



# **Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church**

**What does the Bible say about...**

**Orphans**

**James 1:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 25:35-40**

**03/03/2019**

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## **Main Point**

God makes it clear in His Word that He has a heart for orphans, and He expects His church to take care of them.

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## **Introduction**

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Do you know anyone who has adopted a child or was adopted as a child? What is the most interesting part of their story?**

**When a family adopts a child, how is the child blessed? How are the parents blessed?**

Adoption is not only a powerful picture of the gospel, it's also one of many ways that Christians can obey God's Word when it comes to caring for orphans. In our study today, we will see that God has a heart for the orphan, and that the church must do its part to take care of them.

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## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:22-27.**

**What reveals more about a person: actions or words? Why do you say so?**

**Why do we often "hear" and not "do" when it comes to Scripture? What does this say about our faith?**

**In what area of your life could you do a better job applying God's Word rather than just listening to it?**

James maintained that just listening to God's Word was insufficient. When one hears the Word and does not act on the admonitions contained in it, that person really is engaging in self-deception. Simply listening to the message is not enough. For James, genuine religion and daily life could not be separated. He had little patience with those who claimed to be pious or religious but gave no evidence of inward change by their daily conduct.

**What three actions does James identify as evidences of genuine religion in verses 26-27?**

**Why do you think James singled out caring for orphans and widows as an example of faith in action? What do you imagine their plight was in James's day? What is it like today?**

**What truths of Scripture are we putting into action when we meet the needs of orphans?**

True religion expresses itself in loving service and in holy living. Put another way, true religion includes both social ethics and personal ethics. Orphans and widows were some of the most helpless members of society, and by taking care of them the church put God's Word into practice. Both aspects of religion brought together in this verse indicate that we are to be in the world rendering service to others, yet we are not to succumb to the evil of the world. Jesus perfectly modeled this balance for us during His time on earth. Jesus also went so far as to secure our adoption by God in the ultimate example of sacrificial, loving service.

**HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 4:4-7.**

**How did Paul describe a believer in Christ? What is the inheritance of an adopted child of God?**

**How has God intervened to alter human history and adopt us as full heirs? How does it change the way believers live?**

Jesus came to redeem all who would accept Him, both from their enslavement to the law as a system of attempted self-justification and from their guilt for sin. The price of redemption was costly, but Jesus came ready and willing to pay that price. Jesus also came into the world so that we might receive the full rights of sons. God's adopted children in Christ enjoy a secure, personal relationship with their Heavenly Father that is received by faith, not by keeping the law's requirements. By God's grace, we are delivered from slavery to sonship.

**Why does verse 6 emphasize the importance of knowing and crying out to God as "Abba, Father"?**

**What does it mean when people know God as “Father”? How do they live differently because of that personal relationship?**

**How does knowing you are adopted by God change your view of yourself and of God? How does this affect your love for others? Why should this motivate us to care for orphans?**

The word adoption spotlights the new status of believers. We have a new spiritual family and thus no longer belong to our old, sinful family. As children of God, we show our gratitude and love for Him by following Jesus’ example of sacrificial love and service to others.

**HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:35-40.**

During His earthly ministry, when talking about His second coming and the time when we all will be held accountable for our actions while on earth, Jesus described what faithfulness to Him looks like.

**What are the six ministry actions Jesus’ followers performed in this passage? What do all of these actions have in common?**

**What did Jesus mean when He said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me”?**

**Why is meeting the physical needs of the hurting and helpless so important for the Christ-follower?**

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## **Application**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How is it that by serving people, we love them and show them Jesus?**

**Who are “the least of these” near our campus and homes? What message do you think these groups of people are getting from Christians and area churches? What message should they be getting from our church?**

**What opportunities do you have to be personally involved in ministry to orphans? In what ministries are you or have you been active?**

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## Pray

Close your group gathering in a time of prayer. Take time to hear prayer requests, specifically those related to today’s topic and convictions group members are feeling as a result of the Scripture. Then close in prayer, asking God to open your eyes to the people around you who need to know Him and feel His love.

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## Commentary

### JAMES 1:22-27

1:22. James was concerned that believers persevere in living out God’s Word. The word “doers” refers to believers who hear the Word taught, read, or preached and put it into action in their lives. The term “hearer” describes someone who hears the words of Scripture without really listening to them. That person takes no actions as a result of attending a session in which the Bible is read and taught. A person who believes sitting through a presentation of God’s Word

as an end in itself is self-deceived, which is the worst and most tragic kind of deception. People who do not act on God's Word cheat themselves of the full, meaningful, and useful life God intends for them.

