



## **WOW: Word Of the Week**

### **Optimism and Hope: Philippians 1:10**

**September 2, 2020**

What is the difference between optimism and hope? Is there a difference? Are they connected? Consider this statement: "Optimism can see hope where pessimism cannot." Paul prayed that the Philippians would "choose what is best." Discern excellence, approve what is best, seek what is superior.

Optimism is an attitude, a certain way of looking at life – seeing the future through God's eyes rather than from a merely human vantage point. Optimism is an outlook focused on the optimal outcome—the best.

Optimism is not hope, but the eyes of optimism bring hope into focus more clearly.

Let me describe optimism. When the optimist says that everything will come out alright, that statement is not an unrealistic appraisal, head in sand, failure to see clearly. Optimism is expectation based on reality, but optimism chooses and sees a different reality than pessimism.

Optimism sees beyond the present. Optimism focuses on the future, focuses the lens by looking at distant objects. Optimism sees God's work in this fallen world beyond the present moment.

The dictionary says that optimism is "hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something."

In the New Testament, the word for hope is sometimes translated as expectation or trust. The verb "to hope" is sometimes translated "to wait." You begin to see the confusion.

Biblically, hope refers to the future, often to the coming of the Lord.

We read of faith, hope, and love -- hope is one of the "big three."

Hope is important; hope is often misunderstood. Many confuse hope and optimism.

Let's dig deeper. Some authors describe "passive optimism." Passive optimism is not optimism, it is fatalism. Close your eyes and hope for the best, a "head in the sand" approach. People confidently believe that things will come out all right all by themselves – like a student who confidently affirmed he was ready for the Greek final. "Whatever!" Things will just work out. This optimism is illustrated by people who cope with suffering by wanting it to end soon.

Hope is active. Optimism that is characterized by hopefulness results in action. Hope motivates action, participating in and contributing toward a better tomorrow. The kingdom of God stirs hope in us -- we respond with actions, anticipating and participating in, helping shape the future.

Optimism characterized by hopefulness accepts suffering as part of living in a fallen world. In a fallen world, people get sick, people die. People suffer. These realities will not go away – the key to understanding optimism is in the question, "How shall we respond?" "How can we choose what is best?" These questions suggest action on our part.

Read Scripture. Suffering may be the path that leads to the best tomorrow. To partake of the sufferings of Christ is to partake of the glory of his resurrection. If we suffer with him, we will be glorified with him. These promises make the hope shared by Christians beyond compare. God provides hope to sustain us in difficult times. God encourages us to continue working for the kingdom of God as we await his coming.

In the midst of circumstances that many consider less than ideal – may we optimistically act to make this moment the best possible and the future better than ever. May we see the hope of the kingdom, celebrating God's marvelous works even in difficult days. God is working all things for good. May our prayer be that of Paul: "Lord, help us see and choose what is best!"