

Should the Church Support Orphan and Retirement Homes?

- I. Introduction
 - a. Gal. 6:10 – We are to do good to all men
 - b. James 1:27 – Especially those who are in the type of distress that orphans and widows face
 - c. Some would suggest that we should fulfill our obligations to the fatherless and widows by supporting an orphan or retirement home from the treasury of the church
 - i. With any suggestion of what the church should do we need to ask two questions?
 1. Is it lawful? Is it authorized by the New Testament
 2. Is it expedient? Is it effective and reasonable in accomplishing its stated goal?
 - ii. The answer to both these questions is no:
 1. Church support of orphan homes is not authorized by the NT
 2. Church support of orphan homes is not an expedient way of caring for orphans
 - iii. We will speak primarily of orphan care, but the same discussion could be had with regard to elder care in institutions.
- II. Key Thought: We will examine four arguments advanced for the church support orphan homes, four negative effects of church support of orphan homes, and discuss the responsibilities are of individual Christians towards orphans and widows.
- III. Four Arguments for the support of Orphan Homes Examined
 - a. The church can do any good work that its members can agree to do
 - i. But, this would authorize church-supported:
 1. Athletic centers
 2. Dining halls
 3. Hospitals
 4. Ski resorts
 5. Underwater basketweaving classes
 6. Nearly anything else
 - ii. We are not on that basis with God – 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Jn 9; Dt. 4:2; Heb. 8:5
 - b. The church is commanded to do this work – James 1:27
 - i. But James 1:27 is explicitly address to individuals, not churches (“himself/oneself”)
 - ii. Moreover, the command is to care for needy orphans and widows, not needy orphanages and needy retirement homes
 - c. The church is not commanded to do this work, but individuals are (James 1:27; Gal. 6:10), and anything an individual Christian can do himself, the church can do collectively
 - i. But individuals clearly must do things that the church collectively must not do (1 Tim. 5:16)

- d. The church is not commanded to do this, but they are authorized to help Christian household in need (1 Cor. 16:1-3; Acts 11:28-30), and an orphanage or retirement home is equivalent to a Christian household in need
 - i. Aid to Christian households were intended to take care of emergency, temporary problems that arose. Cases of permanent need were to be handled by relatives unless none were available or willing (1 Tim. 5:16). In case of a Christian or child with a permanent need and no relatives to help, the church can, should and must provide for their support, either directly in the home of one or more members of the congregation, or by contracting with some care provider, or some combination.
 - ii. But an orphan or widow home is NOT a Christian household, for the following reasons
 - 1. It is not Christian – it may hire or be run by Christians, whose activities may promote Christian values, but it is not Christian; the only truly Christian institutions are the church and the home, whose structure and operation are defined by the New Testament (Eph. 4:11-16; 5:22-6:4), not by articles of incorporation or bylaws.
 - 2. It is not a home – a home is a family living in one place that is bound together by blood, marriage or adoption – a widow or orphan home is a dwelling for the residents and a workplace for the staff and volunteers, but it is not a home.
 - 3. It replaces a Christian home – every widow and orphan in a institution cannot be kept in a Christian home until they are released from the care of the institution; the best institutions (both religious and secular) recognize this and are eager to facilitate the transferring of their residents into good homes; the worst see this as a threat to their occupancy level and payroll

IV. Four Negative Effects of Church Support of Orphan Homes

- a. Church (or individual) contributions to the general fund of the institution, rather than contracting for the care of a orphan or widow in need converts the church's responsibility for an individual in need into a church's responsibility for an institution in need
 - i. Responsibility and support are detached from the child or widow and placed in the institution
 - ii. The church (or individual) becomes involved in the care of every person in the institution, whether they are there for good or scriptural reasons or not
- b. It also results in the institution, rather than the church, being responsible for key decisions that the church should be making
 - i. Compliance with 1 Tim 5:16
 - ii. Determining when and where to release a child or widow to another situation

