

Does the bible really say we should adopt orphan children? The answer is on our lips and in our heart.

How we deal with orphan children reveals the condition of our heart, the nature of our love for our Abba God who adopted us when we were spiritual orphans, and our thankfulness to Jesus Christ who paid such a terrible ransom to make our adoption possible. If we are truly thankful that we are adopted children of God, what better way can we prove our thankfulness, than by helping the world's orphans to become adopted children of God.

No other specifically named group of people is mentioned more frequently in the bible than orphans and widows, in terms of the justice due them and their need for our love, care and ministry. Fulfilling their needs, all of their needs, is God's desire for His people to have at the very top of their priority list. Ancient land owners were required to set aside land all around the perimeter of their fields, and to allow widows and orphans to glean any crops that grew in that portion of their fields, that eventually became known as "the fields of the fatherless," and it was a sin to encroach upon that land, whose crops literally belonged to the widows and orphans by decree of God. Lev 19:9-10, 23:22; Dt. 24:19-21

Furthermore, in Dt. 14:28-29 God commands us to set aside a special tithe every third year that is specifically reserved for the Levites, aliens, widows and orphans. It is not to be touched or used for any other purpose. To be sure we didn't miss it, God repeated the command in Deut. 26:12-13. This tithe is so special and so specifically reserved, that it became known as "The Sacred Portion." The concept of the fields of the fatherless and the sacred portion, should drive home the seriousness of God's desire for us to be His instruments of blessing for orphan children, but somehow over the years, both of those practices have been abandoned and forgotten.

Commands to fulfill the needs of widows and orphans are repeated dozens of times in the bible, and are backed by harsh warnings against those who ignore them. When God wants to emphasize a point in His Word, He repeats it. When he repeats the command to fulfill the needs of widows and orphans dozens of times, it is obvious we are not getting it. That must be why He also included the seven harsh warnings found in Ex. 22: 22-24; Deut 27:19; Ps 10:18; Isa 1:23-24; Isa 10:1-2; Jer 5:28-29; Mal. 3:5. Those who refuse justice due orphans and widows are enemies of God according to Isa 1:24. God knew, that even to this day, adoption ministry would still be at the bottom of our priority list, and most would still not even know that adoption is ministry at all.

In Dt. 24:17-18 we read:

17. "You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge."

18. "But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing."

Verse 17 is a command not to pervert justice. [oppress, refuse to give or fail to provide justice] Verse 18 defines the true justice God desires. Verse 18 and could be paraphrased as follows: Remember, I redeemed you, therefore I command you to do the same thing, redeem the orphans.

In Rom 8:23 we see that redemption is found to be synonymous with adoption. By examining every occurrence of the word redeem or redemption in the bible, the original Greek or Hebrew in every case means to release or rescue from loss by the payment of ransom, in other words, to pay whatever debt is owed. Redemption in any context means to restore a person to his or her original status and position in life and / or property. Jesus paid our ransom with His shed blood on the cross, which made it possible for us to be restored to our original position as children of God. In Gal 4:4-5 Jesus paid the ransom with His blood to redeem us, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. God's redemption results in our adoption.

Verse 18 commands us to redeem orphans and thus fulfill their emotional, spiritual and social needs, while verses 19 - 22 remind us to fulfill their physical needs. Doing one without the other is like faith without works. This reflects God's heart to fully provide for the needs of everyone, these verses are a specific command for us to be God's instrument of provision for orphans and widows according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19) Adoption is the orphan's greatest need, and we fulfill that need when we obey Dt. 24:18 to redeem them.

It is a perversion of justice to deny orphans their physical needs for food and clothing, but it is far more important to ensure that their emotional and spiritual needs will be fulfilled, "so that they may receive the adoption as sons." (Gal 4:5) and Matt 6:31 reminds us that God's kingdom and His righteousness are far more important than food and clothing. Consider the following commentary of James which also calls for adoption of orphan children.

