**The Christian’s Role In Adoption And Fostering (SR: Matt. 25:31-46)**

 When we neglect an issue, it’s easy to not think about it. Yet, like cancer, ignoring it doesn’t make it better; in actuality, it makes it worse. Other issues that we do talk about on occasion may also grow worse but for a different reason. Oftentimes, problems that we see in the world are labeled as social or political issues in a way that detracts from their spiritual and moral significance. Among these include: homosexual marriage, human trafficking, transgenderism, abortion, and other prevalent disputes. When these issues become labeled in such a way, we can become callous to the spiritual realities behind them. And this failure to acknowledge such a connection inhibits offering viable and realistic alternatives to immoral, unethical, and ungodly decisions that plague our world.

 Today we are discussing adoption and foster care. Many people, including many Christians, label this a social or political problem, but are hesitant or even hostile to the idea that they are spiritual issues. In preparation for this lesson I have had several Christians express concern over using the pulpit to discuss such a topic, some well meaning & some just woefully ignorant. I have also had many Christians so excited about hearing this lesson that it empowered me to see it through. I hope that today’s lesson will help all to see that this is truly a spiritual issue, one that the Bible addresses, and one that we have responsibilities to fulfill before God. I hope that you will also see this as a viable alternative that we can offer to women who may otherwise choose abortion.

**I. The Great Foundational Reality: God Adopted First**

 A. This morning’s lesson made it resolutely clear that God acted first and adopted His people. Four passages in the NT explicitly state this fact (Gal. 4:5-7; Eph. 1:5-7; Rom. 8:15, 23). This was by the good pleasure of His will and as an expression of the deepest and most sincere love in the universe (Jn. 14:18).

 B. God’s nature is to be a “Father to the fatherless” Who “makes a home for the lonely” (Ps. 68:5-6). He executes justice, defends, and gives them food and clothing (Deut. 10:18; Ps. 10:14; 27:10; Jer. 49:11; Hos. 14:3).

 C. If God’s nature is to do this, then what does that say of His people? In the beginning we were created in the image of God bearing His nature (Gen. 1:26-27). As we are recreated in Christ, we are said to once more become partakers in the divine nature (2Pet. 1:1-4).

**II. The OT Illustrates This Principle As A Divine Expectation**

 A. God repeatedly commanded His people to defend, uphold, nurture, clothe, and feed the fatherless and other people of pity (e.g. Deut. 24:17, 21).

B. A feast was held every three years in order to uphold the fatherless and other persons worthy of special compassion (Deut. 14:28-29). When this was done they were to eat and be satisfied in order that God would bless His people.

 C. Manifold failures to meet the needs of the fatherless compounded over time and on numerous occasions, God calls His people to amend their ways, specifying their failures in this area (e.g. Ps. 82:3-4; Is. 1:16-17; Jer. 7:5-7).

 D. Caring for the fatherless and widows is an essential to anyone with true religion Anything less brought condemnation (e.g. Deut. 27:19; Ex. 22:22-23).

 E. Job is an example of a righteous person whose actions involved tending to the orphans (Job 29:12-17). God seeks compassion (Mic. 6:6-8; Mt. 9:13; 23:23).

**III. The NT Reiterates This Responsibility Under The NC**

 A. The obvious NT Scripture renewing this is James 1:26-27.

1. James 1:26 serves as a negative example. If you claim to be a Christian, but your speech doesn’t match up, than your religion is vain.

 2. James 1:27 serves as a positive example. If you claim to be a Christian, then the claim is substantiated by your actions, namely caring for orphans and widows and keeping yourself unstained by the world.