- c. It places the institution in the position of both soliciting for the support of a charitable need and soliciting for opportunities to increase that need.
 - i. Send us your orphans and widows and we will care for them (i.e. please increase our need)
 - ii. Send us money to care for these orphans and widows or else they will go without (i.e. please reduce our need)
 - iii. These conflicting interests are immediately resolved if the church contracts with the home to care for their child or widow
 - iv. This is exactly how households contract with a retirement home to care for an elderly person who cannot be cared for at home. It is not charity, it is a contractual agreement.
- d. It tends to replace and supplant the Christian obligation to visit widows and orphans in their distress
 - i. There are some who would adopt a child or take in a widow but who may conclude that the trouble and expense is not worth undertaking when they can simply be sent to an institution
 - ii. The secular government has almost entirely abandoned group institutional living for children because they recognize that is NOT GOOD for the children, mostly relying on foster care for ongoing child-placement needs
 - iii. They have discovered what God has told us all along. A home is best for children, not an institution.
 - iv. But because this is true, an orphanage asking for financial assistance is asking the church to give them money so they can provide clearly substandard care (non-family-based residence) for an orphan.
 - v. In almost every case, the money would be better spent supporting a Christian family to care for the child.

V. Pure and Undeclared Religion

- a. Individual Christians ARE responsible for caring for those who are in need (Gal. 6:10; James 1:27)
 - i. Do we look for opportunities to help the fatherless?
 - ii. Do we look for and take advantage of opportunities to help widows?
- b. THE FATHERLESS: Getting it right –
 - i. A Christian in CA named Dana sent out this email earlier this year about three fatherless children who needed a home:
 - ii. Brethren~

There is a family in [Bowling Green, KY] walking an AMAZING walk of Faith!

And....

There are 3 Little Souls in [California] with equal Faith and INSPIRING Strength and Character and Conviction of the Lord!

3 little children ages 8, 10 & 12 have been in Foster Care for the past 5 years. The Foster Care family were members of the Church of Christ and had taught the children the Truth. The oldest little girl had been Baptized . The Children's Birthparents had lost their rights and the State was starting an Adoption plan for the children. The children were asked what type of family they wanted and they asked to be placed in a Church of Christ home where the family was Black.

The State placed them in a home where both the parents were Black... but they were Not members of the church of Christ. Upon the First time that this new family went to "church" the children were upset by the many things unscriptural going on. They argued with their new "parents" about no Scriptural Authority for the Instrumental Music, No communion (the oldest girl went home and had her own communion with red koolaid and crackers) as well as many many other things that they saw in error.

The new Adoptive Parents grew weary constantly defending themselves and their beliefs!

At one point in time the State had thought about having the children be "counseled" as to the reason that ALL religions are the Same! They soon found out that would not fly with these 3!

The new Adoptive Parents asked the State to remove the children.

Then Something Unbelievable happened and through the Power of Prayer one of the State Social Workers asked me to find a suitable family, within a week!

The children were requesting a Black family , that was Strong in the Faith and a member of the Church of Christ.

Calls and emails have been going out night and day All across the country... but ... our Prayers have been answered!

Anthony and Angela Ross of Bowling Green, Kentucky have said YES! We will take the children!! The Ross family attend the Eastside congregation there in Bowling Green.

Now the Ross family have 4 children of their own ranging from 3 to 18! And... were not actively pursuing Adoption.

When i called them, they did not know who i was but listened as i told them the story of these 3 little souls.

Angela Ross had the most poignant thing to say that i will Never forget.. " I have found in my life that when GOD has a plan for you... you just best Get out of the Way and let HIM take control... I guess we are going to Get out of the Way and hand this over to GOD, even if we dont have any money for it!"

iii. Their willing faith resulted in a tremendous outpouring of prayers and support to enable them to adopt these three children into their home.

1. That is an inspiring story

2. It is representative of thousands of similar stories in which Christian families raise innocent children who may otherwise not have a home, much less ever hear the gospel of Christ

a. Some of you have adopted children

b. But that is not the only way to help the fatherless

i. It was the foster parents of these children that originally taught them about Jesus and the one church

ii. And it was hundred of individual Christians who assisted the Ross family raise the funds to adopt these children

iii. And there are hundreds of other ways that you can make a difference in the lives of fatherless children that may have an eternal influence on their souls

iv. I encourage you to pray for and look for those opportunities and act upon them

c. The WIDOWS

i. We have many widows among us

ii. They need to know that we have a special heart of care and concern for them

iii. Help them, encourage them, pray for them

VI. Conclusion