
Are You an Optimist or a Pessimist?

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The classic illustration for describing an optimist and a pessimist goes something like this: ‘A glass contains water to its mid-point. How do you see it? As half-full or half-empty?’ An optimist, we are told, will say that he sees the glass as half-full. While a pessimist will say that he sees it as half-empty. And this simple difference in how each views the glass is said to reflect, or be representative of, the greater difference in how people view their lives in general. Hence this simple test, and others like it, are used to make a person aware of his fundamental viewpoint, or outlook, on life.

In connection with this, an optimist is described as one whose fundamental and prevailing viewpoint is positive and hopeful. He ordinarily views things, events, and occurrences, in a more positive light; with hopes and expectations of good things happening. He construes things as generally being favorable, minimizing in his thinking the potential for things to turn out unfavorably for him. Hence he thinks of the glass as half-full, realizing that there is great potential in the glass. There is still room for more water to be added. And this he construes to be a good thing.

On the other hand the pessimist is described as one whose fundamental and prevailing viewpoint is negative and doubtful. He views most things that happen in a more negative and skeptical light. He has the tendency to think unfortunate or adverse things are more likely to happen, or that they will more likely be the outcome from whatever does happen to him. Hence he thinks of the glass as half-empty, viewing the water as being depleted and expecting a worse situation

shortly; i.e. soon it will be gone.

For the most part the water glass illustration and test does a good job in giving a simple portrayal of the two general mindsets of optimism and pessimism. Hence it is commonly used by psychologists, therapists, counselors, and the like, as they deal with people and their problems. They use it get a person to think about what his prevailing viewpoint on life is, and then to realize that his particular viewpoint may have something to do with his problem. And indeed it can.

Now when it comes to simply identifying and/or defining the issue of a person’s prevailing viewpoint on life, it pretty much does come down to either optimism or pessimism. Simply described, and without any detailed analysis, these are the two general mindsets that people possess.

A Sonship Question

Now the title to this article asks the question, *Are you an optimist or a pessimist?* However I am not asking this question as the psychologists, therapists, and counselors of the world might ask it. In other words I am not asking you to think about what prevailing viewpoint on life you have acquired, and now operate upon, based upon what you have gone through in your life. This is what the world has in mind when it asks this question. Instead I am asking you to think about what your prevailing viewpoint on life is as the result of the effectual working of God’s word within you. More to the point, I am asking this question as a father would ask it of his son. Particularly as a father would ask it after he had taught his son the

very things that are designed to give him the kind of viewpoint that he should have on his life.

And indeed this question does need to be asked in just this way. For in this present dispensation of God's grace in which we live, we have received "the adoption of sons."

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

(Romans 8:14–15)

God, therefore, is not only our "Father" by virtue of regeneration; He is also our "Father" in connection with sonship. Hence He is being a Father unto us, having given us "the adoption of sons." And we accordingly should be "crying, Abba, Father," in joyful understanding and appreciation of it.

Moreover in being a Father to us, God is doing with us what a father is supposed to do with his sons. He is educating us and edifying us as His "sons." And one of the things that a father does with his sons right from the outset of their sonship education is to instill in them some fundamental operating virtues. Virtues which form the basic components for the sons' thinking, and as such become a firm foundation upon which the sons build the kind of lives that they are going to live. And one of these fundamental and foundational virtues that a father is supposed to give to his sons is that of a proper viewpoint and outlook on life.

Now God our Father has not been remiss at all in providing for us as His "sons." He has not failed to see to it that we are able to have operating within us the proper fundamental and foundational virtues for our sonship lives, including that of having the proper viewpoint and outlook on life. And in view of what God our Father teaches us to think about our lives as His "sons," we ought to be optimists to say the least.

Optimism Par Excellence

However the simple term "optimist" will not do for us. For it is not positive enough. It does not rise high enough on its own when it comes to conveying the kind of optimism that ought to characterize us. It does not sufficiently express what our viewpoint and outlook on life should be like, being God's "sons." Our optimism should be of a different kind. It should be optimism par excellence.

This shortcoming, therefore, needs to be overcome by the addition of a modifier which can render the word appropriate for our use. Wherefore I will say that *Godly optimism* is the kind of optimism that we should possess. For *Godly optimism* is optimism that goes far beyond that which the natural human heart and mind could ever generate on its own. It is optimism that is supernatural, being the product of the "Spirit of adoption" and the effectual working of God's word within us. It is optimism that is not only equal to, but in truth is the exact same as, the optimism that God Himself has for our present lives as His "sons." It is optimism that is based upon understanding and appreciating just what our "Father" has planned, purposed, and provided regarding us, when He not only called us by His grace, but adopted us as His "sons." Indeed such optimism is of a species that does not belong to the realm of the natural man. It truly is God's own optimism instilled in us by Him, and so owned and possessed by us as His "sons." Hence *Godly optimists* is what we should be. Anything less is unbecoming to us as God's "sons."

