

INTRODUCTION

Her name was Anne Hillyard and all it took for Mrs. Hillyard was to read an article written by the very famous preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon on "*The Holy War of the Present Hour*" in August of 1866 to fulfill what she had long cherished in her heart to do – somehow to minister to the fatherless boys in her community.

Unknown to Mrs. Hillyard was what took place at the Tabernacle at the previous Monday evening prayer-meeting, where Spurgeon spoke to the congregation these words –

'Dear friends, we are a huge church, and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city. I want us, to-night, to ask Him to send us *some new work*; and if we need money to carry it on, let us pray that *the means may also be sent*.'

It was a few days later that Mrs. Hillyard wrote to Spurgeon offering to entrust him with £20,000 for the purpose of founding an Orphanage for fatherless children. Here was *the new work and the money with which to begin it*.

A student studying at the College at the time writes of this event –

"It was my conviction thirty years ago, as it is to-day, that the Stockwell Orphanage, as well as the money to found it, came from the Lord in answer to the petitions offered that Monday night. Surely, the Orphanage was born of prayer."

I may easily ask, *what gave this woman an unceasing desire to do His will in this particular matter? Why the fatherless? Why an orphanage? Why was this laid upon her heart? Why the training of children in the "simple gospel principles?"*

When Spurgeon went to meet Mrs. Hillyard along with another gentlemen, he was surprised to find out that Mrs. Hillyard lived in a very modest home.

So much so that they began by saying, “We have called, Madam, about the £200 you mentioned in your letter.”

“£200! did I write? I meant to have said £20,000.” “Oh, yes!” replied the Pastor, “you did put £20,000; but I was not sure whether a nought or two had slipped in by mistake, and thought I would be on the safe side.”

I mean, can you imagine the shock of hearing such news. *Should we even be surprised when God answers our prayers?*

But again I ask myself, *where did she develop such theology? Where did she develop this view of God as the Father of the fatherless?*

The answer is so simply but most profound: In the Holy pages of Scripture.

This woman was endeared to God’s Word. She quoted passages like **Psalm 81:10** –

¹⁰ “I, the LORD, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

She found encouragement from the Scripture. She found truth from the Scripture. She found the heart of God from the Scripture – especially the heart of God for the orphan.

Today, my beloved I want to endeavor to disclose the heart of God for the orphan by first looking at the *OT* and Lord-willing next week by looking at the *NT* to see what God’s Word reveals about the heart of God for the orphan.

I trust this short series will develop your understanding of our God as the Father to the fatherless and how such knowledge is truly wonderful.

I pray that your heart will be moved to *defend the orphan* and that God would endear your hearts to Himself in all of this study.

CONTENT

Today I want to simply lay the foundation by looking at three attributes of our Heavenly Father. These attributes reveal His heart toward the orphan.

1. GOD'S JUSTICE
2. GOD'S MERCY
3. GOD'S BENEVOLENCE

The Hebrew term for “*orphan*” is יתום and it refers to that boy or girl who is “*bereaved of both parents.*” The boy or girl who “*has been made fatherless.*” This term appears 42x in the OT.

It appears for the first time in the Holy pages of Scriptures in Exodus 21. Turn there for a moment. Exodus chapter 21.

You might recall that in the previous chapter, God had given the Israelites the *Ten Commandments*, yet because of their trembling fear of God, the people asked Moses the following in **20:19** –

¹⁹ ... “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.”

And so Moses was actually placed as a mediator between them and God, verse **21** tells us –

²¹ So the people **stood at a distance**, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*.

God then continues to reveal his covenant with his people in a discourse that has come to be called *the Covenant Code* (20:22-23:33), *Book of the Covenant*, or *Case Laws*, “*a basic block of laws that guide the behavior of God’s covenant people.*”¹

In short: These laws build upon the *Ten Commandments*. They tell us how we are to apply the *Ten Commandments*.

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, vol. 2, *Exodus*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2007), 473.
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It is this *Covenant Code*, God begins to reveal his heart for the orphans. It is here that God's revelation and authority come together to produce a holy people, set apart unto God alone.

GOD'S JUSTICE – *His heart is just toward the orphan*

Notice what law He places upon His people in **Ex 22:21ff** –

²¹ “You shall not wrong [Heb. יָנָה (*yānâ*) – *oppress; maltreat*] a stranger or oppress [i.e. *press, crush*] him, **for** you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

²² “You shall not afflict [Heb. יָנָה – “*cause someone to feel dependent*” or “*take advantage of*”] any widow or **orphan**.

