

# Safford Church of Christ

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

6 December 2015

## Topics

**A.M. Bible Class:**

Bro. Pete Waller

**A.M. Lesson:**

Bro. Chuck Watson

**P.M. Lesson:**

"Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3)

**Wednesday:**

Submit yourselves to God! (James 4:1f)

Pulpit Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-3494

Elders

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.
Thursday Ladies Bible Class	10:00 A.M.

*Great are the works of the Lord,  
studied by all who delight in them. Psalm 111:2  
Please silence your cell phones and other electronic devices.*

## "Turn the Other Cheek" and the NLT

Matthew William Bassford, <http://hisexcellentword.blogspot.com>

Recently, I have been using the New Living Translation instead of the NASB for my daily reader. At one point in particular, the NLT has made a big difference in my understanding of the text.

Compare Lamentations 3:30 in the two translations:

*Let him give his cheek to the smiter,  
Let him be filled with reproach. (NASB)*

*Let them turn the other cheek to those who strike them*

*and accept the insults of their enemies. (NLT)*

See it?

I think this passage demonstrates the difference between the NASB and the NLT in a nutshell. Broadly speaking, the goal of the NASB is to translate the text in such a way that you have access to the "raw material" of the Scripture. The NASB wants to give you the data, not draw your conclusions for you. By contrast, the NLT wants to tell you what the text means, giving you an interpretation so that you don't have to puzzle through the raw material on your own.

In keeping with its translation philosophy, the NASB supplies basically what I find in my Hebrew interlinear: "He gives/his to smiter/his cheek." The NASB has been Englished up a little bit, but it's pretty much what the text says in the original language.

By contrast, the NLT departs from a formal-equivalent word-for-word translation. First, the NLT is a gender-neutral Bible; hence, "him" to "them." This method is evidenced all the way throughout the NLT, but I find that it rarely makes a difference to the way I understand the text. After all, when I come to "How blessed is the man. . ." in Psalm 1:1, it would never occur to me to read the psalm as being only about males. A godly woman can be like a tree planted by streams of water too!

That aside, the truly interesting translation in Lamentations 3:30 in the NLT is "turn the other cheek." The reading is certainly interpretive, but the passage that it is interpreting is not Lamentations 3:30. Instead, it is interpreting Matthew 5:39. In fact, the NLT uses language from Matthew 5:39 to translate Lamentations 3:30, even though the latter is hundreds of years older. NLT implies that Jesus in Matthew 5:39 is quoting Lamentations 3:30.

Maybe I am an idiot, but I had never thought of that before, and it makes a big difference in the way I read Matthew 5.

If indeed Jesus is citing Lamentations 3:30 as a

signpost to an Old-Testament context and speaking to an angry Jewish audience that is considering rebellion against Rome, that dramatically changes the meaning of “turn the other cheek.” The context of Lamentations 3:30 is clearly about how the defeated Jews ought to behave after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 589 BC. Here is Jeremiah’s prescription:

*It is good for a man that he should bear  
The yoke in his youth.  
Let him sit alone and be silent  
Since He has laid it on him.  
Let him put his mouth in the dust,  
Perhaps there is hope.  
Let him give his cheek to the smiter,  
Let him be filled with reproach.  
For the Lord will not reject forever,  
For if He causes grief,  
Then He will have compassion  
According to His abundant lovingkindness.*

(Lamentations 3:27-32 NASB)

In other words, Jeremiah is saying to the Jews of his day, “You are in this fix because you sinned and God punished you. In these circumstances, rather than fighting back, you should submit to your oppressors until God rescues you in His compassion.”

It makes perfect sense for Jesus to be saying exactly the same thing to the Jews of His day. Like the Jews of Jeremiah’s time, first-century Jews were suffering under the boot of the oppressor, albeit a Roman rather than a Babylonian overlord. In using Lamentations 3, Jesus is arguing that the Romans are over the Jews because of divine punishment for Jewish sins. The Jews need to solve their Roman problem not by rebelling against their conquerors (because fighting against God’s will is pointless) but by repairing their relationship with God—doing everything else that Jesus tells them to do in the Sermon on the Mount.

Once the Jewish nation is righteous, God will deliver them from the Romans. Until then, they need to meekly submit to the oppression that they brought on themselves. Note that this reading dovetails with Matthew 5:41 (the “second mile” text) which is also about Roman-Jewish relations.

If this reading is correct, Matthew 5:39 is not a general call to personal pacifism. Instead, Jesus’ Jewish audience would have understood “turn the other cheek” in the light of Lamentations 3, as a primarily political rather than personal instruction.

This is not the way you treat the robber who breaks

into your house in the middle of the night. This is the way you treat the Roman soldier who abuses and oppresses you. The point is not that violence is wrong per se, even in self-defense. It is that violence is wrong when the object of your violence is somebody whom God has set over you. Rebellion, not self-defense, is the spiritual problem.

This is very, very different from the way that I have ever read Matthew 5:39 before. I’m not sold on this interpretation yet (give me a few years to think about it first!), but I think it’s at least worthy of consideration.

However, even that is not the point I mean to make here. The point is that using different translations can transform our perspective on the text, particularly when the alternate translations are very different from the translations we normally use. In my opinion, there are a number of places in the NLT where the translators miss in their interpretation of the text. I would never feel comfortable relying on the NLT for close study the way that I rely on the NASB.

However, I’ve read Lamentations 3 in the NASB for years (it’s the “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” passage, after all!) and never connected Lamentations 3:30 and Matthew 5:39 before. It took the NLT to do that for me. Maybe most of you are smarter and better Bible students than I am, but rarely in my study do I have moments of genuine insight that transform the way I view a difficult text. In giving me even one of those moments, the NLT has justified its place in my spiritual life many times over.

## **News:**

Christie Robinson is home.

## **Extended prayer list:**

*Robin Richards—depression, back pain*

*John Cunningham—cancer*

*Norma Robinson—health*

*Linda Boling—health*

*H.L. Boling—general health and complications from leukemia*

*Tatyana Knowlton—macular degeneration*

*Nic and Ani Self—health and personal needs*