There are widely varying opinions about the presence or absence of a biblical mandate for adoption of orphan children, and what, if anything, that James 1:27 indicates about adoption. Many will cite various biblical references that mention only food and clothing to challenge the validity of an adoption mandate, James 2:15-17 is a good example of such a verse. Jesus spoke in parables and He clearly explained why in Matt 13:10-13, and many scriptures including James 2:15-17 employ an allegory to illustrate spiritual concepts that are far deeper than the scripture itself. Parables and allegories have a keen ability to discern what is truly in our hearts. (Heb 4:12) They are also able to identify those who have no love, some love, or great love for God. I believe many scriptures are intentionally vague in order to discern the love and thankfulness in the heart of the reader. There is no need to debate the meaning of these verses in James or Deut 24:17-22. Though man may claim that different levels of service define the pure and undefiled religion in James 1:27, or the true justice due orphans in Deut. 24:17, no matter how we define it, or how many levels we assign to these scriptures, they will still discern the level we have chosen, and adoption will always rise to the highest level, because adoption displays unbridled charity, and is the reflection of God's greatest love for man, which is stated so simply and clearly in Galatians 4:4-5 and John 1:12. However we respond to these verses, or any scripture, reveals the nature of our heart, and the level of our love for God, and 1st John 3:17 confirms that, if we refuse to give orphan children what they really need, "*how can the love of God abide in us?*" Whether we respond literally by providing only food, clothing and shelter for orphans, or allegorically by attempting to fulfill their every need, including adoption, our response will always reflect the level of our love for God.

If we interpret James 2:15-17 as an allegorical reference to every human need, then our hearts will respond as if these verses were saying: “If a child is in need of a home and a loving family, and we say to the child, 'go in peace, be cared for in an orphanage or foster home,' but we don't give that child the permanent home, loving family and sense of belonging they need, what use is our faith?”

How can I tell an orphan child that “*My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in Glory in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 4:19) if I am not willing myself to do whatever it takes to give that child everything that he or she needs. The bottom line is that we are commanded to do whatever it takes to make it possible for orphans to become adopted children of God. It required the death of Jesus on the cross to make that possible. I believe it also requires of us far more than caring for children at arms length in an institution. If God’s will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, (Matt 6:10) then we must do on earth what Jesus has done for us - make whatever sacrifice is necessary for orphans to become adopted children of God. Adoption by a Christian family is by far the best way to make that happen.

Statistics prove that institutional care and social welfare are perversions of justice that prevent many orphan and foster children from becoming adopted children of God. This fact alone demands that adoption must become the new paradigm of orphan ministry. God’s word calls every single one of His people (His adopted children) to participate in making it possible for orphans to also become His adopted children. It’s true, that not all are called, equipped, or have a desire to adopt, but it is just as true that all are called, equipped and blessed with wealth and resources that can and must be directed toward making it possible for other Christian families to adopt. Christian families who adopt are the missionaries who bring the gospel to orphans in the best form they can understand and accept. But orphans are a forgotten mission field and to them, the silence of the church is deafening.

Until Christians are willing to take the necessary action to make adoption an integral part of a dynamic ministry to widows and orphans, and to make that ministry a part of the DNA of their church, the church will never achieve the practice of pure and undefiled religion, and the following perversion of justice will continue to be the outcome of the current paradigm we call “orphan ministry.”

“Statistics regarding the future prospects for children who emancipate from orphanages, the foster care system, or who grow up as street children are profoundly bleak; ironically, the statistics for American children are almost identical to those for children around the world. Theft, prostitution, homelessness, substance abuse, incarceration, and suicide affect the lives of the vast majority of children who grow up as orphans and never find permanent, loving homes.” Source: <http://www.howtoadopt.org/TheGreatNeed/>

Raising a child in an institution is proof that our love is only lukewarm, and Rev. 3:15 has another strong warning for the lukewarm church.