1:23-24. One who is content to listen to God's Word and take no action is self-deceived because that individual has no clear, precise, lasting perception of self. James drew an illustration from everyday life to drive home this point. The mirrors of that time were made of polished metal—bronze, silver, copper, or tin. Such mirrors gave blurred, imprecise images. James compared the person who listens without taking action with a man looking at his own face in a mirror but neglecting to do the needed grooming the mirror reveals.

1:25. In contrast to the person content to be a hearer of God's Word without acting on it, James presented a doer who acts. This person looks intently into the perfect law of freedom. The law to which James referred is perfect because it gives freedom. James probably had in mind the gospel, God's message of salvation in Christ and the implications of redemption for daily living. It is this message of grace that sets people free. The person who gives careful attention to the perfect law of freedom perseveres in it. The individual will experience God's blessings in what he does, will have God's stamp of approval.

1:26. This and the next verse paint three excellent portraits of genuine Christianity. Together they frame the essence but not the totality of "pure and undefiled religion" (v. 27). James gave practical aspects of following Christ to warn against self-deception. James painted the first portrait in negative terms. One who supposes he or she is religious, without controlling his tongue, is self-deceived. Evidently James identified a person who incorrectly assumes he or she is genuinely religious with a hearer who fails to act on God's Word (see v. 22). No matter how industrious we are in performing religious acts, if we are not disciplined in our speech, our religion is useless—ineffective, fruitless, or empty.

1:27. Two positive, compelling portraits present pure and undefiled religion before . . . God. Again, these snapshots were not intended to give a complete picture of a person's relationship with God through Christ; they emphasize practical expressions of genuine discipleship. The word "religion" is a form of the word "religious" in verse 26. In verse 27 the term refers to proper, valid expressions of genuine relationship with God. These demonstrations contrast sharply to elaborate rituals and mere talk. In God's estimation real religion finds expression in concrete actions—and His evaluation is all that really counts.

The first positive portrait of genuine religion shows believers as they look after orphans and widows in their distress. The Greek word translated "look after" means "to visit for the purpose of comfort and relief" and expresses personal involvement. The tense expresses continuous

action in providing for people in need. James's second positive portrait of genuine Christianity depicted personal moral purity. Believers are to keep themselves unstained by the world. The word "unstained" has the sense of being spotless, pure ("unpolluted"), and without blemish. The term "world" refers to unredeemed people's way of life. It is the sphere ruled by evil and thus opposed to God. Moral purity is evidence of a genuine relationship with Christ.

#### **JAMES 1:22-27 - HOLMAN NT COMMENTARY**

1:22. James's command is literally to "keep on becoming doers of God's Word." He insisted on an obedience which lasts. This does not minimize the importance of hearing God's Word. It does emphasize strongly the need for acting. Too often Christians view a sermon as an interesting moral or theological lecture. We need to do something other than sitting and listening. Jesus pronounced a blessing only on those "who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28).

The command to listen to God's Word describes someone who attends a lecture. The hearer could nod agreeably to the message but do nothing as a result. God wants a listener to become a disciple, an obedient follower of Jesus. One who hears the message without doing anything is self-deceived. Such a listener has made a false estimate of the situation. Jesus warned against this error (Matt. 7:21-27).

1:23-25. James presented a negative and a positive illustration of a response to God's message. Via a vivid picture of listless listening, verses 23-24 compare those who only hear God's Word to people who gaze into a mirror and dash away with little memory of what they saw. Mirrors in New Testament times were made of polished metal. People used them to wash their faces, shave their beards, apply cosmetics, and comb their hair. Then they quickly left, giving little thought to the image they had seen. People can repeat this experience in the spiritual realm. We give a quick glance into God's Word, find a morsel of truth, and jump into another task without remembering or applying what we read.

Verse 25 uses the mirror metaphor with four verbs to picture the response of obedient listeners to God's message. First, obedient people look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom. This describes someone who gazes at God's message with a desire to learn. The same verb—translated as bent over—pictures the apostle John staring into Jesus' empty tomb (John 20:5). John's look led to an obedient faith (John 20:8).

Second, obedient people continued to do what God said. They put God's Word into practice and follow through with commitment. Third, obedient listeners do not forget what they hear. Spiritual amnesia never conquers their minds. Fourth, obedient listeners do what God's message instructs them to do.

Good listening, endurance, clear memory, and obedience characterize committed Christians. They are eager to receive and obey what God tells them to do.

God's Word is the perfect law that gives freedom. Obedience to Jesus' commands in Scripture brings freedom from sin and death. Whenever we submit to God's message, this law of liberty produces a disposition to obey God's will joyfully. We have freedom because we truly want to serve God. Jesus promised this freedom in John 8:31-32.

Obedient people are promised a blessing. We do not need to wait for a future blessing. We already have the blessing in our grasp. Doing what God requires brings a blessing with it.