 B. *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father*

 1. *“If these things are found, they show that there is true piety. If they are not, there is none...If a man, from proper motives, is the real friend of the widow and the fatherless, he will be the friend of every good word and work, and we may rely on him in any and every way in doing good...If a man is truly benevolent, he bears the image of that God who is the fountain of benevolence...If he has not these things, he cannot have any well-founded evidence that he is a Christian; for it is always the nature and tendency of religion to produce these things. It is, therefore, an easy matter for a man to determine whether he has any religion; and equally easy to see that religion is eminently desirable. Who can doubt that that is good which leads to compassion for the poor and the helpless, and which makes the heart and the life pure?”* (Barnes, *James*, 33f)

2. *“The kind of ‘religion that God our Father accepts’ is the kind that exerts a positive influence on one’s life. This verse...presents a concrete way of insisting that genuine religion is a life-changing force. One’s religion should be more than external; it must spring from an inner spiritual reality that expresses itself in love to others and holiness before God.”* (Barker, Kohlenberger, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*: NT, 1024)

 C. *Is to visit orphans and widows in their distress*

 1. “Visit” is *episkeptesthai* & means, “to see or inspect, w/ a view of assisting”.

 a. This word is used this way in Judges 15:1 LXX; Mt. 25:36, 43; Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 7:23; 15:14, 36; Heb. 2:6.

 b. *“It is plain to see that this word involves personal contact, visiting a person, going to see him. It is not about building institutions or merely sending money. Nor is it about ‘churches’ acting collectively, but rather deals with individual responsibility, as the following clause proves beyond any question. ‘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”* (L.A. Mott, *Thinking Through James*, 2015, 32).

 c. The verb is present infinitive, suggesting continuous, habitual action (cf. Mk. 14:7). Obligation remains so long as need continues; since the need always exists, the obligation always continues!

 2. *“The ‘fatherless’ (orphanos) are those ‘bereft of parents,’ whether because of death, disease, divorce, desertion or delinquency; children without parents, children whose parents either cannot, or will not, provide for them fall within the purview of this word.”* (Woods, *James*, 100)

 3. God did this for His people; we must pay it forward – *“God ‘visited’ his people by sending his Son into the world to bless and to save them (Luke 1:68); the ‘fatherless and widow’ are ‘visited’ when we do what we can to comfort and sustain them.”* (Woods, *James,* 99)

 D. *And to keep oneself unstained by the world*

 1. This clearly shows the context is individual and not collective. Compare also the former verse that speaks of “anyone who thinks himself...”

 2. Words and actions need to line up. This is a matter of sanctification.

 E. *“A close scrutiny of the passage before us will find quite readily that there is nothing here that remotely resembles an institution of human ingenuity...Creation and maintenance of such organizations is a matter of individual preference and conscience, personal choice, and private enterprise. They have absolutely nothing to do with the work of the New Testament church and should not therefore be viewed as worthy objects of congregational support from local church treasuries...It is not a forty-second cousin to what James was describing when he wrote as he did.”* (Dan King, “James,” *Truth*, 220-222)

**IV. How We Can “Visit” The Fatherless – Pro. 12:14; Mt. 25:14-30; Gal. 6:9f; 1Ti. 6:17f; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; Heb. 10:24; James 3:13; 1Pet. 2:12 (For more info, let’s talk!)**

 A. Adopt A Child/Children (250,000 adopted per year; 150mil orphans worldwide)

 1. A few statistics: 150mil orphans worldwide; 14mil age out/year; 250,000 adopted/year; 9,000 adopted internationally (going down); if each lined up side by side, the line would be 30,000 miles long; 81.5mil Americans have considered adoption, if even 1/500 actually did, all kids would be in homes (Dave Thomas Foundation)

2. *“I always questioned if I was ready to adopt. Then I realized no child was ready to be an orphan.”* (Let Children Smile, March 25, 2016)

3. Wilson Adams asked Lea, his adopted daughter, what she would say to families thinking about adoption. She said: *“They need to think less about themselves and more about kids who need help. Kids need someone to call ‘Mom’ and ‘Dad,’ give them love, help them when they are sick, and hug them goodnight. They also need someone to be goofy with. Families need to ask, ‘Is there room at my table for one more?’ You can change someone’s life and maybe they will change yours.”*

4. You can do this through the public system or privately. If done publicly, there are more resources available and they are free. This is typically done by adopting kids who are in the foster system and parental rights have been terminated. There are currently 167 children in KY in this situation. Private adoption agencies are another route.