All these verbs (i.e. do not *wrong, oppress, or afflict*) are all synonymous with one another. Individually and together, they prohibit any sort of misuse or unfair treatment of the needy, whether they are a *stranger, widow, or orphan*.

God calls them to remember the days while in Egypt, not just months back but the 430 years their forefathers endured as aliens in the land.

“Extend the sort of mercy you craved for while living as slaves in Egypt.”

We read later in **Ex 23:9** –

⁹ “You shall not oppress a stranger, since **you yourselves know the feelings** of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Anyone listening to this would immediately understand what it is like *to be treated wrongly*, what it is like *to be pressed and crushed upon*, and what it is like *to be taken advantage of*. You know the feeling. You know what it is like.

But God does not stop with their mere knowledge, feeling, and/or experience. There is more to this commandment.

It is not limited to their experience and sympathetic understanding. God knows their hearts to do wrong.

For instance, He led them in the wilderness for 40 years, “*that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would Keep His commandments or not*” (Deut 8:2).

What is amazing is that despite of God’s infinite knowledge of our wicked and wandering heart, yet He still calls His people to Himself. He bids them come. “*Come.*”

For years, the congregation at the *Metropolitan Tabernacle* used two hymnals – one compiled by John Rippon and the other by Isaac Watts. They finally merged these two hymnals into one during the years of Charles Spurgeon.

One of those hymns sung was titled, “*Yet there is Room.*”

¹ YE dying sons of men,
Immerged in sin and woe,
The gospel’s voice attend,
While Jesus sends to you:
Ye perishing and guilty, come,
In Jesus’ arms there yet is room.

² No longer now delay,
Nor vain excuses frame:
He bids you come to-day,
Though poor, and blind, and lame:
All things are ready, sinner, come,
For every trembling soul there’s room.

⁴ Compell’d by bleeding love,
Ye wandering sheep draw near;
Christ calls you from above,
His charming accents hear!
Let whosoever will now come,
In mercy’s breast there still is room.²

² C. H. Spurgeon, *Our Own Hymn Book: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Public, Social and Private Worship* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Hymn #490 by James Boden 1777.
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The cry goes out, *“Come...there still is room.”*

God still bids us come though knowing our sinful hearts.

If that does not amaze you, just think that though you have come to Him, He still keeps you. There is no *“return policy”* with God.

Make no mistake about it: God knows human nature.

It is for this reason that He explicitly warns His people not to do what might have come naturally for them – that is to enjoy the experience of lording it over someone else for once.

This was the practice of the people *in the ancient world*. People would discriminate against the poor, the lowly, and the ones who struggled to make it on their own, who had no form of protection.

God plainly tells His people that they could not engage in something that was done to them. He knew full well that they could fall into the easy patterns of the culture of which they were a part, but they had to as **Douglas K. Stuart** puts it in his commentary on Exodus –

“They had to break with temptation and tradition and act differently from others if they were to be Yahweh’s holy covenant people.”³

Now widows and orphans were examples of those who could easily be taken advantage of. The question then becomes, *“How so?”*

Q: *What makes* strangers (i.e. aliens), widows, and orphans *so vulnerable and at risk for exploitation?*

A: The answer is rather simple: They lacked protection.

³ Stuart, 516.
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Allow me to quote Stuart as he explains:

- **ALIENS** lacked the guarantees of citizenship, which included the right to their own permanent land ownership among the tribes, the right to family, clan, and tribal support/backing in legal disputes, the right to direct involvement in the political process, the right to freedom from exploitation by those with greater “clout” either politically or socially or monetarily than they possessed, and the right to resist noncriminal deportation.
- **WIDOWS** lacked direct legal participatory rights (since women were represented by their husbands in legal matters⁴ and a widow had no husband) and could not own land in their own names under many conditions.⁵ If too old to work, they would have no means of providing even for enough food to eat without other members of the family intervening on their behalf. A widow who had nothing otherwise to support herself could easily be made to work long hours for next to nothing as a virtual slave.
- **ORPHANS**, if young enough, were similarly at the mercy of others. If they had no separate inheritance of their own and were not otherwise protected by older (extended) family members, they might have to work virtually endlessly for whatever anyone chose to pay them—perhaps just some food to get through each day. If there were no work and no one “took them in,” they might actually starve to death or freeze to death.⁶

God takes this matter seriously. He reserved His special attention for widows and orphans who had no one to care for them. So much so that there is a warning given in following verses in **Ex 22:23-24** –

²³ “If you afflict [Heb. נָחַץ – “cause someone to feel dependent” or “take advantage of”] him at all, *and* if he does cry out to Me, **I will surely hear his cry;**

⁴ E.g., Prov 31:23; Ruth 4:1–11.

