

The Tanner St Church of Christ meets each Lord's Day beginning with Bible classes at **9:30 AM**. We continue with our worship at **10:20 AM** and again at **5:00 PM**. We also meet each Wednesday evening at **7:00 PM** for Bible study and worship. Our meeting place is located about ¾ of a mile from I30 at 1512 Tanner St in Malvern, AR.

If you have questions about what we believe and teach, please visit our website, **TannerSt.com** to listen to sermons or read past articles from our bulletin. Or you can contact us and we will be glad to find a convenient time to study with you.

Phone: (501) 332-8806 Email: preacher@tannerst.com

Consider: Galatians 2:20

Needed News

Dolline Fain is still doing about the same. She spends a lot of time sleeping.

Ricky Ragsdale went to the ER today but is back home now. His condition is about the same with very slow progress.

Adene Gray is feeling some better. She has not been feeling well most of this week. **Monte Raspberry** has also been sick some this past week.

Conrad Harris has been feeling a little better this week. He continues to have some good days when he can be out and walk around the property some.

Conrad Harris, Joyce Venable, Thelma Echols, as well as family members of many who attend with us, also have ongoing health issues. We need to remember all of these in prayer and keep in touch with them as we find opportunity.

Dan and JoBeth Henderson will be in Texas several days this week. Dan is going down to help Isaac with some vehicle problems on Monday. JoBeth will be helping her Mom prepare for her Thanksgiving family gathering. They will return for Wednesday services and go back to Henderson, TX for Thanksgiving. Other families will also be travelling during this season so keep one another in your prayers.

Seeking His Righteousness

"...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.." Matthew 6:33

November 2015

Volume 4 Number 44

"Turn the Other Cheek" and the NLT

Matthew Bassford

Recently, I've been using the Schuyler (NLT) Caxton for my daily reader. Even though I'm not a single-column fan, this particular single-column Bible is so well-designed that it works even for me. In consequence, my daily readings recently have come from the NLT instead of the NASB I've been using for most of the year, and at one point in particular, this 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 shows 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 is true all the way throughout the NLT, but I find that it usually doesn't make a difference in 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". This is certainly an interpretive reading, but the passage that it's interpreting isn't Lamentations 3:30. Instead, it's 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. It makes this choice to imply that Jesus in Matthew 5:39 is quoting Lamentations 3:30.

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

It pulls together a couple of threads from my spiritual thinking recently. First, I'm in the midst of teaching a junior-high class on the book of Revelation. No workbook for us; we're simply working through the text. Every time we come to a phrase or an image that John is borrowing from the Old Testament, we stop, go back to the Old-Testament referent, read it, figure it out, and then discuss why John is using it in his writing. I don't think you can understand Revelation at all unless you get a handle on the way that John is employing that Jewish vocabulary of apocalyptic language.

Second, I've been reading through N.T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Among other things, Wright argues that we need to understand Jesus in the context of a Jewish nation seething with anger against its Roman oppressors and sliding toward a series of disastrous revolts that would destroy it. Much of what Jesus says, Wright contends, is an attempt to divert the Jews from this calamitous course. I think Wright oversells his point a little bit (in my experience, academics often do), but I also believe this is a worthwhile insight. Jesus speaks to all places and times, but He speaks particularly to His place and time.

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's 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're 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, just as Christians in the seven churches would have understood Revelation 4 in the light of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, 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've 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.

(As pointed out above, reading from multiple translations can help us see things we may not have understood before. Of course, caution and care is always advised in study. DLH