

December 21, 2024

Defining Your Position

Are you a Literalist or are you A contextualist?

A literalist:

- Translates a passage or work literally.
- Insists on or adheres to literal interpretation of a text, statement, etc.
- Adheres to the literal representation of a statement or law.

A literalist would look at “an eye for an eye” literally and actually act on it.

Lev 24:17 " 'Anyone who strikes another person and kills him must be put to death.

Lev 24:18 Anyone who strikes an animal and kills it is to make restitution, life for life.

Lev 24:19 If someone injures his neighbor, what he did is to be done to him—

Lev 24:20 break for break, eye for eye, tooth for tooth—whatever injury he has caused the other person is to be rendered to him in return.

Yet, there is even a context to what appears to be a literal response...

Lev 24:21 He who kills an animal is to make restitution, but he who kills another person is to be put to death.

Lev 24:22 You are to apply the same standard of judgment to the foreigner as to the citizen, because I am Adonai your God."

Lev 24:23 So Moshe spoke to the people of Isra'el, and they took the man who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him to death. Thus the people of Isra'el did as Adonai had ordered Moshe.

The repercussions of the action.

So there is a contextual aspect even when a verse is taken literally.

Contextualist:

Contextualism is a **family of views in philosophy which emphasize the context in which an action, utterance, or expression occurs**¹. Proponents of contextualism argue that, in some important respect, the action, utterance, or expression can only be understood relative to that context. Contextualism can also refer to a doctrine emphasizing the importance of the context in solving problems or establishing the meaning of terms

A contextualist will look towards the surrounding of the verse and look at additional sources to gain a more specific understanding. Other sources, meaning other parts of Scripture.

Originalist:

Originalism is a legal theory that interprets the U.S. Constitution based on the understanding at the time it was adopted. This approach asserts that the meaning of the constitutional text is fixed and should be interpreted as it was understood by the framers and the public at the time of its adoption.

Context is relative and imperative to our understanding.

Whether you embrace it or not does not change the context, especially when it comes to Scripture. The cultural context, the backdrop for which the Scriptures occurred is through one nation and one people. Israel and the Jewish people. Yet, its impact is felt by the entire world. Ignoring this reality, ignores context and therefore will impact understanding.

Consider a verse in Galatians, specifically the KJV:

Gal 2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

I ask people to explain this verse to me because as it stands, it makes no sense.

How can you live for God when through Torah you are dead to Torah?

The Greek is: Egô gar dia nomou nomoô apethanon, literally, "For I through nomos to nomos died."

A good general rule of interpretation is that if a word appears more than once in a passage, its meaning stays the same throughout the passage.

Here we have an exception; the phrase means, "For I through Torah to legalism died." In this verse,

Sha'ul avoids the natural Greek word order in order to place two forms of the word "nomos" side by side. This signals the reader that something unusual is going on, specifically, that the sense of the first "nomos" differs from that of the second. David Stern's expanded translation brings out that the first "nomos" is the true Torah, the Torah understood properly as requiring trusting faithfulness; while the second is the perversion of the Torah into a legalistic system.

The very issues Yeshua was addressing on a regular basis, teaching the people while being critical of the religious leaders of Yudah. Stern's version reads as follows:

Gal 2:19 For it was through letting the Torah speak for itself that I died to its traditional legalistic misinterpretation, so that I might live in direct relationship with God.

Many of us will never likely ever study the Greek manuscripts, so when someone points out there is a difference in the Greek, we should pay attention. Even though the nuance is ever so slight, it is significant. In the same way the standalone Aleph Tav is significant, yet not translated from the original Hebrew, so too nuances in Greek exist.

So, now let's look at some of the points that Alan Stanley, a pastor of a mega church has made and is emphasizing when he says we are not to mix the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.

Consider Mark 2:22

Mar 2:22 And no one puts new wine in old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine is for freshly prepared wineskins."

Stanley conveys - *Many understand that the old wineskin is the Old Covenant while the new wineskin is the New Covenant. Seems valid on the surface, something old, something new. Yet, does this align with Scripture?*

What is the wineskin when you really think about it?

Is it the Covenants?

Does this really make sense?

What if I were to tell you the wineskin is a vessel – what is a vessel?

A container used to hold something, usually a liquid.

Is there something else that is old we can use to relate to this verse?

What about our old nature?

Our nature prior to our transformation through our acceptance of Yeshua. Sha'ul in his letter to Jews and Gentiles living in Rome, speaks extensively about this old nature.

Rom 7:5 For when we were living according to our old nature, the passions connected with sins worked through the Torah in our various parts, with the result that we bore fruit for death.

