

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Our Responsibility to Orphans and Widows

(Jerry Fite)

In Biblical times, there were few, if any, governmental safety nets to see to the needs of orphans and widows. Technically speaking, orphans were children who had no providing fathers to take care of their needs. The widow, with dependent children, would be in the same strait without a providing husband. Jews were never to take advantage of the “fatherless,” “widow” and “sojourner” (*Deut. 10:18*). Individuals knew God would execute justice for the helpless, but they were also responsible help provide essentials, such as food, as they reaped their own harvest (*Deut. 24:19*).

For the orphans, It was not till 400 A.D. when Rome provided orphanages for children whose fathers were killed while serving in the Roman army. Similarly, one of the first orphanages in America was instituted in Natchez Mississippi (1729) to provide for white children whose parents had been killed in skirmishes with the Indians.

For the “widows,” were by definition “left empty.” They were often “forsaken.” Unjust treatment of the widow is acknowledged and condemned throughout the Scriptures. Job and Isaiah comment on their times when a “widow’s ox is taken for a pledge” (*Job 24:3*),

and “the cause of the widow” is not considered (*Isaiah 10:2*). Jesus condemns certain leaders among the Jews who “devour widow’s houses” (*Mark 12:40*). He apparently points to a common scene of a widow shamelessly persisting to receive justice at the hands of an unrighteous judge to illustrate the principle of continual beseeching God in prayer (*Luke 18:1-8*). The widow in ancient times had her borders taken away (*Proverbs 15:25*), and found herself without help to take up her “cause” (*Isaiah 1:23*).

We are to “visit the fatherless and widows” (*James 1:27*). This is a personal responsibility just as the individual is personally responsible for keeping oneself unspotted from the world. The word “visit” involves “seeking out” to help in meeting the needs of one due to unavoidable circumstances is currently helpless. We “seek” to help because we are sincerely concerned for their welfare.

In our times, there are governmental sponsored programs to help children. They may not be technically orphaned by losing a father and mother to death, but they still may need adoption into a supportive and loving family. Husbands and wives can open their homes to become foster

parents to help provide for children who cannot help themselves. Tabitha practiced “pure religion” when she made garments the widows could use (*Acts 9:36, 39*).

In our families, children and grandchildren are commanded to take care of the needs of their widowed mother or grandmother. After all, our mother and father took care of us when we were helpless. Therefore, we should lovingly “requite” or “pay them back” with help in their time of need (*I Timothy 5:4*). Each of us must “relieve” the widows of our family. The church must not be burdened due to our not fulfilling personal responsibility (*I Timothy 5:16*).

Relieving the burdens of the afflicted should be a constant in our lives in serving the Lord. Have you come across helpless children in need, then you must do what you can to fill the needed gap. Do you have widows in your life who have been deprived of justice in the courts, lacked daily food and sustenance, and in some need of help? Then we must “visit” them. This is more than just visiting them and walking away ignoring the fact they have been “left empty” by the death of a providing husband. Let us lift up their hearts by seeing to their needs and never allow them to be neglected.