⁵ The law that resulted from the case of the daughters of Zelophehad and their request for proper inheritance rights represented a great protection for women in Israel (Num 27:1–11; 36:1–12), but its benefits were limited to daughters, not to widowed wives.

⁶ Douglas K. Stuart, vol. 2, *Exodus*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2007), 516-17.

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²⁴ and **My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.**

"I will come after you and everyone you hold dearly." This was a special reaction that involved the Holy wrath of God upon those who would abuse and exploit the widow or orphan.

If Israel was to be His *"own possession among all the peoples...a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* (Ex 19:5-6), then they must obey His voice and keep His covenant – which included this portion of Scripture called the Covenant Code.

God makes it very clear that He had freed them from Egypt and had brought them near to himself to establish a covenant with the entire nation. It was a covenant that came with certain obligations – one of which was not to *"afflict any widow or orphan."* Thus saith the Lord.

Again, consider God's use of language here in **v. 24** –

²⁴ ... I will kill you with the sword...

This kind of language should not surprise us. In Lev 26:25 God says *"I will bring the sword upon you."* In Deut 32:42 God says, *"I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh."*

Q: *How is God going to do this?*

A: Notice that He speaks of the sword. This expression of *"the sword"* is often used in the *OT* and the *NT* as a figure of speech for *"warfare."*

The threat implied here is that God would allow Israel's enemies to attack and exterminate them if they did not uphold His Law.

His wrath would work out in military invasions against His own people.

Now fast forward 40 years, after the Wanderings in the desert, as the people prepare to enter the Promise Land, to the last few weeks of Moses' life. And this Law still stands.

God continues to give the orphan a special attention and Moses testifies to it in **Deut 10:17-18** –

¹⁷ “...the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who **does not show partiality** nor take a bribe.

¹⁸ “**He executes justice** for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.

People may treat others differently based upon external criteria such as looks, possessions, or social status, but God is utterly impartial.

Calvin writes –

“God distinguishes Himself from men, who are carried away by outward appearance, to hold the rich in honour, and the poor in contempt; to favour the beautiful or the eloquent, and to despise the unseemly.”⁷

Such is the propensity of the human heart, but not so the heart of God.

God’s uniqueness separates him from creation, and yet His love leads him to reach out to creation and never shows favoritism but always judges righteously.

We see this in His gracious offer of salvation to people of every race. Thanks be to God! In **Acts 10:34-35** Peter says –

³⁴ ... “I most certainly understand *now* that **God is not one to show partiality,**

³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

Not only in salvation, but God is also impartial in judgment. “*He executes justice*” to those whom society shuns. He does so as their defender. They may not bow down to the one true God, but it is God who shows “*love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.*”

⁷ John Calvin and Charles William Bingham, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2010), Dt 10:17–19. *God’s Heart for the Orphan, Pt. 1*

In **Romans 2:9-11** we read –

- ⁹ *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil...*
¹⁰ *but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good...*
¹¹ *For there is **no partiality with God.***

God judges righteously. In all of this we come back to this marvelous truth: *“For though the LORD is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly”* (Ps 138:6). *Is this moving to your soul, my beloved?*

Elsewhere we read:

- *“You have been the helper of the orphan”* (Ps 10:14).
- *“O Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear, To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror”* (Ps 10:17-18).
- *“Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow”* (Isaiah 1:17).
- Woe to those who “rob the poor of My people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil and that they may plunder the orphans” (Isaiah 10:2).
- Concerning the wicked men who are found among God’s people, Jeremiah writes that they *“excel in deeds of wickedness; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; and they do not defend the rights of the poor”* (Jer 5:28).

Yet our God is one who pleads the cause of the orphan for He is just God. And He commands His people to adopt that same attitude toward the orphan.

Transition: Thus far we have seen that His heart is just toward the orphan. Not only that but secondly we see...

