

ΣΥΝΕΙΔΗΣΙΣ IN ROMANS 2, 12–16

By

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“What precisely Paul had in mind in these verses [i.e. Rom. 2, 14–16] has been a subject of much debate”¹. “What is specially intended in the use of the word συνείδησις [...] is a matter of debate”². “Nowhere does [Paul] give a definition of conscience”³.

The three quotes above express in a negative way the aims of this essay. On the basis of exegetical analysis of Rom. 2, 12–16, Paul’s understanding of συνείδησις in this passage will be defined, which will subsequently help to understand his idea of conscience. Paul nowhere in his letters defines συνείδησις. Rather, he uses it assuming that his audience knows its basic meaning. Consequently, the reader today has difficulties and frequently either does not understand or sees in συνείδησις its contemporary meaning. As we try to reconstruct the meaning of συνείδησις, lexical study is avoided. Consequently, historical research will be restricted to necessary information, since Paul, though certainly influenced by secular Greek, because of his non-Hellenistic philosophical standpoint, re-defined terminology⁴. The main stress is put, as will be observed by measuring the scope of the exegesis of 2, 12–16, on the contextual approach. Verses 14–16 form one sentence, so the meaning of συνείδησις must especially be sought in their grammar. Also the immediate context (2, 12 f.) of the sentence has to be examined.

¹ Dunn 1998: 136.

² Schreiner 1998: 123.

³ Opperwall 1979: 763.

⁴ Unfortunately, Pierce has not avoided that. For example, proving that συνείδησις in the NT is used only with reference to past events (Pierce 1955: 81) he can say (1955: 82): “We were not able to discover in *Greek usage* a single case of the reference of any of the συνείδησις group of words to the future. *This alone should be enough*” (emphasis added).