The Source of Godly Optimism

Immediately after declaring to us in Romans 8:14–15 that we have received "the adoption of sons," God our Father begins to educate and edify us as His "sons." In so doing He begins by providing us with those previously-mentioned fundamental and foundational operating virtues for our lives as

“sons.” There are three of them, each one corresponding with the three initial virtues a father is expected to instill in his sons. Hence in Romans 8:16–39 we have three specific doctrines set before us, whereby these three operating virtues are effectually produced within us.

Simply stated the first of these three doctrines, set forth in verses 16–25, is that of the joyful hope that we possess as God’s heirs in His plan and purpose. It provides us with the virtue of having the proper, fundamental perspective that we need to have in view of what God is doing in this present dispensation, along with our role in it as God’s heirs and “sons.” And as verses 23–25 in particular explain, this doctrine effectually works within us to produce the Godly virtue of contentment and patient waiting for the realization of our hope, especially in the face of any of “the sufferings of this present time” that we will experience.

The second doctrine, set forth in verses 26–27, concerns the issue of our prayer life with our Father, which is something that we should recognize as being vital to our daily lives as God’s “sons.” And when we are ones who do recognize this, the doctrine of verses 26–27 effectually works within us to produce the Godly virtue of unperturbed constancy and satisfaction in prayer, specifically at those times when we “know not what we should pray for as we ought.”

The third of our three initial sonship doctrines begins to be set forth in Romans 8:28.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

(Romans 8:28)

With this declaration, the apostle Paul begins to set forth the doctrine specifically designed by our Father to effectually work within us to produce the capstone of the three initial Godly virtues for our lives — the virtue of *Godly optimism*.

Now the source of *Godly optimism* truly is the doctrine of Romans 8:28–39. For *Godly optimism* regarding our sonship lives is not something that we are naturally born with, nor become possessors of simply by virtue of regeneration. Instead it is something that we learn; that we acquire as part of our sonship edification. It is something that God our “Father” instills in us. Yet not magically or mystically, but by teaching us information that produces it in us. Specifically by teaching us the same information that produces it in Him.

Unfortunately, however, many Christians do not learn and operate upon *Godly optimism*. Some continue to just operate on the mindset that they had before they believed “the gospel of Christ,” never learning much more than the fact that they are saved. Others, though, may learn to operate upon some less-than-effectual form of optimism. One that is either based upon a mishandling and/or mistaken teaching of God’s word, or one that is a concoction of the wisdom of men but cleverly cloaked in Bible apparel.

For example, by not “rightly dividing the word of truth” a Christian can be deceived into thinking that any number of the marvelous promises, provisions, and teachings in God’s program with Israel apply to us today. He, therefore, will think or be taught that God wants him to claim such promises and provisions and to operate upon them. In so doing he will become zealously affected by these things, and he will become optimistic about God operating in his life in some wonderful ways. Yet even though he is being influenced by what the Bible says, and is enthusiastic about it, his optimism is not *Godly optimism* at all. For he is claiming and endeavoring to operate upon promises, provisions, and teachings that do not pertain to what God is doing in this present dispensation of His grace.

Likewise some Christians operate upon the uplifting teachings and counsel of the wisdom of men; or of the wisdom of men laced with Biblical

principles, which is supposed to sanctify this brand of wisdom and make it “okay” for Christians. Hence, for example, they may practice the “power of positive thinking,” in order to produce and maintain their optimism. Or they may get their daily dose of optimism through the numerous motivational, inspirational, and ‘feel good’ sources that exist today, ranging from popular television and radio psychologists, therapists, and counselors, to daily devotional guides and comfort food for the soul designed to ‘empower you through your day with Biblical guidance.’

Sadly many Christians actually know more of what Dr. So-and-so says, than what God says. And they also clearly operate more on the basis of what Dr. So-and-so says, than what God says. Though in an attempt to justify this they are often quick to point out that Dr. So-and-so often makes reference to God and the Bible, and what he/she says is often very good and does help people.

Howbeit, none of this is *Godly optimism*. At best it is an effective substitute, which not only the world, but also Satan’s policy of evil, are dedicated to producing, supplying, and offering to Christians as an imitation and substitute for what God has specifically designed for us to operate upon today. Therefore it should come as no great surprise to find the airwaves, bookstores, and pulpits of our day filled with effective substitutes for what God Himself has specifically designed and given to us.