GOD'S MERCY – *His heart is merciful toward the orphan*

When the “*Feast of the Harvest*” (Ex 23:16) or the “*day of the first fruits*” (Lev 23:9-22; Num 28:26-31) came around, God did not leave the orphan from this one-day festival that was to be a time of rejoicing.

We read in **Deut 16:10-12** –

- ¹⁰ “Then you shall celebrate **the Feast of Weeks** to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you;
- ¹¹ and **you shall rejoice before the LORD your God**, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and **the orphan** and the widow **who are in your midst**, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name.
- ¹² “**You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt**, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

This was indeed *a harvest festival*, where all were invited to a joyous meal in celebration of the bountiful blessing of God in providing crops of grain. *Guess who was a part of the guest list?* The orphan.

Regardless of their social or economic status, the most disadvantaged among them were especially to be welcome.

Q: *On what basis? What is the reasoning behind this?*

A: Moses writes, “*you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt.*”

Israel was to remember their own bondage in Egypt and how the Lord had freed them so that now they could enjoy such blessing.

Sometimes you have to reflect on the past to do the right thing in the present.

Eat, partake of God’s faithfulness for you as His people, and include the orphan in your midst.

In fact it is repeated again in **v. 14** -

¹⁴ ...you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and **the orphan** and the widow who are in your towns.

Now turn over a couple pages to **Deut 24:17ff** –

¹⁷ “You shall not pervert the justice due

an **alien** [i.e. a non-Israelite who not a member of the community]
or an orphan [i.e. who did not have the protection of normal family or tribal affiliation],
nor take a **widow’s** [i.e. who was especially vulnerable, prone no doubt to constant indebtedness]
garment in pledge [e.g. not even her clothing was to be taken as a pledge, which suggests, perhaps that loans to her were to be made without collateral of any kind; at times it is best to provide a gift than a loan especially if such a person has little or no opportunities for repayment].

[What you see here is the mercy of God. This same mercy was to be extended to the alien, to the orphan, and to the widow. *What is the motivation for this?*]

¹⁸ “But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; **therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.**

Now there are practical ways to show mercy and Moses writes of the them. Practical ways to show mercy that at the same time protect the dignity of the persons involved. Read on in **v. 19ff** –

¹⁹ “When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it;

[When harvest time came, care was to be taken not to pick the fields, orchards, or vineyards clean but to leave behind any residue that might at first been overlooked. *Why?*]

it shall be for the **alien**, for the **orphan**, and for the **widow**, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

[The alien, orphan, and widow then were to be allowed to gather up what remained as a means of sustaining themselves by their own labors. Not so much an outright gift, but an opportunity for the needy person to benefit from their initiative and industry]

The story of Boaz and Ruth provides a later application of this principle.

Ruth was fully aware of her right as an alien and a widow to glean from the fields of anyone with whom she found favor. We read in **Ruth 2:2** –

² And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain **after one in whose sight I may find favor.**” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.”

This suggests that not everyone in Bethlehem would have been inclined to allow her to do so, certainly not without permission at least.

Boaz not only gave such permission to Ruth (and to many others, v. 4) but commanded his reapers to leave even the sheaves behind so that Ruth could have more than leftovers. We read in **Ruth 2:15-16** –

¹⁵ ... Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her.

¹⁶ “Also you shall purposely pull out for her *some grain* from the bundles and leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.”

This permitted the recipient to salvage his own honor while at the same time delivering the landowner from any sense of arrogant control over the lives of those dependent on him.

Boaz was simply applying what God had prescribed. Not just following “*the letter of the law*” but the spirit too. He possessed the heart of God.

Ruth was a Moabite, a foreigner in Israel, just as Israel had been a foreigner in Egypt.

“Don’t you ever forget what it was like to be enslaved. Therefore deliver the weakest among you from that social and economic bondage so easily created within a society.”

The passage concludes in **Deut 24:20-21** –

²⁰ “When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.

²¹ “When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.

Now it was not restricted to the generous allowance for the alien, orphan, or widow to work for such provision, but God also commanded his people to give.

Transition: We have seen His justice, His mercy, and now we will see...

GOD’S BENEVOLENCE – *His heart is benevolent toward the orphan*

Turn if you would in your Bibles to **Deut 26:12-13** –

¹² “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, **then you shall give it** to the Levite, to the stranger, **to the orphan** and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

¹³ “You shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have removed the sacred *portion* from *my* house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, **the orphan** and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.

