

A Biblical Critique of Contextualization and Christian Identity

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Abstract

This short study offers critiques to the shift from actualization to contextualization in modern times through intellectual, ethical, moral and biblical perspectives. Using examples from local practices, it shows the tendency of society to prefer convenience over order and truth. Using attractive cultural relativism and subjectivism, the paper rejects the notion that socially acceptable or personally desired actions are the standards of morality, rather, referencing an objective moral standard that is derived from Scripture. References in the Bible, such as the book of Genesis and the book of Ecclesiastes, confirm the existence of an order created by God that separates right from wrong. Reflecting on the Christian responses to violence in the contemporary world, the study has stressed upon retaining Christian identity through Christ-like humility, having morality based on the unchanging character of God, rather than depending on changing cultural norms.

Keywords: Relativism, Scripture, Identity, Christ-like humility, Culture, Norms, Society, Preservation.

Is Morphing Valid?

On analyzing a shift from actualization to contextualization from multiple perspectives: intellectually, ethically, morally, and biblically. We, moderns, accept everything without assessing the outcome, looking merely at the interests of our own.

The researcher has come to know the mindsets of people in Lahore, Pakistan. For instance, people go to the pharmacy and buy medicines without a doctor's prescription, and there is a routine here where pharmacists sell medicines without acquiring a license. When I go to a pharmacy, I often notice and attempt to see how the medicines are put on the shelves, but I would be unable to do so because 1) all the medicines are piled in no discernible order, and 2) Pharmacy staff do not typically hold any educational certificate, etc. Pharmacy staff can, however, fast, and conveniently pick up the medication on my demand, as he has shaped the order of his own, putting medicines into the shelves to his ease. What I mean by this phenomenon is that people do things that would give them comfort without considering the right direction or the actual order. In other words, our society is fond of finding shortcuts without bearing in mind the actuality of actions.

One of the Marketing experts, Themba A. Malashe, argues in the light of Genesis 3:6 that Eve took something from God that does not belong to her, and by doing so, she falls into debt¹, and from the perspective of debt, he says: “[E]verything that is wrong is made to seem right by reasoning.”² I do not believe it from a rational perspective; this cannot be true. Malashe's perception goes further by saying that: “Debt is one of those things, and the biggest thing that was made wrongly, has now been made right and legal...”³ From his marketing perspective, he is trying to endorse that Eve only borrowed. He is trying to make perfect sense that something wrong is also right at the same time, from a marketing point of view.

There is an order in which everything in this universe sustains. For example, we cannot say that the alphabets are in order by starting from any alphabet other than letter A; we start from A

¹ Themba A. Malashe, *The Truth about Debt: Get Out of Debt Now! Series One*, (Reach Publishers: 2011), 268.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

and finish at Z; we cannot prove that the order of starting from A is correct and starting from any other alphabet is also correct.

When we walk through the book of Ecclesiastics we come to know about a catalogue of polarities, we see opposites arranged in a syntactic order (3:1-8). Just as hot and cold cannot be present at the same time, light and darkness cannot go together; either something is right or something is wrong, we cannot say that something is right and something is wrong at the same time. To understand the theme here, let us learn what 'Culture Relativism' is: it says that "good and bad are relative to culture. What is good is what is socially approved of in a given culture. Our moral principles describe social conventions and must be based on the norms of our society."⁴ We may find the definition very attractive, but let me point out the objection to CR that if good and socially approved mean the same thing: i.e. such and such is socially approved, so such and such is good, then what about if child abuse is socially approved, child abuse is good? The same perspective can be seen in same-sex marriages, where some churches have approved it merely satisfying their own desires. Do we say what fits in human eyes is equally correct in God's sight? In an eastern society where feudalism is seen as a brotherhood, and people prefer sheep move without having rational thoughts, it cannot be right. Let's look at another example, Alcohol was constitutionally prohibited in the USA till the '20s; however, the amendment was rectified on December 5, 1933, ending prohibition. What does the Bible say about drinking alcohol? God is against what seems to be acceptable to humans (Proverbs 23:20,21; Luke 16:15; 2-Corinthians 10:33; Ephesians 5:18). According to the biblical perspective, it is noteworthy to observe that what fits in human sight is not perfect in God's sight.

Is it right for us to condemn what is looking at our contextual needs? For instance, 'Subjectivism' says that "Moral judgments

⁴ Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction, Second Edition*, (New York: Routledge ,2011), 8.

describe how we feel. To call something good is to say that we have a positive feeling toward it. The ideal observer view is a further refinement; it says that moral judgments describe how we'd feel if we were fully rational.”⁵ Suppose I say I like hurting people. Is hurting people good? Thus, Subjectivism' simply gives a very crude approach to the essence of morality, whereby we simply do what we like.⁶

In light of the above arguments, let us delve into how to preserve the essence of the Christian identity, where everything is shifting, moving, and contextualizing. One of the incidents that happened in Youhanabad, Lahore, is clear proof depicting the liberation aspect of this horrible incident, wherein Christians react “blow for a blow” by setting two individuals on fire. However, Julia Bicknell writes:

“News of their murder filled the Pakistani media, somewhat overshadowing the deaths of the 17 Christians and injury to 80 more. As gory images of their lynching ran on TV and more details emerged, for many Pakistanis, earlier sympathy with the Christian community slowly turned into animosity. One young Muslim commented on a Facebook post: “Christians (*chuhras*) have set on fire two Muslims today. I am only sad about their death.”⁷

The arising focus towards the problem is not on the word ‘*Chura*’ but rather the attitude of both sides. Isn't it written in Paul's letter to Philippians that: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5), and what is the meaning of having a Christ-like attitude? “When

⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶ C.F. C. S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. (Macken House: William Collins, 2016). 16-20.

⁷ World Watch Monitor: 40 Pakistani Christians freed after almost 5 years in prison on trial for ‘terrorism’ by Julia Bicknell, January 30, 2020., <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2020/01/40-pakistani-christians-freed-after-almost-5-years-in-prison-on-trial-for-terrorism/> (accessed on November 30, 2025).

he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).⁸ In this regard, George McDonald writes in his unspoken sermons, “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.”⁹

If someone’s intellect is still saying okay to contextualization and not admiring the actualization, then what about “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8)?

Conclusion

In a world constantly changing truth to fit cultural, convenient and personal wants, we must ask: does the truth change, or do we? Relativism and subjectivism may seem appealing but they cannot uphold the idea of right and wrong clearly. When morality is based on whether people think it’s right or not, or are happy about it or not, it has lost its basis.

Scripture reminds us that God made an order which does not change with the sequence of time. If Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, is moral truth being negotiable. The call of the Christian living is not to be like the culture, but to be like Christ, responding with respect and humility, faithfulness, and trust in God’s constant nature.¹⁰

Truth is not flexible enough to fit any particular context; it is we that are supposed to be flexible enough to make ourselves fit to words of truth.

⁸ C.F. John Stott. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: The Bible Speaks Today Series*. (IVP Academic: 2020).

⁹ John Baillie, Lucius Hatfield Bugbee, Charles Kendall Gilbert, *Religion in Life, Volume 43*, (Abingdon Press: 1974), 354.

¹⁰ C. F. H. Richard Niebuhr. *Christ and Culture: 50th Anniversary Edition—Being True to Christ in a Materialistic Age*. (Harper & Row: 1975), 1-3, 43-46.

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