



“Christian Responsibility – Orphans & Widows” (James 1:27)

Danny Hodges – NT3556

Intro: James is a book that deals with litmus tests that reveal the genuineness of our faith/religion. Last week verse 26 made it very clear that one litmus test is whether or not my religion is making a difference on my tongue. Two more are given here in verse 27, and the first could be summarized by saying that genuine religion reaches out to those in distress, and the second that it keeps one from being polluted by the world. The second could be a series of messages, but on this particular point I’m going to be very concise. I John 2:15-17 tells us the “world” James is referring to. Genuine religion is seen in my life by a lifestyle that distinguishes itself from “the world.” When I became a Christian, immediately I began to resist the cravings I once regularly indulged in. I also began to resist the temptation to lust after things I set my eyes on. And there was a humility about my life that had not been there before. And guess what? Everyone who knew me before saw these differences about me. And if you are the real deal, people will see the difference in your life. The rumor spread rapidly in my small hometown that “Danny Hodges got religion.” I have made comments in the past about me having to correct people spreading that rumor, telling them that I got “saved,” that I received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And while I still like to be technical so that people don’t misunderstand, nevertheless, according to James, when I got “saved” by receiving Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, I got pure “religion.” Remember our two words from last week’s message on verse 26, the first having to do with worshipping God, the second with religious practices associated with that worship. What was the point? No amount of religious practice makes any difference unless it changes your life. You will no longer live a “worldly” lifestyle.

And you will no longer live just for self. You will reach out to people in need. See I John 4:7-8. Salvation prayer?

Now, the specific people in our text we are to reach out to in love are orphans and widows. The word translated “to look after” (KJV = “visit”) means more than going by and saying hi. Now, this does not mean it’s not Christian to simply visit with someone. But the word here goes beyond just a visit.

Episkeptomai: to look upon in order to help or to benefit; to look after, have care for, provide for.

- Matthew 25:36
- James 2:14-17; I John 3:17-18

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The *only thing that counts* is faith expressing itself through love.

Reaching out to orphans and widows is to be done individually as we have opportunity, but it may also be done corporately. In Acts 6, widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, and the apostles gave wise counsel on how to solve the problem and meet their needs. Later, Paul wrote about the Christian responsibility of caring for widows; See I Timothy 5:3-10, 16.

God had a lot to say about widows and orphans in the Old Testament.

- Isaiah 1:11-17; Deut. 27:19; 14:28-29; 24:17, 19-22.
- Psalm 10:14 But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless...16 You hear, O lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed...
- Psalm 82:3-4a Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy...

A few years ago, the Lord put a burden on the heart of one of our pastors (Tom Teel) about orphans right in our own back yard. Tom shared his vision with me, then with our pastoral staff, and we felt the Lord say “go for it,” so Tom did. I’d like to introduce you to Pastor Tom Teel by way of video, then he’s going to come and briefly share about this tremendous ministry the Lord has raised up right here at CCSP.

INVITATION

- Psalm 68:5-6a A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. *God sets the lonely in families...*