

The Attackers: Conscience & the Norms & Standards: the Internal Counselor Regarding Right & Wrong, Tit 1:15; Legalism Comes from a Distorted Conscience, Rom 2:12–15; the Founders' Perception of "Natural Law"; Pros & Cons Expressed by Edmund Burke & John Randolph of Roanoke

Conscience and Norms and Standards:

1. The Greek word for "conscience" is **συνείδησις** (*suneidēsis*), defined as "an abiding consciousness whose nature it is to bear inner witness to one's own conduct in a moral sense."¹

Titus 1:15 - To the pure [καθαρός (*katharos*): status quo spirituality], all things [all thought decision, & action is righteous inside the divine dynasphere] are pure; but to those who are defiled [μιαίνω (*miainō*): excrement in the soul] and unbelieving [ἄπιστος (*apistos*): unbelief; rejection of doctrine], nothing is pure, but both their mind [νοῦς (*nous*): academic understanding] and their conscience [συνείδησις (*suneidēsis*): norms and standards] are defiled [μιαίνω (*miainō*): polluted].

2. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* offers rather detailed definitions of *suneidēsis*; here is one:

συνείδησις means a "percipient and active self-awareness" which is threatened at its heart by the disjunction of acknowledgment and perception, willing and knowing, judgment and action. Thus συνείδησις is not to be defined as a power of religious and moral evaluation or the like which can be detached from man. It is man himself aware of himself in perception and acknowledgment, in willing and acting.²

3. Each believer's inventory of norms and standards is under constant revision. His conscience is originally programmed by God Who is the Creator of the soul and designed by Him as an internal governor for thought, decision, and action.

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, gen. ed., "συνείδησις," in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 2d ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), 1339.

² Christian Maurer, "σύνοιδα, συνείδησις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:914.

In Romans 2:15 Paul is speaking of Gentiles who without knowing the Torah will display its works at the Last Judgment and in this way shame the Jews. The conscience of the Gentiles, expressed by accusing and excusing thoughts, will thus bear a witness which accompanies the Last Judgment. The existence of this conscience, which is already present and which extends into the future, is thus for Paul, as for later Judaism and especially Philo, an indication of the responsibility of man.³

4. Because of the sinful nature, the conscience is infiltrated by viewpoints and belief systems common to the devil's world. Regardless, the conscience is designed to regulate such involvement.
5. This principle is brought out by Paul in the verse just cited. Romans 2:15 reveals that even the unbelieving Gentiles kept many of the mandates found in the Torah and in doing so shamed the Jews.
6. It was typical for the Jews of the first century to display a self-righteous attitude regarding their keeping of the Mosaic Law for salvation, but Paul points out the Gentiles kept many of its commandments while being ignorant of them.

Romans 2:12 - For as many as without the Law have sinned, without the Law also will perish; and as many under the Law have sinned, through the Law will be judged.

v. 13 - (For you see the hearers of the Law are not just before God, in fact, the doers of the Law shall not be justified.

7. Verse 13–15 of Romans 2 is a parenthesis that amplifies the position Paul covers in the first 12 verses and summarized in verse 1:

Romans 2:1 - Therefore, you are without excuse, O man, every one of you when you judge: for in which sphere you keep judging another of a different category [e.g., Gentiles], you condemn yourself; for you who keep judging practice the same things.

³ Ibid., 916–17.

8. Verse 13 presents the situation every person faces who, through legalism, assumes himself to be righteous.
9. The Jews who hear the Law and then keep the Law assume by doing so they are justified by God.
10. But the Gentiles do not have the Law, yet we learn that they kept many of the requirements of the Law due to the function of their consciences.

Romans 2:14 - For every time that Gentiles, who do not have the Law, do instinctively those things from the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law unto themselves.

Romans 2:15 - The very ones who demonstrate the accomplishment of the Law written in their *kardias*, their consciences confirming the testimony, in fact their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending themselves.)

11. Thus we affirm that the conscience is an internal governor that, as a part of the soul, is designed to restrain man within what our Founders referred to as *natural law*: “a body of unchanging moral principles regarded as a basis for all human conduct.”⁴
12. Edmund Burke and John Randolph of Roanoke expressed the purist version of the “laws of nature”:

Burke and Randolph were not the men to deny that laws of nature exist—laws, that is, derived from the spiritual character of man and demonstrated in the pages of history. Liberty was no absolute and abstract “Right of Man,” immutable and imprescriptible; but it was a privilege conferred upon men who obeyed the intent of God by placing a check upon will and appetite. As Burke’s Tory friend Samuel Johnson appealed in the arts to Aristotelian nature, so ran the political appeal of Burke and Randolph—to human nature, to the ways of God toward man and civilized man toward man, and not to the romantic or historical concepts of irrevocable “natural rights.”

⁴ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v.: “natural law.”

No “right,” however natural it may seem, can exist unqualified in society. A man may have a right to self-defense; therefore, he may have a right to a sword; but if he is mad or wicked, and intends to do his neighbors harm, every dictate of prudence will tell us to disarm him. Rights have no being independent of circumstances and expediency.⁵

13. The Jews, who endeavored to keep the Law, assumed that all Gentiles, by not being Jewish and therefore not bound by the Mosaic Law, were not justified before God.
14. But the consciences of the Gentiles who did not have the Law are said to have kept principles of the Mosaic Law. Their consciences subscribed to its inclusion in the natural law so that they became a law unto themselves.

⁵ Russell Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke*, 4th ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997), 44.