Notice, Sha'ul is writing in past tense “when we were” Beginning with Romans 7:5, Sha'ul presents an exhaustive presentation of this old nature, concluding with Romans 8:13...

Rom 8:13 For if you live according to your old nature, you will certainly die; but if, by the Spirit, you keep putting to death the practices of the body, you will live.

Stanley conveys: *Continuing to live by the old nature, leads to death. So, why would you put new wine, the Holy Spirit (Ruach Ha Kodesh) in the old nature vessel when this nature leads to death.*

Yet, it is by the Spirit that brings forth life, from Genesis 2 onward...to where Sha'ul conveys the aspect of a new nature in his letter to the Ephesians...

Eph 4:21 If you really listened to him and were instructed about him, then you learned that since what is in Yeshua is truth,

Eph 4:22 then, so far as your former way of life is concerned, you must strip off your old nature, because your old nature is thoroughly rotted by its deceptive desires;

Eph 4:23 and you must let your spirits and minds keep being renewed,

Eph 4:24 and clothe yourselves with the new nature created to be godly, which expresses itself in the righteousness and holiness that flow from the truth.

So, right from the start, the aspect of his using Mark 2:22 to frame the narrative is in error.

Some view that we are not to mix the the Old Covenant with the New Covenant...

This was conveyed by Andy Stanley several years ago...

Almost instantly the enemy presses me to use my gift of word compilation to fire away, pointing out their hypocrisy according to the Law and “setting them straight” with the truth of the New Covenant. But I’m not falling for it. This isn’t my first go-round with a Mosaic Law-abiding citizen, or even this specific person. Plus, I used to mix in Moses’ commandments with Jesus’ too, so I know their M.O.

I believe here he is setting the stage, while at the same time responding to at least someone specifically who does not agree with his premise. Nor is this my first go around with those who believe Torah is not valid for today or today's believers in Messiah.

Anyone remember the number of times Torah is specifically referenced in the New Covenant writings?

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If there wasn't to be any mixing, then I believe the writers of the New Covenant didn't get the memo.

Stanley continued...

For years, rather than allow the Spirit to lead me, I made the mistake of using 613 Old Testament commandments as a buffet line just like they’re doing. So I can empathize with their bondage.

When someone makes such a comment or observation about the 613 mitzvot, their understanding is typically elementary. In some cases I even wonder if they have ever actually studied in depth Torah. I would think the context contained within the Scriptures of Torah would make it blatantly obvious that not all the mitzvot apply to everyone.

Yet, I believe most look at a summary of someone else's study of Torah.

I would certainly like to know how a man would apply mitzvot that apply to and can only be done by women? What about all the mitzvot that apply to the Cohen and sacrifices?

So, when someone makes such a general statement as observation, I find it hard to believe that they have truly studied Torah in depth.

Stanley commenting: *Jesus never mixed the two Covenants, but instead, explained the paradoxes. He gave very difficult–no, impossible–behavior passages? Not once did He say, “Give it your best shot and God will grade you on a curve,” never. He said, “You must be absolutely perfect like God if you want to live by the Law. Here’s the standard. Don’t you dare disregard a single commandment or you’ll be least in the kingdom and in danger of hell”*

(see Matthew 5 & 6).

He references Matthew 5 & 6, yet does He really understand the context?

Yeshua is providing the blessings associated with living a righteous life according to Adonai, in a similar manner that Adonai conveyed to Israel. The blessings or B-attitudes are comparable to the blessings Adonai conveys to Israel in Deuteronomy 28 and were contingent on living in obedience...

Deu 28:1 "If you listen closely to what Adonai your God says, observing and obeying all his mitzvot which I am giving you today, Adonai your God will raise you high above all the nations on earth;
Deu 28:2 and all the following blessings will be yours in abundance - if you will do what Adonai your God says: And even being encouraged by Adonai at just how real these blessings are...

Deu 30:15 "Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil -
Deu 30:16 in that I am ordering you today to love Adonai your God, to follow his ways, and to obey his mitzvot, regulations and rulings ; for if you do, you will live and increase your numbers; and Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are entering in order to take possession of it.

To when Yeshua encourages His audience, He in essence reiterates what Adonai conveyed to Israel, yet emphasizing what had already been established.

Mat 5:12 Rejoice, be glad, because your reward in heaven is great — they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.

And thus making the same connection as Adonai made through Moshe in Deuteronomy 28...

Mat 5:17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.

Mat 5:18 Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud (ך) or a stroke will pass from the Torah — not until everything that must happen has happened.

