence of a moral law written in their heart. Concerning this Philippi writes, "That they have in their hearts a consciousness of the demands of the moral law, they indicate first by their acting in accordance with law, and again by their conscience passing judgement on their acts.¹

2. Conscience Testifies of Objective Morals

As Philippi notes, the second evidence for an objective moral law is the function of conscience within man. It was seen in Romans 2:15, that man's conscience serves as a judge of the rightness or wrongness of man's actions. There are two important aspects of conscience as it relates to an objective moral standard. It was first seen that conscience did not have any intrinsic ability to obligate individuals.²

¹Philippi, Commentary on Romans, pp. 85-86.
²cf., p. 25.
In other words, conscience merely expressed a moral standard but was not such a standard itself. It was seen in Romans 2:15 that the actual standard of morality is "the work of the law written in the heart" of man. Diman writes:

Conscience, as we have already seen, exists within us as the recognition of moral law... It does not lay down a law, but simply warns us of the existence of a law. Its authority is not original, but derived; in its sternest accents it never speaks but with a delegated voice.¹

The second important aspect of conscience is that it is universal in extent. In arguing for objective morals one should keep in mind that it is not required that all men agree on all moral issues. It is obvious that men have always had differing opinions of what is right and wrong. What is important is that there is a very high degree of agreement among men of different times and cultures concerning certain facets of morality. Trueblood writes:

The best evidence for ethical objectivity, however, is not this dialectical argument, but the fact that there is really a significant agreement in moral convictions, an agreement to great to be accounted for by coincidence.²

Concerning the same issue C. S. Lewis writes:

I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behavior known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities. But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities but these have never accounted to anything like a total difference.³

In the Abolition of Man, Lewis documents a number of

²Trueblood, Philosophy of Religion, p. 113.
moral issues that find agreement among various cultures. Lewis notes that men of various times and cultures agree on what Lewis calls, "the law of general beneficence." According to this law such acts as murder, lying, and causing others needless pain and misery are commonly held to be morally wrong. Lewis shows that it is agreed upon by various cultures that people have certain duties to parents, elders, and ancestors. These duties include honor, respect, and care. Lewis points out that it is common among various cultures to regard adultery as morally wrong. Another moral issue which finds agreement among various cultures is the fact that men consider stealing as morally wrong. As Lewis documents, the moral issues of murder, lying, causing needless pain, duty to parents, adultery, and stealing find substantial agreement in various cultures.\(^1\) These examples are not meant to be a comprehensive list but do indeed strongly support the objectivity of morals.

Concerning the universal nature of man's conscience, Stevens states:

> Divine revelation is, in the apostle's view universal in extent....Above all, is the moral nature, the conscience, a point of contact between God and man (Rom. 2:14-15). The idea of God's revelation to the nations in nature and in conscience is most fully developed by Paul.\(^2\)

Trueblood writes, "In dealing with the phenomena of con-


science we are dealing, therefore, not with something transitory or local, but with something permanent and universal.\textsuperscript{1} Lenski challenges the view that all men have a conscience. Lenski writes, "Paul had looked around in this wicked world a bit. It still contains men who have no conscience at all, who in no way respond even to an inner law."\textsuperscript{2} Lenski is correct in asserting that there certainly are men who appear to have no conscience. Yet, it is clear that such men are described in Scripture as having a conscience despite the lack of its appearance. As was noted in the study of Romans 1:32, even the most wicked of men, is able to understand his actions as wrong. This is synonymous with the function of conscience in man. In Titus 1:15, it is seen that some men whose lives are characterized by wicked acts have a "defiled conscience." This is a conscience that is no longer functioning properly due to the effects of sin. It was noted in the study of conscience that in 1 Timothy 4:2 some people actually had their conscience "seared". It is this type of person, one consumed by their own sin, who gives the appearance of having no conscience at all.

Thus far, two independent witnesses to the existence of an objective moral law within man have been noted. Both the moral actions of man and the inner function of conscience testify to the fact of "the work of the law written in the heart." In Romans 1:32a, a third witness to the objectivity of a moral standard is seen.

\textsuperscript{1}Trueblood, Philosophy of Religion, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{2}Lenski, Interpretation of Romans, p. 163.
3. Man's Knowledge of the Requirements of God

Testifies of Objective Morals

In Romans chapter 1:18-32, Paul presents a vivid picture of the wickedness of man. Here man is seen in his lowest state. Those whom the Apostle describes here have totally rejected God, verse 28, and have "been filled with all unrighteousness," verse 29. If any group could be classified as without any moral standard or conscience, this group would be the one. Yet, in verse 32 Paul clearly shows that even these wicked people "know the requirement of God." As it was seen in the earlier study of this verse, these people are seen as knowing (ἐπιγνώτες) the requirement of God. The word "know" here indicates a complete, and full knowledge. These men know the requirement of God (τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ). Here the τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ represents what God has determined and demands as right. What Paul is saying here is that even the most wicked man has "the work of the law written in his heart" and is able to discern right from wrong.