 5. Desirous families have to jump through many hoops; an arduous process. One preacher and his wife recently tried to be approved and were denied twice. The 2nd denial was illegally for their Christianity!

 B. Foster A Child/Children (400,000 kids in the system in the U.S.)

 1. Become A Foster Family

 a. This process is also complex. In order to be approved, a family or individual has to meet a host of criteria, pass background checks, have home studies, and wait and wait and wait.

 b. Once approved (hopefully), the foster parent(s) take care of the child(ren) until parents meet certain guidelines for reconciliation. If they do not meet those guidelines in the time allowed (typically a year or more), parental rights are terminated and the child(ren) are free to adopt.

 c. The truth is that it can be emotionally exhausting. You may not feel the parents or child(ren) are ready, you may become very attached, etc. However, you have provided a home for those children in distress & your influence may deeply affect them.

 d. One Christian foster parent voiced frustration: *“It is super hard trying to sway people into becoming foster parents because they say ‘I couldn’t do it’ and seem to be more concerned about how they would feel instead of how the child feels in that situation.”* She also said, *“People like to say you never know what you are going to get with foster kids, but the truth is you never know what you will get with your own kids! A person’s history or family history does not necessarily define them and what they will become.”* (Michelle Phillips Hamlin)

 2. Sign Up For Emergency Care (Luke 10:25-37)

 a. 1st contact for the kids pulled from homes. Give a place to stay until a permanent foster family is found, typically 2 weeks.

 b. You have to keep your phone on 24/7. Dropped off w/in 1-3 hours.

 c. Generally, you sign up for this on a monthly basis.

 d. Benefit of the honeymoon period of a month for trauma exhibition.

 3. Sign Up For Respite Care (Mk. 10:45)

 a. Everyone needs a break, especially foster parents.

 b. Foster kids can’t be watched by anybody and everybody.

c. Many states require licensing to babysit. Requires BG check, classes, fingerprints, first aid/CPR training, & a copy of your DL.

 d. Benefit: Helps parents with work stuff or time away or w/ bio kids.

C. Become A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) (Prov. 31:8f)

 1. These are authorized volunteers who can spend time with children, get to know them, and speak with everyone in their life to see what they can do to improve the child’s situation by sharing with the judge.

 2. There are currently more than 85,000 CASA volunteers serving over 260,000 children each year. This means that 140,000 children in the system do not have this sort of an advocate!

 D. General helps include: listening, meals, celebrating, kind speech, gift cards, doing laundry, car packages, playdates, purchasing memberships & day passes, tutoring, volunteering, etc. *“As a foster parent who is overwhelmed on my best days and hiding in my closet on the worst, I generally accept offers of help in any capacity. You don’t even have to be creative!* (Kelly Meldrum)

 E. Above all else, pray (James 5:16). As Wilson Adams put it: *“Pray for the children who will lie down in an unfamiliar bed in a stranger’s home tonight. Pray for the parents who had their kids removed today. Pray for the restoration and reunification of families. Pray for healing for the kids who have lost faith in everyone and everything that was supposed to keep them safe. Pray for the judges, attorneys, social workers, advocates, and counselors who are tasked with making potentially life-altering decisions and recommendations for children in care. Pray for the families who have voluntarily opened their homes to brokenness and heartache. Pray for the hearts of God’s people to be broken and enflamed by the children in crisis in our country.”*

*“We [Christians] are seriously lacking in caring for our orphans, and it is such a huge opportunity to bring them to Christ. Not only the children, but their families too. It is a huge opportunity to minister to those that need Him most.”* (Michelle Phillips Hamlin)

*“These children certainly do have afflictions. There is satisfaction knowing that you are pleasing to God as you show these children His love. Even if they are only in your home for a few months they maybe are going to church for the first time, they hear our prayers, they see a good marriage with love and respect, they feel warmth and nurturing. We are surprised that more members of the church are not or at least involved in some way with helping these children. They need people to take them under their wings and help to heal them. I encourage others to get involved. These are children who’ve been abused, neglected, lived in multiple homes, may have bad behaviors and lack of boundaries. Most children that we have had have enjoyed going to church with us. And their eyes light up when we’ve told some about heaven. A place where no one cries and no one hurts.”* (Susan McKee)

