

# Visiting Orphans

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: James 1:27

- A. This is not an orphans' home sermon. 50 years ago, this was an issue that divided churches of Christ from within and alienated brethren all over this country. The fallout from that division is evident everywhere, but the lines between sound and institutional churches are well defined.
  - 1. The issue never was over whether Christians should care for the orphans among them. Both sides agree that Christians should provide for their care.
  - 2. The issue was over church sponsorship of institutions and the elimination of the New Testament defined differences between individual and collective works.
  - 3. In spite of frequent ad hominem, ad hoc, and ad absurdum arguments made by defenders of institutionalism against sound brethren, the truth remains the truth.
  - 4. However, orphans are still the true losers in this fight, neglected by professed Christians on both sides of the argument.
    - a. Institutional brethren have distanced themselves from their care by throwing money at impersonal, inefficient, and often neglectfully abusive orphans' homes
    - b. Non-institutional brethren pat each other on the back for refusing to support orphans' homes from the treasury and then tell the orphans to go their way to be warmed and filled in orphans' homes operated by the state
    - c. While neither of them will sit together in fellowship in a meeting house, both of them will sit together in perdition
- B. This lesson is about what the New Testament teaches individual Christians to do for the care of orphans
  - 1. Harry Rice and his wife took in four foster children over the years and raised them along with their own children in their home into adulthood, including sending them through college. An institutional preacher made the foolish mistake of saying to him in defense of the liberal churches' support of orphans' homes: "I like the way we're doing it better than the way you're not." He didn't know to whom he was talking.
  - 2. Do not say, "Way to go! That how we do it in sound churches!" That's what Harry Rice did as a member of a sound church. What have you done to care for orphans as a member of a non-institutional church?!

## I. WHAT IS WRITTEN?

- A. What has God's pattern been since the beginning?
  - 1. In the Patriarchal Dispensation, every child was to be cared for. Abraham and Jacob had children by servants and were required by God to care for them and to give them an inheritance equal to those of

children born to their wives. Abraham had to receive special permission from God to send Ishmael away - Gen. 21:9-13

a. Even the non-believers in Babylon had a law requiring this (The Code of Hammurabi, Anet 157, and Lipit Ishtar Code 24).

2. God condemned, utterly destroyed, and sent into oblivion the Canaanite nations that practice child sacrifices, including those who sacrificed the children taken as spoils of war after killing the parents - Lev. 20:2-5

3. God commanded in the Law of Moses that they must care for orphans  
a. Deut. 10:17-19, 24:19-22, 26:12-13, 27:19

b. Those who neglected them were sent to perdition - Mal. 3:5-6

4. God made caring for fatherless a condition of salvation - Isa. 1:16-18

a. He still defines religion by the care of orphans - James 1:27

B. Orphans are not mentioned often in the New Testament

1. John 14:18; James 1:27

## II. VISITING ORPHANS

A. Who are orphans?

1. "Orfanov, orphanos" - bereaved, parentless, comfortless, fatherless (Strong's). The word means fatherless. Children without fathers and mothers to support them physically, intellectually, emotionally, and especially, spiritually

a. Eph. 6:4; Gen. 18:19; Psalm 78:4; Prov. 22:6

2. Without parents, not only are children at risk of dying of starvation or exposure, but they grow up without knowing love, belonging, and security, but most importantly, without one to teach them of the Lord

B. What is visit?

1. I am wearied by those who pompously declare that visit means more than just go see them; that it means to visit help upon them. You don't get it either!

2. God is a Father to the fatherless - Psalm 68:5. If we profess to be like our Father in heaven, in what way are we fathers to the fatherless?

3. Visit is episkeptomai - "to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes, in order to see how he is, to visit, go see one; to look upon in order to help or benefit; look after, have a care for, provide for" (Thayer)

a. "To go to see and relieve" (Strong's)

b. "To look upon, care for, exercise oversight" (Vines)

c. Note that the word episkeptomai is related to the Greek word for overseer, episkopos, the word from which we derive the office of bishops or elders who oversee the work of a congregation and feed the flock among them.

4. So what is meant by visiting orphans? To oversee their care, and upbringing and to feed and clothe them

C. How is visit used elsewhere in the scriptures?

1. Luke 1:68, 78-79 - Zacharias prophesied that God would visit mankind, a prophecy about the coming Messiah. Christ did not have brief chat with humankind. His visit was a direct, personal interaction to help us.

2. Acts 7:23-24 - Moses' visit to his brethren involved his taking personal action in their defense.
3. Acts 15:36 - Paul and Barnabas visited the brethren directly to see how the work was progressing and to help them with whatever they needed.
4. Matt. 25:35-36 - Visiting those in prison means taking care of their needs, not by sending gifts but by directly interacting with them in prison
5. "James strikes a downright blow here at ministry by proxy, or by mere gifts of money. Pure and undefiled religion demands personal contact with the world's sorrow: to visit the afflicted, and to visit them in their affliction." (Vincent's Word Studies)

Conclusion:

- A. It is evident that placing money in the collection plate will not fulfill the command to visit widows and orphans.
  1. This is not taking them into our oversight and care
  2. This is an individual duty, not a collective command
- B. It is also evident that just being a member of a church that doesn't support orphans' homes will not fulfill the command to visit widows and orphans
  1. Ask: who is James talking to? It says oneself; that is you and me.
  2. Ask again: What are you doing to help widows and orphans?
  3. Are you comfortable facing God in Judgment with that answer?