

Pessimism and Optimism, Personal and National

Optimism vs Pessimism has been debated since the time of the great Greek philosophers. Aristotle was known for his optimism, but he connected it to positive actions, not merely thoughts or moods: He wrote *"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."* Modern counselors have also recognized the link between actions and mental health. It is now widely understood that good, disciplined actions in heart and in hand, are basic parts of good attitudes and good moods.

But optimism is a growing challenge when daily life is growing tougher. Inflation has some families deciding between heat and eats. Political arguments are dominating the news tempting us to give up hope. Personal friends are attacking personal friends for perceived social infractions and even families are drawing battle lines and rejecting one another for social or political offenses.

There truly are many things in our nation that are currently challenging our pursuit of love, joy, peace and patience. The international scene is not any better, with active wars, pipeline sabotage, skyrocketing crime rates and supply chain problems, including food. We should never deny the realities of those things. Denial of reality is never God's plan for your peace. But *optimism should never be the result of circumstances you do not control personally.*

Again the Greeks recognized the pursuit of optimism as a basic reality of life - a reality many have missed today. Democritus wrote, "Happiness resides not in possessions, and not in gold, happiness dwells in the soul." Keep in mind that these were secular philosophers who, somehow, somewhere, stumbled on these timeless truths that *things and situations do not control or deliver optimism or pessimism.* So, what does?

In reality, *you do.* Optimism vs pessimism is a personal choice - it is now and always has been. All my life I have seen individuals who are in the same place in the same circumstances, yet one is happy and optimistic and the other is unhappy and pessimistic. Optimism is simply *not* a result of ignorance or denial of bad circumstances. *It is a result of an individual's response to the circumstances!* Never forget that. Write it on your bathroom mirror in eyebrow pencil (that works very well, ask me how I know). Frame it in fancy calligraphy on your dining room wall. *And write it on the tablet of your heart.* And remember that the concept applies to national and international situations as much as personal ones.

No matter what is happening outside our minds, we still control our personal, inner responses. I'm *not* saying a positive response is always easy, but Paul tells us it is possible, as God inspired him to encourage the church at Philippi to combine positive *thoughts, with positive actions:*

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Did you catch it? We must allow our minds to dwell on positive things! Control your thoughts *and* practice the things Paul has taught! When you actually *live in that reality, "the God of peace will be with you."*

Ray Wallace