*“The Church exists that its members may be inspired to become a fountain of spiritual sympathy to the widow, and a ministry of moral help to the orphan. A congregation can offer no comelier praise than the music of constant acts of loving-kindness and tenderness and self-sacrifice. Where this worship is not rendered, the grandest sanctuary, so called, will be rather only a sepulcher of souls, and the most aesthetic church-service a ‘vain oblation.’ The true gospel cultus lies in personal acts of sympathy and kindness, done to the poor out of love to Jesus, and because the poor are his ‘brethren’ (Matt. xxv. 34—40). Every professing Christian should therefore try the reality and strength of his piety by this test: Does he give himself to the celebration of the true full ritual of Christ’s house—that which lies in a life of purity and charity?”* (C. Jerdan, “The General Epistle of James,” *Pulpit Commentary*, 1962, 19)

**Resources For Further Education & Application**

**ONLINE**

*Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS)*

*Kentucky Foster Adoptive Caregiver Exchange System (KY FACES)*

<https://prdweb.chfs.ky.gov/kyfaces/Home>

 This is the general website for gaining information on adoption and foster care in Kentucky. Through this website you have points of contact, how to become certified, access to the profiles of children currently in the state foster and adopt system, resources and services freely available to foster and adopt families, success stories, and other great resources.

*Kentucky Adoption Profile Exchange (KAPE)*

<https://prdweb.chfs.ky.gov/kape/index.aspx>

 This is a current listing of children who are available to be adopted as they have been in the foster care system for over a year and their guardians have not met the stipulations for regaining them. Their profiles, pictures, and points of contact are all listed. Please note there are 167 kids just in our county who are in this situation.

*National CASA Association*

<http://www.casaforchildren.org>

*Sacred Selections*

 Organization run by Dana and David Carrozza that facilitates adoptions. They hold fundraising events at their branch chapters throughout the year. Our Louisville branch is overseen by Tom and Judy Stockton. There are also branches in Lexington and Bowling Green. Their website is <http://www.sacredselections.org>.

*Elk River Treatment Center*

 A treatment program for ages 12-18 specializing in post-adoption and behavioral attachment issues. Their website is <http://www.ElkRiverTreatment.com>.

*Leaving the Pit Behind*

 Organization founded by Art Adams. Offers professional counseling and family therapy with a Biblical basis. Conferencing and video meetings facilitate long distance counseling with a licensed clinician. Their website is <http://www.LeavingThePitBehind.org>.

*Let Children Smile*

 Organization dedicated to raising awareness and providing information, support, and positive direction for post-adoption families. Their website is <http://www.letchildrensmile.org>.

*ATTACh*

 <http://www.attach.org>

**BOOKS**

*I Am Lea November* by Wilson Adams

*Parenting with Connection* by Karyn Purvis

*The Connected Child* by Karyn Purvis

*The Body Keeps The Score* by Bessel van der Kolk

*Adopting Older Children* by Stephain Bosco-Ruggiero, Gloria Russo Wassell, Victor Groza

*In Defense of the Fatherless* by Sara Brinton and Amanda Bennett

*Fields of the Fatherless* by Tom Davis

*Parenting Adopted Adolescents* by Gregory C. Keck

*Parenting the Hurt Child* by Gregory C. Keck

*Daring to Hope* by Katie Davis Majors

*Adopted for Life* by D. Russell Moore

*The Collapse of Parenting* by Leonard Sax

*Too Small to Ignore* by Wes Stafford

**WHAT NOT TO SAY!**

“How much did he cost?”

“What happened to the real parents?”

“Which of your children are yours?”

“Is it hard to love a child that isn’t blood related?”

“Why did you adopt from there?”

“You people are saints!”

“Well, what did you expect when you took someone else’s kid?”

“If you had to do it again, would you adopt?”