Mat 5:19 So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mat 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Stanley continued...*Christ came to teach the full extent of the Old Covenant—the Law—not to abolish it but reveal the true standard to the self-righteous people who believed they were actually living by it (see Matthew 5:17). This is why some of the red letters can be very deadly. They were supposed to be (see 2 Corinthians 3:6). When Jesus taught Law He was setting people up for failure so that they'd lean toward faith in Him alone. As I understand it, Jesus' purpose was to reveal the true standard to the "self-righteous" only.*

And here we get to another erroneous perspective of Torah, "Adonai established the Law as an unrealistic goal that no one would ever attain" So, the Jewish people were never intended to be Adonai's light to the world, but were his "stooges" Yet, this flies in the very face of Scripture, ultimately slapping Adonai in the face. He was setting people up for failure so that they'd lean toward faith in Him alone?

This statement also flies directly in the face of Hebrews 11.

Stanley conveys: *Known as the chapter of faith. Combining the two Covenants creates double-talk and confusion in the fullest. This is why Jesus wanted to be perfectly clear about living by the Law: Don't*

even dip your toe in it. If you fail at one of the 613—ten of which were the Ten Commandments—you fail at all of them. Not one jot or tittle can be set aside by you. As much as it hurts our pride, we must give up on Law completely, and instead, believe in Jesus only (see Matthew 5:19, 11:28-30, John 1:12).

Mat 11:28 "Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Judaism speaks of the "yoke of Heaven," the commitment any Jew must make to trust in God, and the "yoke of the Torah," the concomitant commitment an observant Jew makes to keep the generalities and details of halakhah (oral tradition / Talmud).

Notice the disconnect that Stanley is making here, while not understanding the teaching of Yeshua in the passage. Yeshua speaks of his own easy yoke and light burden. These two are sometimes contrasted in a way implying that in comparison with Judaism, Christianity offers "cheap grace." or "hyper grace".

The easy yoke consists of a total commitment to godliness through the power of the Ruach ha Kodesh that includes living by Adonai's mitzvot that apply to you.

It at once requires both no effort and maximal effort. No effort in the sense that the necessary moment-to-moment faith can not be worked up from within but is a gift of God (Eph_2:8-9); and maximal effort, in that there is no predeterminable level of holiness and obedience sufficient to satisfy God and therefore allows us to rest on our laurels.

Simply stated...

Easy Yoke = Torah, rightly divided and lived through the power of the Ruach ha Kodesh.

Stanley has also referenced Yochanan 1:12...

Joh 1:12 But to as many as did receive him, to those who put their trust in his person and power, he gave the right to become children of God, Yet does not include the next two verses, for which I believe are significant...

Joh 1:13 not because of bloodline, physical impulse or human intention, but because of God.

Joh 1:14 The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his Sh'khinah, the Sh'khinah of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

What many believers, theologians and teachers tend to ignore, overlook or are just plain ignorant of is trust is not absent of Torah, but is ultimately required by it.

Obedience towards Adonai's mitzvot originates from the heart, especially where the New Covenant is concerned. A point the author seems to ignore...

Eze 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Eze 36:27 I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them.

Jer 31:33 (31:32) "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says Adonai: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Jer 31:34 (31:33) No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know Adonai'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more."

And I won't spend too much time on a point everyone here should already know...that this New Covenant for which Stanley says should not be "mixed" with the Old Covenant is made with the Jewish people.

Eze 36:22 "Therefore tell the house of Isra'el that Adonai Elohim says this: 'I am not going to do this for your sake, house of Isra'el, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have been profaning among the nations where you went.

Eze 36:23 I will set apart my great name to be regarded as holy, since it has been profaned in the nations — you profaned it among them. The nations will know that I am Adonai,' says Adonai Elohim, 'when, before their eyes, I am set apart through you to be regarded as holy.

Eze 36:24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the countries, and return you to your own soil.

Jer 31:31 (31:30) "Here, the days are coming," says Adonai, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah.

Jer 31:32 (31:31) It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says Adonai.

Stanley continues with this premise..."*Now, should all Christians know the words in the Bible, even the stuff not written to us? Of course. From front to back the Bible is true. But we must keep everything in context. We must decode whether or not the Old or New Covenant is being referenced in each verse, passage, section, and book. Especially when Jesus was speaking.*

"we must keep everything in context"

What is the author trying to say here?

Stanley's conclusion and thus his understanding of the context: *In my opinion, ignore anything that is Old Covenant and pay attention to anything that is New Covenant. In other words parse and disregard.*

Stanley continues to attempt to make his point: *This flies in the face of Christians who struggle with Mosaic legalism, which is an oxymoron because we were never even given the set of 613 commandments to begin with.*

Do a quick Google search he asks of...

