

## James 1:27 | True Religion

North Center | Jan. 22, 2023

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Today is **Sanctity of Life Sunday**. Exactly 39 years ago today (Sunday, January 22, 1984) President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential proclamation designating the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in January as *National Sanctity of Human Life Day*. The reason for this day is (1) to remind our country of the horror of abortion (*which is the slaughtering of well over 63 million babies since 1973*) and (2) to remind us of the value of every human life. Every human life is made in the image of God. Therefore, every human life is sacred. Precious. Eternal.

And since the dawn of the church, God has been calling His people to be actively engaged in the ministry of compassion. We are to be a voice advocating for those who have no voice (*like the **child in the womb***), to care for those who are unable to adequately care for themselves (*like the **widow in distress***), to open our lives to those who have no family caring them (*like the **orphan***). **National Sanctity of Life Sunday** is meant to remind us that Christians have a divine calling on our lives to be the hands and feet of Jesus in caring for those who have nobody else in their corner.

Ten years ago (this month) God brought three boys into my home that Liz and I had the privilege of adopting. Most people watch their family grow one child at a time. Not the Knoops! One day we had zero children; the next day we had 3 (ages 7, 5, and 2). It was like we went to **Costco** and got our children in bulk. 😊

One of the most common questions I have been asked over the past 10 years (when people find out that we adopted three boys at once) is “**Why?**”

- Did you want a big family?
- Do you have a particular love for children?
- Is it because you weren't able to have children biologically?
- Did you grow up in an adoptive culture (where you knew lots of adoptive people)?
- Was it because you just wanted ethnically diverse children?
- Were you trying to create your own **basketball team**? 😊

The short answer is **James 1:27** (*and all the other verses in the Bible that are just like it*).

**Q.** Why did we pursue adoption (and why are we still pursuing adoption)?

**A.** Because it is at the very heart of our Father.

In my early 20's (really for the first time) I began to see the compassionate heart of our heavenly Father toward the most vulnerable among us: the unborn baby, the widow, the foreigner, the disabled, the orphan...and I realized that I could not call myself a Christian (a follower of Christ) and be indifferent to their situation. I think it was **C.S. Lewis** who said, “*The opposite of love is not hate; it's indifference.*”

And I began to see that the reason I am called to invest my life into ministries of compassion is because this is how my Father in heaven has invested into me. I was the foreigner (without a true home), and He welcomed into His home. I was the helpless one with no hope and nobody advocating for me, and then the Father sent His Son to come save me. I was orphan without a family, and then God adopted me into His family (**Rom 8; Gal 4; Eph 1**).

**Q.** Why orphan ministry?

**A.** Because it's our story in Christ.

I want to spend just a couple minutes this morning looking at what **James 1:27** is saying – and then turn the pulpit over to our friends from The Reel Hope Project to talk about how every single one of us can get involved in this ministry of compassion and hope together.

Verse 27 is the last verse in chapter 1, which means that, in order to really grasp what this verse is saying, it's helpful to see it in its context. This verse becomes more meaningful if we see how James has been building up to it.

So, here's the plan:

1. Recite James chapter 1, and as I do, see if you can trace the progression.
2. Outline the progression that I see in chapter one.
3. Highlight the action word (“visit”) in verse 27.
4. Turn it over to brother Pete.

**PRAY**

**Recite James 1**

Here is the progression in this chapter:

1. Life will always have its struggles. So, if you are waiting for everything to line up just right before getting involved in the work of compassion, you will never will. Instead of looking for excuses in your situation, ask God for wisdom as you seek to live for Him (**1–8**).
2. Beware of the temptation of pursuing “*the good life*” instead of “*a godly life*” (**9–15**).
3. Everything you have (and everything you don't have) is a good gift from God. God knows what He has called you to do, and He knows what you need to be successful in the work (**16–18**).
4. Listen to His Word & then do what He says (**19–26**).<sup>1</sup> There are many people who know how to sound religious, but if there is no movement toward the heart of God in their actions, James says that their religion is useless.
5. **What is true religion? (27)**. True religion is a **clean heart** (with God) & **callused hands** (with the world). Hands that have been fighting against injustice. Rescuing those who are perishing. Building up the church. Serving the needy.

Action word: “**Visit**” (ἐπισκέπτεσθαι)

- **Gen 21:1** | God visited Sarah & she conceived (see also **1 Sam 2:21**).
- **Exod 3:16; 4:31** | God visited the children of Israel in Egypt & they were rescued.<sup>2</sup>
- **Ruth 1:6** | God visited Bethlehem & their famine was replaced with bread.<sup>3</sup>
- **Luke 1:68** | God visits His people & they are redeemed.

When God visits people, their lives are changed for good.

Why do we have hope? Because when Jesus came, God visited us.

Why are we called to visit the orphan? Because God has visited us.

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<sup>1</sup> Being a Christian isn't just about what you know; it's about what you do with what you know. In our day today, there is no shortage of information, but there is a shortage of application.

<sup>2</sup> See also Jer 27:22.

<sup>3</sup> See also Psalm 65:9.