And without denial, these substitutes and imitations are effective. They do get results. They can and do produce optimism, encouragement, and the like. But the issue is that they are not effectual. They are not God’s designed means for producing and maintaining the optimism of His “sons.” Therefore they do not produce *Godly optimism*.

The source, once again, for our *Godly optimism* as God’s “sons” in this present dispensation of His grace is the doctrine of Romans 8:28–39. As

noted it is the third of the three fundamental Godly virtues for our sonship lives to operate upon. By means of its effectual working it is specifically designed to produce within us the two basic components which make up optimism; i.e. a positive outlook on life and confidence that there is profit to be had from the details of life. And indeed these are the very things that verses 28–39 are able to effectually produce within us, and sustain within us, come what may.

The Doctrinal Purpose of Romans 8:28–39

Often times, however, Romans 8:28–39 is looked upon, and taught, as if its doctrine is about the eternal security of our salvation. This is unfortunate for two main reasons: 1. Because this is not the true doctrinal design and purpose of this passage; and 2. Because the real passage whose doctrinal purpose it is to teach eternal security is often denied its effectual working.

Strictly speaking, before we ever doctrinally arrive in the latter part of Romans 8, God has already taught us about the eternal security of our justification and salvation. This is what the doctrine of Romans 5:5–21 is all about, and what it is designed to effectually produce within us.

Moreover in Romans 5 God teaches us the doctrine of our eternal security in a way that cannot be improved upon, and hence does not need any augmentation or further substantiation. In fact the strongest form of persuasion and assurance that our minds are capable of possessing is employed by God in the doctrine of those verses. This is so because through the effectual working of the doctrine of those verses God puts into our minds, and into our thinking, the very same issues that are in His mind and in His thinking about our security. And just as these issues have Him knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that His justifying and saving of us is an eternally secure thing, so also are they designed to produce the same in us.

Therefore when God justified us and saved us in response to believing “the gospel of Christ,” He knows full well that He produced an eternally secure transaction, and He knows why this is so. In view of this when the doctrine of Romans 5:5–21 is learned by us, and it effectually works within us, we know exactly what God knows about our justification and salvation. We think about it exactly as He does, with the same thoughts that He employs, with the result that they generate in us the exact same knowledge and assurance of our eternal security that those thoughts generate in Him.

With this being so it is impossible for either God, or for us, to get any more assured on the matter of our security than by what He sets forth to us in Romans 5:5–21.

So then God has designed for us to emerge from the doctrine of Romans 5 with the fully assured knowledge of the eternal security of our justification and salvation.

Furthermore God expects us to possess such assurance before we doctrinally go on any further with Him. For the truth of the matter is that we cannot go on any further and expect to benefit from the effectual working of the rest of what God has done for us, or has for us, if we are not fully and unquestionably settled in our minds regarding the security of our justification and salvation. The ability for us to benefit from the effectual working of all else that God has for us demands that this be so.

So it is then that when we doctrinally arrive at Romans 8:14–15 and are taught that we have received “the adoption of sons”; and the Holy Ghost — “the Spirit of adoption” — then begins to lead us as “sons” in verses 16ff; He does not need to lead us again into the doctrine of eternal security, as if we had not yet been taught it, or needed to have it supplemented. He has already taught it to us back in Romans 5, just as it says.

Instead when we begin to be “led by the Spirit” as “sons” from this point on in Romans 8, He leads

us as “the Spirit of adoption” that He is. He, therefore, leads us into sonship doctrines. Specifically He leads us into, (and begins to lead us through), the particular curriculum for our sonship edification that God our Father has composed and written for us as His “sons” in this present dispensation of His grace.

Moreover this curriculum for our sonship edification begins with the same ‘form of doctrine’ that a father is responsible for teaching to his son first and foremost. A ‘form of doctrine’ that provides the son with his fundamental and foundational operating virtues, of which the third and final one is his proper outlook on life. This, once again, is what Romans 8:28–39 gives to us.

A Brief and Simple Statement about the Effectual Working of Romans 8:28–39

As was noted previously, optimism is primarily composed of two main components: a positive overall outlook on life, and confidence that there is profit to be had from whatever comes one’s way. These are not only optimism’s two main components, but they are also related to each other with the first component being the parent of the second. That is to say, the positive overall outlook on life begets the confidence that there is profit to be had from whatever comes one’s way.

