

Adoption as Basic Christianity

Steve Burchett

James would be surprised that we now have what some have called an “adoption movement” in our country. When he wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27), he was writing about *basic* Christianity.

The previous verses (18-25) in James 1 show the relationship of both a true believer and an unbeliever to the word of God. The real believer hears, receives, and does the word, but the unbeliever does not. In James 1:26-27, James gets even more detailed in his description of the real Christian versus the false Christian. He contrasts “worthless religion” in verse 26 with “pure and undefiled religion” in verse 27. Put simply, James is teaching about what marks authentic believers.



Within his description of the characteristics of believers, James says it is typical for them to “visit orphans and widows in their distress.” Those who have been “brought... forth by the word of truth” (v. 18) will reveal they have truly been regenerated by caring for suffering and needy people like orphans and widows.¹ This is God’s will for the church.

I understand why we sometimes use the phrase “adoption movement,” but rescuing² and meeting the physical and spiritual needs of helpless, hurting, and even near-death children is just normal Christianity. A renewed emphasis on adoption is welcome, but it must not become a forgotten fad.

Not only is adoption God’s will, but it is also *God-like*. The ministry known as “Together for Adoption” helpfully emphasizes, “Christianity has a vertical to horizontal movement.”³ For example, as Paul argues in Ephesians 4:32, since God forgave us (vertical), we should forgive others (horizontal). The idea concerning adoption is this: Just as God delivered us by the life and sacrifice of His Son, resulting in our adoption into His family, we should sacrifice our time and resources for orphans and adopt them into our families.

¹ Both orphans and widows were two obvious groups of people in James’ day who fit in this category. The principle James teaches, however, would allow us to expand out beyond just these two segments in our day to include groups like the poor, the disabled, and children in the foster care system.

² The verb for “visit” carries with it the idea of redemption (cf. Luke 1:68).

³ www.TogetherForAdoption.com.

It is not a coincidence that James speaks of visiting orphans in their distress as “in the sight of our God and Father,” because God is a “Father to the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5). In other words, God is “pro-life,” and we should be also, both when children are in the womb, and when out!

Practical Considerations:

Certainly, then, God is calling the church to do more than just stand along a street with signs that declare our pro-life beliefs. Barry Maxwell, a pastor and father of three adopted children, agrees:

We may moderately impress the world with our protests and pamphlets. But we will get the world’s attention when we commit to fostering and/or adopting otherwise aborted, abandoned and/or estranged children. We’ll prove how committed we are to a pro-life worldview when we go beyond platitudes and protests to the proactive, long-term care for the children we strive to save at birth. We don’t want children (just) to be born, but to thrive and grow in the knowledge of the life-giving God. What’s the point of saving their life if we’re not committed to helping them live?⁴

Does this mean that *every* Christian should adopt? Definitely not. The church is one body made up of members with a variety of gifts and callings. However, the “body life” language of the New Testament reveals that though you may not adopt personally, you will eagerly uphold those who do with your prayers, listening ears, and resources (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-27). The entire church will have a part in caring for these children and giving them what they need most: The good news of Jesus Christ.

On a trip to the Philippines, I was privileged to visit an orphanage. As I was walking away from one of the living areas, I heard a little girl crying out, “Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!” I said to the director of the orphanage, “What’s she doing?” She responded, “She thinks you’re her daddy.” Some would tell the church that story and ask, “Do you hear the children calling?” That’s the wrong question. The better question, upon a consideration of James 1:27, is, “Do you hear God calling?”

If we have been born of God, we *will* “visit” the millions of distressed orphans in this world. That’s what Christians do.

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www.CCWtoday.org

www.BulletinInserts.org

⁴ Search “Foster/Adoption a Better Strategy than Pro-Life Lobbying” at www.barrymaxwell.com.