



HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2011

The annual observance of Human Rights Day on December 10 commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations on this same date in 1948. This manuscript has been awarded the Guinness World Record for being the most translated document, at over 300 languages and counting.

As impressive as this accomplishment is, there is little new in the way of treating other humans decently that God has not already been saying to us for thousands of years, in a work that has been translated into thousands of languages. Interestingly, the Bible does not use the word “rights”, but speaks much about how people should treat one another.

But **His** high expectations for the manifestation of His just, merciful, and right character fall on the people that He has already redeemed. In Exodus 20:2, what is God’s introduction to the Ten Commandments? _____

How many of these include how we are to treat one another? _____

In Isaiah 1: 11-17, what is more valuable to God than our “proper” religious practices and schedule? _____

Who are we to rescue, according to Jeremiah 22:3? _____

In Amos 4:1, what are the pampered, wealthy women of Israel accused of? _____

In verse 4 and 5, their worship is criticized as well. How does an indulgent, inward focus, even within the church blind us to the needs of others? _____

How did Daniel avoid this sin in Daniel 1:8-16? _____

What does the Lord require of us according to Micah 6:8? _____

There are so many other examples in the Old Testament of God’s specific instructions to take care of those who are at a disadvantage in taking care of themselves in ancient culture: the alien, the widow, the fatherless, the rape victim, the slave, a set aside wife, even unborn children. **We know the character of God by the way that He expects His people to reflect it to the world.**

What are some of the ways we saw the Christ as man revealing that character? _____

How did Jesus sum up our greatest rule for living in Mark 12:30-31? _____

Obviously influenced by the same words we have read in the Old Testament, what does James 1:27 say qualifies as pure religion? _____

How are remaining unspotted by the world and helping those in need interrelated? _____

In James day, the widows and orphans were society's most vulnerable people. In Hitler's Germany it was the Jew. What groups of people would you consider most vulnerable in our own society? _____

What would it mean to look after them? _____

Where the NIV uses "look after", both the KJV, and the ESV use the word "visit". The word visit intrigues me. That implies much more than a check in the mail, or even a vote in the election box. The Greek word that is correctly translated as both look after, and visit, is *episkeptomai* (ep-ee-skep'-tom-ah-ee). It does mean to look after, but with more emphasis on the 'look' than we usually give it. We first have to **see**, in order to help. We have to step into homes, and parts of towns we are uncomfortable in. We have to be on the lookout for those in need. We have to keep our eyes and ears open to the hurts that are happening, and to the voices that aren't being heard, and to those who don't even have a voice. We have to train ourselves to see, and to notice, so that we can help.

In listening to a presentation by Sharon Cohn Wu on the work of the International Justice Mission, I was moved by her description of human trafficking, especially the lines used by their captors to "break in" the children for usefulness as sex or labor slaves. They are told that "no one knows you are here", and "no one cares because you are worthless". In other words, there is no hope because no one *episkeptomais*, no one SEES.

Do God's people SEE? Do we CARE?

James goes on, in 2:14-26 to describe what people of faith are called to do once we see a need. If we see, and care, what will we DO? _____

Thanks to technology, our world has gotten smaller, and our neighbors on this planet closer. We can be so much more informed. We hear the numbers:

- According to worldhunger.org, there were 925 million hungry people in the world in 2010, and I don't think it was the way I get "hungry" for a mint chocolate chip ice cream cone!
- In my state alone, in 2008 (the most recent year given) over 10,600 babies were intentionally killed while in the "safest" place available, their mother's womb.

- According to National Geographic, an estimated 27 million people are enslaved worldwide today. (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/pf/4538736.html>)

But do we *episkeptomai*? Do we SEE? Do we CARE?

The problems, the needs, are not just far afield. According to the U.S. State Department's annual report on human trafficking, 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year. According to Nita Belles, author of *In Our Backyard*, even more of the sex trafficking victims in our country are our own children. She adds that there are more slaves in America today than at any time in the history of the United States. The average age for entering into sex trafficking is 12-14 for girls, and 11-13 for boys. According to the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, sex traffickers target children partly because of market demand, but also because their vulnerability and gullibility make them an easy target. In my own neighboring city of Wichita, KS, there have been 28 sex slave cases this year alone. How many more were not reported, not seen?

Do I *episkeptomai*? Do I SEE? Do I CARE? And if I don't, what will be the consequence to my soul?

Who is it that should do something about such injustices? The people who are called to the purpose of showing God's character to the world. Those of us who have been redeemed and are now His holy instruments. You. Me.

Lest we be overwhelmed the vast scope of the problems before us, consider the early Christians and the commonplace, but abhorrent practice of infanticide. Deformed, sickly, female, or simply unwanted babies were rather routinely drowned, or left helpless in the city dumps to be devoured by wild animals, or die of exposure. In the ancient world, it was simply a means of birth control, and a widely accepted practice among most cultures. The Jews, again, the ones called to show God to the world, did not participate, and that practice alone was enough to set them apart. But with the dawn of Christianity, there was a new challenge, for these early Christians were not just Jews, but were also of the very societies and peoples who disposed of their babies on the garbage heaps. Just being removed from the problem was no longer an option, these early believers had to find a way to deal with it—in their own families and neighborhoods. So, even when they were being persecuted themselves, even when they had absolutely no political voice, they set about the business of rescuing the helpless. They introduced their friends and neighbors to Christ, and taught them that to follow Him, among other things, meant that you couldn't leave your babies in a dumpster to die. But they didn't stop there. They went to the dump and took the sickly, unwanted babies home. The church community supported each other in raising these unwanted kids. They helped the impoverished families be able to keep their babies. They took care of widows, and orphans and anyone else who needed care. And as people were shown the character of God, the church grew, and grew.

Early Christians were known for rescuing the vulnerable. What are Christians known for today?

Sources:

Human Rights Day:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/WorldRecord.aspx>

You can also download the entire Universal Declaration of Human Rights at this website.

World hunger statistics:

<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>.

US abortion statistics:

<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0103.pdf>

World slavery:

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/05/0517_040517_pathwayscob.html

<http://attheEndofSlavery.com>

US slavery:

<http://www.ksn.com/news/local/story/Human-trafficking-expert-speaks-in-Wichita/q40Brb1nEmUkDnm2K5w.csp>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/slaves/etc/stats.html>

<http://www.2ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/factsheet.html>.

Early Christianity and Infanticide:

http://christiancadre.org/member_contrib/cp_infanticide.html.

WANT TO HELP?

<http://attheEndofSlavery.com>

<http://www.worldvision.org>

<http://www.prolife.com>

<http://www.showhope.org>

<http://www.persecution.com>

Do you have other organizations to recommend?