Here the Israelites had a special tithe, not liken to our view of a tithe, but a special one. It was given at the end of every third year.

There was a *Levitical tithe*, which went to support the priests and Levites who served the people (cf. Lev 27:30-33 and Num 18:21-32).

There was also a *tithe of the harvest* [or a *fellowship meal tithe*] that was presented annually (i.e. a 10th of the remaining 90%). This tithe included crops and livestock, which were to be eaten in a meal of fellowship at the central sanctuary/tabernacle.

It was another way in which the Israelites were to express their unique relationship to and dependence on the Lord in reference to their food.⁸

You actually ate the meal before the Lord (cf. Deut 14:22-23). You would acknowledge that the food that you are eating came from the Lord not from your agricultural skills.

Those that lived far could simply sell their tithe of produce and livestock, travel to the central sanctuary, and then there buy the cattle, sheep, and wine and eat it at the sanctuary in God's presence (cf. Deut 14:24-27).

Yet at the end of every third year there was a special tithe. Instead of partaking of this *fellowship meal tithe*, you would give this tithe to feed the Levites and less fortunate members of society "*in your towns.*"

In God's system of tithing, your gift was two-dimensional, both vertical and horizontal – much like our love for God and for our fellow neighbor.

The *offering of firstfruits* to the Lord (cf. Deut 26:1-11) could not be separated from the act of kindness to your fellow neighbor, here referring to the *Levite*, the *strangers*, the *orphan*, the *widow* in your towns.

It is not a novelty that you are giving to God by giving to his people.

You remember our Lord's words in **Matt 25:40** –

⁴⁰ "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of them, **you did it to Me.**'

⁸ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), Dt 14:22–23.
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This tithe was considered a “*sacred portion*” to the Lord. It was special and dear to the Lord because it reflected His nature and His benevolence to the orphan.

You would actually go away having fulfilled this tithe with these words –

¹³ ... ‘I have removed the sacred *portion* from *my* house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, **the orphan** and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.

“This sacred portion belongs to you Lord. I have done as you have commanded me to do. I have not transgressed against your law. I have not forgotten Your Word. I have given to the orphan.”

CONCLUSION

Preaching in the Tabernacle, in 1867, on “*Believing to See*,” Spurgeon said:

*“I hope the day may soon come when the noble example which has been set by our esteemed brother, Mr. Müller, of Bristol, will be more constantly followed in all the Lord’s work; for, rest assured that, if we will but ‘believe to see,’ we shall see great things. I cannot forbear mentioning to you, to-night, what God has enabled us to see of late as a church. We met together, one Monday night, as you will remember, for prayer concerning the Orphanage; and it was not a little remarkable that, on the Saturday of that week, the Lord should have moved some friend, who knew nothing of our prayers, to give five hundred pounds to that object. It astonished some of you that, on the following Monday, God should have influenced another to give six hundred pounds! When I told you of that, at the next prayer-meeting, you did not think, perhaps, that the Lord had something else in store, and that, the following Tuesday, another friend would come with five hundred pounds! It was just the same in the building of this Tabernacle. **We were a few and poor people when we commenced; but, still, we moved on by faith**, and never went into debt. **We trusted in God**, and the house was built, to the eternal honour of Him who hears and answers prayer.*

*And, mark you, it will be so in the erection of this Orphan Home. We shall see greater things than these **if only our faith will precede our sight**. But if we go upon the old custom of our general Societies, and first look out for a regular income, and get our subscribers, and send round our collectors, and pay our percentages,—that is, do not trust God, but trust our subscribers,—if we go by that rule, we shall see very little, and have no room for believing. But if we shall just trust God, and believe that He never did leave a work that He put upon us, and never sets us to do a thing without meaning to help us through with it, we shall soon see that the God of Israel still lives, and that His arm is not shortened.”*

My beloved, what work will God impress upon your heart? What will He lay upon your heart? Have you considered the orphan in your midst? How does your heart respond to the truths you have heard?

Today is only the beginning. Next week as we look into the *NT* we shall see how Lord incorporates his heart for the orphan into the very fabric of our salvation. This is no small matter my beloved.

It was at the close of the Pentateuch we read a warning for all Israel. A warning we would do well to observe. **Deut 27:19** –

¹⁹ ‘Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

Let’s Pray.