



Fee, Gordon D. and Mark L. Strauss

How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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This book wasn't actually given to me for review but I enjoyed it so much that I thought I should at least say a few words. For starters, translation issues aren't something I generally get riled up over. I've not engaged in the whole TNIV/ESV debate and I rarely, if ever, point out grievous translational errors (although I do point out some, but not nearly all that I come across), and when it's all said and done translation theory isn't an interest of mine. So you can imagine how shocked I was that I enjoyed this book as much as I did.

One of the reasons that I liked it so much is because Fee and Strauss taught me as much about my native tongue as they did about Hebrew and Greek. I speak fluent English but I take it for granted. I don't give much thought to the way that English works but in reading through this book I started to really appreciate why it's important to give thought to these matters. It's fairly obvious that not all languages function the same, but if one doesn't know how their language functions then it will be near impossible to translate another language into their native tongue. Fee and Strauss write well, and they write clearly. Fee says in the preface that he had his wife proof the book to make sure it was understandable for a lay audience. All scholars should have wives like this! But this is really what the book is about: clear communication!

Fee and Strauss argue for functional equivalence over formal equivalence and they do so persuasively. They point out again and again how all translation is interpretation and that there's no such thing as a one-to-one correspondence between languages. This wasn't anything new to me in terms of information but they showed repeatedly how there really is no such thing as a "literal" translation, and those that purport to be "literal" end up making less sense than those that don't. Words have many meanings and their varying contexts determine which meaning is supposed in any given instance. This is why concordant versions of the Bible fail so miserably and sound so unnatural. But if there's one thing that this book has drilled into me it's that the primary goal of translation should be to convey the *meaning* of the source language into the target language as opposed to the *form*.

It's no secret that I've spent most of my Christian life reading the KJV and that's given me a certain advantage when it came to reading other predominantly formal equivalent translations (I say *predominantly* because all translations inevitably mix formal and functional equivalency). Being well versed in the King's English (i.e., Biblish) made reading some of the more awkward things in the NASB or ESV tolerable because in all honesty, they weren't any more awkward than a lot of what I was used to from the KJV. But in the past couple of years I've really enjoyed the NLT which I presently use for devotional reading. The strength of the NLT(se) lies in its ability to clearly communicate the message contained in the Hebrew and Greek without necessarily conforming to the form. And that's really the basic argument of the book. The translation that people can understand is the one that is to be preferred. They acknowledge that different translations are aimed at different audiences and this should be taken into account. The NCV or CEV is geared more toward someone with a lower reading level or whose first language is not English, while the NLT(se) is geared more toward typical readers of English.

It's quite clear that Fee and Strauss prefer the TNIV for its mediating position between formal and functional and they see it as a great translation from which to study, but this is to be expected since they helped to produce it! And since I just got a TNIV time will tell how much I like it, but one thing's for sure, as I work through the TNIV I'll do so with this book close at hand. I highly recommend this work to anyone interested in Bible translations. Fee and Strauss do well to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the various translation theories and methods as well as a host of English translations. There are tons of examples to support all the points made, a glossary of key terms in the back, and as I said at the beginning of this review, Fee and Strauss write clearly and argue persuasively. I think the only thing I took issue with was the assumption of a Johannine community behind the Gospel of John in chapter 6 (p. 91). But other than that this one is well worth your time.