C. Moral Law is Innate

Earlier in this chapter, it was seen that it is often asserted by those who reject the notion of objective morals, that moral values are simply learned from an individual's environment. Yet, as was noted in our discussion of φύσει, the moral law written in the heart of man is an innate knowledge rather than a learned knowledge.\(^1\) It should be

\(^1\)Cf., p. 18.
emphasized that by innate, it is not necessarily meant that Gentiles had a moral knowledge in totality placed within them. Rather, innate could be understood as an intrinsic ability placed by God within man, which enables man to form a moral code as he matures. Yet, on the other hand, it is possible that God places within man a latent moral knowledge which he grows to comprehend as he matures. The process of man's moral maturation is not described in Romans 1-2, but the end product is. What is stated, is that men, all men, come to know "the requirement of God," and in some manner have "the work of the law written upon their heart" by God. Thus, \( \phi\gamma\varepsilon\eta \) denotes that the source of man's moral knowledge is ultimately God, not merely the demands of society.

Orr comments on the innate aspect of moral knowledge, "In mankind, there is an acute moral sense, unexplainable in the way one explains the senses of sight and hearing, therefore obviously implanted for our guidance by a higher Being.\(^1\) Lewis also sees moral values as that which does not need to be taught. Lewis writes, "This law was called the Law of Nature because people thought that every one knew it by nature and did not need to be taught it.\(^2\)

In at least three ways, the scripture makes it clear that our moral values stem from innate knowledge. The first testimony of the innate aspect of morals is seen in Romans 1:32a. Here it is clear that even extremely wicked men know

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\(^2\)Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 18.
the requirement of God. It is absurd to maintain that all
the people mentioned in this passage were taught the require-
ments of God and all went astray into gross immorality.
Rather, the pagans described in this passage came from a
morally corrupt environment but still knew that their actions
were morally wrong.

Secondly, it was seen in the study of ὕσσιν that it
is a part of man's innate "nature" that he does "the things
of the law." Ebrard writes, "The ethical law is given with
the nature and in the nature of man himself, is 'innate' to
man, and a something belonging to his nature, that has grown
together with his existence."1 In the context of this passage
it is clear that the Gentiles mentioned in Romans 2:14-15 did
not have the law. In other words, these people had not
learned the precepts of God's law, yet they did at times ful-
fill those precepts.

Thirdly, it was seen in Romans 2:15 that God himself
had written "the work of the law" in the hearts of man.
Though, the process of this writing is not explained in
scripture, it is clear that God is the source of the moral
law within man. Along with the existence of "the work of the
law written in the hearts" of men, is the function of con-
science. It was seen that these two operate together, con-
science serving as the active expression of the moral law
within man.2 Concerning this relationship, Charnock writes:

1J. H. A. Ebrard, Apologetics trans., William Stuart
and John Macpherson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1886), p. 22.
2cf., p. 25.
It must be confessed by all, that there is a law of
nature writ upon the hearts of men, which will direct
them to commendable actions, if they will attend to
the writing in their own consciences. This law cannot
be considered without notice of a Lawgiver. For it is
but a natural and obvious conclusion, that some superior
hand engrafted those principles in man, since he finds
something in him twitching him upon the pursuit of
uncomely actions, though his heart be mightily inclined
to them; man knows he never planted this principle of
reluctancy in his own soul; he can never be the cause
of that which he cannot be friends with. If he were
the cause of it, why doth he not rid himself of it?
No man would endure a thing that doth frequently molest
and disquiet him, if he could cashier it. It is therefore
sown in man by some hand more powerful than man,
which riseth so high, and is rooted so strong, that all
the force that man can use cannot pull it up. If there-
fore this principle be natural in man, and the law of
nature be natural, the notion of a Lawgiver must be as
natural, as the notion of a printer, or that there is a
printer, is obvious upon the sight of a stamp impressed.¹

Thus, three reasons for understanding the moral law
within man as innate have been noted. First of all, it was
seen that even evil men in morally corrupt societies know the
requirement of God. Secondly, it was seen that man is able
to perform the "things of the law" by his very nature.
Thirdly, it was noted that, this moral law within man was
written there by God.