"What are the 613 commandments in the Law" and you'll be bored to tears before you finish reading half of them. Remember, you must keep all of them if you want to live by them (see Deuteronomy 4:2, Galatians 3:10).

This is his (Stanley's) understanding of Torah.

“Mosaic legalism”

I find it both humorous and sad that Torah is understood as being legalistic.

Now, keep in mind you can make it legalistic, but Yeshua never denounced Torah or the commands.

Sha'ul never denounced Torah or the commands.

What they did address was the perversion of Torah into legalism either by adding to the commandments through what is known as the Tradition of the Elders – the oral law, the Talmud, or by imposing requirements on people for which there was no need required, such as Gentiles needing to be circumcised when coming to accept Yeshua.

Stanley further uses Deuteronomy 4:2 but excludes verse 1...

Deu 4:1 "Now, Isra'el, listen to the laws and rulings I am teaching you, in order to follow them, so that you will live; then you will go in and take possession of the land that Adonai, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

Deu 4:2 In order to obey the mitzvot of Adonai your God which I am giving you, do not add to what I am saying, and do not subtract from it.

That is not a small nor unimportant term to leave out...The context in verse one addresses who is being spoken to and who is responsible.

Yet, Stanley references Galatians 3:10

Gal 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (KJV)

Yet, if we go back to my original example of context in relation to Galatians 2:19, Sterns translates it in this manner...

Gal 3:10 For everyone who depends on legalistic observance of Torah commands lives under a curse, since it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not keep on doing everything written in the Scroll of the Torah."

The nuance between the versions of nomos Sha'ul uses in his letter, differentiates Torah from the oral law, a theme that is prevalent throughout Galatians.

In using this verse he concludes - This same hazardous concoction of mixing Old and New is what got Jesus killed. The Jews could not separate the two and it ticked them off to the point of plotting against Jesus, spitting in His face, beating Him to a bloody pulp, then brutally murdering Him. That's what Law does. It is a ministry of death and death is what you'll get when you place someone under it (see 2 Corinthians 3:7-18).

What killed Yeshua?

It certainly wasn't the mixing of the Old and the New.

Remember these important verses...

Rev 13:8 Everyone living on earth will worship it except those whose names are written in the Book of Life belonging to the Lamb slaughtered before the world was founded.

Joh 10:17 "This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life — in order to take it up again!
Joh 10:18 No one takes it away from me; on the contrary, I lay it down of my own free will. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. This is what my Father commanded me to do."

Luk 24:45 Then he opened their minds, so that they could understand the Tanakh,
Luk 24:46 telling them, "Here is what it says: the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day;
Luk 24:47 and in his name repentance leading to forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to people from all nations, starting with Yerushalayim.

What is Torah?

Is it a ministry of death?

Pro 3:1 My son, don't forget my teaching, keep my commands in your heart;
Pro 3:2 for they will add to you many days, years of life and peace.
Pro 3:3 Do not let grace and truth leave you — bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.
Pro 3:4 Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people.
Pro 3:5 Trust in Adonai with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding.
Pro 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.
Pro 3:7 Don't be conceited about your own wisdom; but fear Adonai, and turn from evil.
Pro 3:8 This will bring health to your body and give strength to your bones.
Pro 3:9 Honor Adonai with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your income.
Pro 3:10 Then your granaries will be filled and your vats overflow with new wine.
Pro 3:11 My son, don't despise Adonai's discipline or resent his reproof;
Pro 3:12 for Adonai corrects those he loves like a father who delights in his son.
Pro 3:13 Happy the person who finds wisdom, the person who acquires understanding;
Pro 3:14 for her profit exceeds that of silver, gaining her is better than gold,
Pro 3:15 she is more precious than pearls — nothing you want can compare with her.
Pro 3:16 Long life is in her right hand, riches and honor in her left.
Pro 3:17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.
Pro 3:18 She is a tree of life to those who grasp her; whoever holds fast to her will be made happy.

Why am I doing this?

Why am I addressing many points from someone else?

First and foremost, it is to equip you with a response to an all too frequent position.

The goal attained.

So, we rejoice in Torah because of what it promises, the goal that is eternal life for those who believe in the one who was first promised in Torah – Yeshua.

Let me leave you with these nuggets...

Why is Torah referenced 176 times in the New Covenant writings?

Why does the writer of Hebrews quote from the Tanakh 73 times?

Why does Sha'ul quote from the Tanakh 71 times in Romans?

How else are you to reach the goal if you not only move the goal post but actually remove the goal post?