Psalm 1:1-3 summarizes the blessings of obedience. Those who meditate on the Law of the Lord will be "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

### **The Evidence of Good Listening to God's Word (vv. 26-27)**

*SUPPORTING IDEA: Committed believers demonstrate their obedience with deeds of compassion and inner purity.*

1:26. This verse describes a person who considered himself to be religious but did not listen well to God's Word. The person focused on the externals of religious action such as public prayer, fasting, giving, and worship attendance. James did not belittle this action, but he added that inner control of the tongue must accompany outward performance.

Keep a tight rein on his tongue sometimes described the bridle used with a horse. The tongue is compared to an unmanageable horse which needed bit and bridle to tame its excesses. Controlling the tongue is so important that James devoted most of chapter 3 to its use.

James leveled two accusations at the person who practiced outward religion without inner control. First, he deceives himself. This repeats the idea of verse 22 in different words. What a pity to find after a lifetime of pseudo-religion that you have only been practicing self-deception!

Second, his religion is worthless. Peter used the same word—translated as empty—to describe useless pagan practices his readers had followed before they became Christians (1 Pet. 1:18). Religious practices without inner control have no more saving power than paganism.

1:27. Two evidences demonstrate pure religion: deeds of compassion and inner purity. This does not reduce Christianity to mere benevolence. True religion has more features than James has mentioned. The emphasis here is that for God to accept our worship it must be accompanied by loving ministry and a holy life. Both Christians and non-Christians could see and understand this type of evidence.

To look after orphans and widows demanded demonstrations of concern and active involvement. The psalmist pictured God as a defender of orphans and widows (Ps. 68:5). Christ used the word for look after in Matthew 25:43 to describe the ministry of caring for those in prison. Obeying this appeal calls for more than an occasional visit. It demands genuine compassion and true engagement.

(Not) polluted demands a freedom from contamination by the world. Peter used this word to refer to Christ as “without ... defect” (1 Pet. 1:19). Christians are to model their purity after that of Jesus.

Some months ago I assembled a small playset with a sliding board and some climbing sections. I placed it in my backyard for my grandchildren to use. Although the process was not difficult, I constantly referred to the instruction book so I would know where to fit each piece. The writers of the book know how their product should fit together. I needed to follow their directions.

We must follow God’s instructions devotedly if we want to produce a lifestyle honoring to God. Obeying God’s Word demands control of the tongue, a compassion for others, and a separated life. These are the identifying marks of pure and faultless religion.

*MAIN IDEA REVIEW: God wants his people to triumph over their trials and to live in obedience to his commandments.*

Thomas D. Lea, Hebrews, James, vol. 10, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 265–268.

4:4-5. Jesus provided redemption according to the will of the Father when the time had fully come. The Son came into the world born of a woman and born under law. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. The phrase "born of a woman" emphasizes that Jesus came into the world clothed in humanity. He was fully man as well as fully God. Paul added that Jesus also was born under law. He was not only a man; He was a Jewish man. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law.

4:6. God not only has sent His Son to redeem us, He also has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to provide assurance of our salvation. Not only does the Spirit convict people of their need of salvation, He also dwells within them from the moment they receive the gift of salvation. The Spirit of Christ within believers gives us assurance of our status with God. The Holy Spirit within us calls out "Abba, Father." "Abba" is the form in which the Aramaic word for "father" is written in English. Children used this term to address their fathers in the intimacy of the family. The word is associated not so much with infancy as it is with intimacy. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, as God's children we experience a warm, family relationship with our Heavenly Father.

4:7. Summarizing, Paul went on to emphasize that such change of status meant additionally that God has made you also an heir. As Christians, they were no longer imprisoned by sin and under the curse of the law. All who had accepted Christ by faith had the Holy Spirit within them to assure, challenge, and guide. As believers, we do also.

#### **MATTHEW 25:31-46**

This passage uses figurative language (shepherd... sheep... goats) drawn from Ezekiel 34:17-19 in Matthew 25:32-33, but the rest is too literal to be classified as a parable. The passage is therefore best taken as a literal description of the final judgment. Verses 31 and 34 define the title Son of Man as King. The King, Jesus, will judge people based on their reception and treatment of the least of His brothers. In light of 12:50, the words refer to Jesus' followers who seek to do God's will. Humble and compassionate treatment of Jesus' followers necessarily accompanies acceptance of the gospel that they proclaim (10:40-42). "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me" means that a person's treatment of Jesus' representatives expresses their love for and commitment to Jesus Himself. Those who show no compassion to Jesus' followers betray their lack of devotion to Him. As in 7:21-23, Jesus identifies Himself as the final Judge, a role that Jews expected Yahweh to fulfill.