

340 Positive reinforcement

As both a trainee teacher and a (trainee) parent the idea of positive reinforcement was high on the agenda: A child that is constantly told it is useless and annoying and naughty tends to live up to that; yet if we constantly praise, encourage and affirm a child, they are more likely to succeed in life. Let's apply this to friends and family who don't yet know God.

We want to introduce people to their heavenly parent so, as faithful Christians, we quote from our Bibles and tell them that they are 'people whose whole lives consist of disobeying God' and they are 'dead in transgressions and sins' and 'gratifying the cravings of (y)our sinful nature' and 'by nature deserving of [God's] wrath'!

Not exactly positive reinforcement! And if you think I'm cherry-picking, those verses are *all* from Eph 2 – the chapter I'm wrestling with at the moment. Read it for yourself if you think I'm exaggerating.

Yes, **do** read that chapter. It **is** very positive. It is celebrating the wonderful way God has taken sworn enemies – Jews and Gentiles – and made them into one people, one community of love and support. And don't we need that in our world today?!

Three points to make:

- 1) The Bible *is* full of apparent contradictions, so please don't try to 'prove' things to people by quoting Scripture.
- 2) When people translate the Bible, their basic attitude to God shows through, sometimes massively.
- 3) It's especially dangerous and destructive to quote verses *out of context*.

By (mis)using these three principles we've put off vast numbers of people from seeing the love of God that we see in Jesus and created *negative reinforcement*. Can I justify my three points? Yes, in reverse order:

3) I quoted a few *negative* verses out of a very *positive* passage celebrating God's amazing love in building a community. (And 'the wages of sin'^{Rom 6:23} is another negative ripped out of a positive passage, and a letter written to Christians, used to harangue non-Christians!)

2) Here are two translations of the exact same sales blurb for a Russian children's book:
– a saga of curses and witchcraft: *The Castle of the Spider's Web*
– a tale of spells and enchantment: *Cobweb Castle*

(N.B. This is made-up rubbish, but it illustrates how the choice of individual words can be affected by the translator's interpretation of the overall point and purpose of a text.)

1) Just from within Eph 2...
– 2¹⁵ 'by **abolishing** in his flesh **the Law** with its commandments and regulations.' **vs.** Mt 5¹⁷. 'Do **not** think that I have come to **abolish the law** or the prophets; I have **not** come to **abolish** them but to fulfil them.'

– ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... **not by works**, so that no-one can boast.’ (Eph 2^{8,9}) vs. Mt 25³¹⁻⁴⁶ where Jesus explains heaven/hell decisions (sheep/goats) as being based on **works**.^[339]

(I mentioned predestination and freewill last time.^[339])

Why do we do this?! When will we learn to be positive?!

Paul Bev. 25.7.24