With this being what produces optimism in the human spirit and mind, it is not surprising to find that when God — Who created and designed our spirits for godliness — goes about to produce *Godly optimism* in our quickened spirits and minds, He says things that are designed to generate these same two components in us. And indeed this is just what He does.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

(Romans 8:28–30)

With these words God has designed that the first component of *Godly optimism* — the positive overall outlook on life — be effectually produced within us. And clearly a positive overall outlook on our sonship lives is what we ought to have when we “know,” as verse 28 says, that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” What other kind of outlook on our sonship lives could we possibly have other than a positive, optimistic one, if we truly “know” that “all things work together for good” to us.

Moreover in view of what verses 29 and 30 go on to say, the outlook on our sonship lives truly is to be a Godly one. For by what they teach they not only substantiate and verify that “all things work together for good,” but the doctrine also causes us to look at our sonship lives in the exact same way that our Father looks at them. Hence the doctrine of verses 29–30 effectually works within us to produce the same Godly positive outlook on our sonship lives that God our Father Himself has had all along, when from the beginning He planned for them in the first place, purposed what they should be like, predestinated us unto that purpose, and then in this present dispensation has brought us up to the point of participating in it.

Therefore when we think about our sonship lives as our Father does; when we view them from His perspective; nothing less than His positive outlook on our lives can reside and function in

our minds. Hence the first component of *Godly optimism* is effectually produced within us.

Furthermore when we then give due consideration to our Godly outlook on life by considering what this outlook means when it comes to us actually facing whatever comes our way, it begets within us the very thing that God has designed for it to beget, i.e. the second component to *Godly optimism*. It begets the confidence that there is profit to be had from whatever we may encounter. Profit unto the fulfilling of what God has planned, purposed, and provided for our sonship lives to be like.

Wherefore after providing for us to have the Godly outlook on our sonship lives, Paul brings us to the point of giving due consideration to it when he goes on to ask,...

31 What shall we then say to these things?

(Romans 8:31a)

Following this Paul asks a series of questions, which by the nature of what they ask effectually work to beget within us the full confidence that we can not only boldly face whatever may come our way, but we can profit from any and all of it to the fulfillment of our Father’s purpose with our sonship lives.

So it is that the doctrine of Romans 8:28–39 effectually works within us to produce the *Godly optimism* that we ought to have regarding our lives as the “sons” of God that we are.

Do You Have *Godly Optimism*?

As was pointed out earlier, unfortunately many Christians do not operate on genuine *Godly optimism*. They either operate upon some less-than-effectual form of optimism, or they do not face the details of their lives with any real optimism at all. Hence they end up having the circumstances of their lives controlling them and shaping them, rather than having the curriculum for our sonship edification and the *Godly*

optimism of Romans 8:28–39 control them and shape them into “the image of Christ” regardless of what comes their way.

However sometimes even when Christians realize what Romans 8:28–39 teaches, they really do not have it effectually working within them as it should. Instead of having it effectually produce a Godly optimistic outlook on their whole life that is solid, constantly in effect, endures throughout their sonship lives, and upon which they build further Godliness; they only operate upon it intermittently, and as something that they ‘fall back upon,’ when needed.

For example, they look upon what Romans 8:28 declares as if it is a ‘spiritual aspirin.’ And as such they ‘take it’ whenever something in their lives gives them a spiritual headache. They ‘take it’ when something unfortunate or adverse happens to them; or when they experience something that they cannot seem to figure out, or make any sense out of. Or when things just seem to be going wrong; when things just do not seem to be going their way. They will then quip to themselves, ‘Oh well, I must remember that “all things work together for good.” I don’t know how this can be the case in this particular situation, but it must be so.’ And so they ‘fall back upon’ Romans 8:28 as if it is designed to be a safety net to catch them when they fall; as if it is something to resign themselves unto when all else fails.

This, however, is not what the effectual working of Romans 8:28–39 is all about. Instead it is designed to produce *Godly optimism*, which by nature is neither an intermittent, occasional, nor fleeting thing. Rather it is a firm and enduring foundation upon which we as “sons” are expected to stand, and from which we look out upon the details of our sonship lives with a clear prospect and confident expectation.

By way of simple illustration, with *Godly optimism* we should arise every morning knowing that we can take what we are learning from the curriculum for our sonship edification and apply

it to whatever may come our way; knowing that in doing so we are engaged in fulfilling the grand and glorious purpose that God our Father has for us in sonship — being “conformed to the image of his Son.”

In view of this I should now rephrase the question that forms the title to this article. I will ask instead, *Are you a Godly optimist?* — K. R. Blades