D. Objective Morals: A Basis for a
Natural Moral Law Theory

In examining Romans 2:14-15 and 1:32a, three evidences
for an objective moral law have been noted. It was seen that
this law is universal in extent and binding upon all men.
These are important facts as they relate to an evangelical
theory of natural moral law. Alan Johnson describes the

¹Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of
God (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 36.
essential elements of such a law:

Essential to the concept of Natural Moral Law seem to be features of universality, unwrittenness, and intuitively perceived or rationally discoverable moral knowledge of the divine will apart from special historical Biblical revelation.¹

It is the assertion of this paper that Romans 1-2 supply the necessary elements for such a Natural Moral Law Theory. Johnson agrees as he comments on Romans 1:32:

There is a universal knowledge of God and his will available to all persons apart from Biblical revelation. This knowledge when perverted to idolatry and injustice becomes the basis of God's just judgement and condemnation. Creation itself bears witness to the Creator and his nature (vv. 20, 26, 27). Paul not only identifies certain acts as 'against nature' (vv. 26, 27) but indicates that pagans who practice or approve of such sins mentioned in vv. 29-31 'know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die' (v. 32). Exegetically this passage seems to affirm that there exists an unwritten universal moral knowledge accesible to all men as men, that this knowledge comes from God (though men may not so acknowledge it), that this knowledge is at least partially known through the structure of human social relations as God has created them, and that men sense at some point a serious accountability for breaking these principles.²

A proper understanding of the Natural Moral Law Theory is essential to a correct formation of a distinctive Christian ethic. In forming an ethical theory, the Christian is not bound to God's written revelation alone. In fact, a proper understanding of Natural Moral Law is essential in forming a complete Christian ethic. Johnson comments:

Therefore an evangelical ethic, which is a fully Christian ethic, though it will necessarily be a serious Biblical ethic will never be merely a Biblical ethic. Not all moral obligation is rooted in Scripture. Neither is all


moral obligation rooted in Natural Moral Law. It is important to recognize that there are two chief sources of ethical knowledge that must be incorporated dialogically into any serious evangelical ethic. While Scripture will always be primary and final, it will always stand beside Natural Moral Law knowledge. Evangelicals must come to grips with this more complete understanding of the Christian ethic, especially in the area of social ethics.¹

E. God: The Source of Objective Morals

As was stated in the introduction, the second premise of the Moral Argument asserts that there is no natural source for objective morals. It is interesting to note that in Romans 1-2 Paul did not spend time refuting possible naturalistic theories concerning morality. Rather, the Apostle only addresses the second premise of the Moral Argument by implication in asserting that God is the source of objective morals. Perhaps in the Apostle's view, God was the only plausible source for such morals. At any rate, the Apostle jumps from the first premise of the Moral Argument to the conclusion which maintains that God is the only adequate source for objective morals.

That God is the source of objective morals is first seen in the fact that "the work of the law written in the heart" of man is clearly God's law. It was determined in the exegetical study that law, in this phrase, stood for the Mosaic Law. Therefore, it follows that the moral law within man has God as its Author. It should be noted that the phrase, "the work of the law written in their hearts," is a verbal parallel to Jeremiah 31:33. In this verse God declares, "I

¹Ibid, p. 197.
will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it." Though it was determined that Romans 2:15 did not refer to the New Covenant with the Jews, it is obvious that the same Author is being spoken of here as in Jeremiah 31:33.

That God is the source of objective morals is also found in Romans 1:32. Here it is seen that even the most wicked man has knowledge of "the requirement of God." Again it is clear that God is the source of this moral standard.

F. Summary

Having examined Romans 2:14-15, 1:32a, it can be concluded that the Moral Argument for God's Existence is found in scripture. Yet, this must be asserted with the limitation that it was not the express purpose of the Apostle to argue for God's existence in Romans 1-2. Rather, in the process of demonstrating another point, that of man's need for God's righteousness, Paul does supply the basic ingredients of the Moral Argument. It has been noted that the scripture asserts that objective morals exist and that God is the source of these morals. Thus, the Apostle Paul has clearly demonstrated that the moral nature of man testifies of the existence of God.
CHAPTER VI

APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY

A. Common Ground

It is vitally important for the Christian apologist to be biblical in his approach to apologetics. The study of the Moral Argument as seen in Romans 1-2 provides some specific insights relating to apologetic methodology, particularly concerning the issue of common ground. The discussion of methodology in this paper will be limited to the specific issue of common ground as it relates to the Moral Argument seen in Romans 1-2. Having concluded that the Moral Argument for God's Existence is found in scripture, what significance does this knowledge have for methodology? It is first of all apparent that the Christian has an excellent point of common ground with the unbeliever in the moral law that is written in man's heart. There is considerable difference between the presuppositional and evidential views concerning the value of man's moral knowledge to apologetics. Concerning the presuppositional view of man's moral knowledge Van Til states:

When presenting the Scriptures as the Word of God to men it is necessary to do so with due consideration of all these facts. Men have the knowledge of God within them. At bottom they know that not to glorify God is to be disobedient to God, is to break the covenant of God. When challenged with the idea of the Bible as the Word of
God this challenge finds an immediate and unavoidable response in the deepest of man's beings. Men know at once that they ought to accept this challenge; they know that they are rebels and ought to resubmit themselves to their rightful sovereign. It is as 'knowing God' Paul says, that men rebel against God (Rom. 1:32). It is therefore a fatal mistake on the part of Christians not to demand absolute surrender of the natural man. He can understand the language of absolute surrender; he can understand no other language.¹

In his *Apologetics*, Van Til states:

The Reformed apologist must seek his point of contact with the natural man in that which is beneath the threshold of his working consciousness, in the sense of deity which he seeks to suppress. And to do this the Reformed apologist must also seek a point of contact with the systems constructed by the natural man. But this point of contact must be in the nature of a head-on collision.²

Though Van Til and other presuppositionalists are willing to accept the view that the moral argument is found in Romans 1-2, they downplay the value of the knowledge. It is frequently maintained by presuppositionalists that this knowledge is darkened by sin and thus rendered ineffective. This conclusion is produced in large by the strong reformed view of total depravity. The result of rendering man's moral knowledge as ineffective is the presuppositionalist's insistence that the unbeliever be approached "in the nature of a head-on collision," and demanded to render "absolute surrender" to the entire package of Christian presuppositions. In other words, the presuppositionalist refuses to reason with man concerning his moral nature but rather proceeds to demand that unbelievers accept Christian presuppositions.

It should be emphasized that the refusal of the presuppositionalist to reason with man concerning his moral nature is based upon a theological system rather than a sound biblical interpretation of the scriptures. It is clear from Romans 1:32a and 2:14-15 that all men know and understand what God has decreed as right. This is not to say that man does not vainly attempt to explain away the influence of his moral nature as something purely naturalistic. Gordon Lewis comments, "the non-Christian may explain the sense of guilt as a result of social pressure, family condemnation, or relativistic mores. He does not interpret his guilt feelings in Christian terms."¹ It is also certain that sin has, to some extent, impaired man's ability to properly interpret both the substance and source of his moral nature. Yet, this is not to say that sin prevents man from understanding anything at all about his moral nature or its implications. Rather, it is presented in Romans 1-2 that man understands both what is right and wrong, and why certain actions are wrong. It was seen in Romans 1:32 that even the most wicked man, know (ἐπιγνώσκω) what God has set forth as right. It is important to note that Paul chose the strengthened form of "know" to describe the Gentiles moral knowledge. Paul is here emphasizing the extent to which the Gentiles knew the wrongness of their actions, yet continued in those actions. Those described in Romans 1:18-32 knew clearly of an objective moral standard which they willingly disobeyed. The great wickedness of this group of people did not eradicate their

ability to understand objective morals. In Romans 2:15 it is again seen that man, in a very real way, understands objective morality. Here conscience is seen as a rational process of man which judges the rightness of his actions.

The scripture also asserts that man knows why his actions are wrong. In Romans 1:32, men know their actions are wrong because they are contrary to what God has decreed (δικαιώμα) as right. Romans 1-2 is clear in showing that man, in a very significant manner, knows and understands the existence of objective morals. The result of this knowledge is that the Christian has solid common ground to reason with the unbeliever concerning the existence of God and the truth of Christian Theism.

B. Practical Conclusions

The Christian apologist should approach the Moral Argument for God's Existence with considerable confidence. The moral law that is written in the heart of all men serves as an excellent point of contact in dealing with the unbeliever. This is not to say that all men can be reached with this approach. In a time when relativistic ethics are so prevalent, the Christian can expect to encounter both a great degree of sinfulness in man and multiple attempts by man to provide naturalistic theories for moral behavior. Yet, the scriptural testimony concerning man's moral knowledge should tell the apologist that many men can be reached through the means of the Moral Argument. As such, the Moral Argument for God's Existence should serve as a valuable tool, along with other
Theistic arguments, in demonstrating the existence of God.

In demonstrating to the unbeliever that all men have an innate moral sense and that God is the source of such a standard, the Apologist is fully supported by scripture. These facts are rooted, not in the wisdom of man, but in God's revealed Word. As such, we can reason with unbelievers along these lines with full confidence that we are honoring God and His Word. C. S. Lewis comments on the value of the Moral Argument to Apologetics:

Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness. It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken the law and put yourself wrong with that Power—it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk. When you know you are sick, you will listen to the doctor. When you have realized that our position is nearly desperate, you will begin to understand what the Christians are talking about....They tell you how the demands of this law, which you and I cannot meet, have been met on our behalf, how God Himself becomes a man to save men from the disapproval of God.1

1Lewis, Mere Christianity, p. 38-39.
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APoloGETICS


COMMENTS


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