

As I traveled through the land, I had the opportunity many times to see the golden fields of grain that fed our people. It was part of the beauty of our life and home. The First Fruits and Final Harvest¹ were times of great rejoicing enjoyed by both masters and servants. But the poor and unfortunate did not have much to celebrate.

When God commanded landowners to “not harvest to the very edges of your field²,” He was emphasizing an essential principle that the helpless must be helped. God is telling us that though everyone has the right to take and keep every bit of produce out of their land, the greater principle is that the aid be given to those in need. The commandment to tithe³ was given to fulfill this purpose, too.

This “gleaning” ordinance represents the idea that we do not always have to demand our full rights for things. Perhaps it is an allegory in some sense to steer us away from legalism and the quest for perfection and direct us towards helping the weak.

The story of Ruth is the greatest real example of the benefits of gleaning. In helping Ruth, Boaz contributed to the establishment of the legacy of King David, and thus, that of Christ. Like the idea of entertaining angels unaware⁴, we must consider the magnitude of the effect of helping others!

The apostle Paul discussed the idea of not necessarily exercising our full legal rights in his writings, claiming that it was not always the best for everyone (especially the helpless)⁵. He was also willing to act in his own mission work as though he was weak in order to win the weak⁶. The concept of helping the helpless was also emphasized in the writing of our brother James⁷.

The most important lesson that I see in all of this is the parallel of Christ, who had the “legal right” to be God and not have to come down earth and suffer for us. But He gave it up and “emptied” Himself⁸ to deal with the poor and helpless, a group of people, of course, to which we all belong. As I thought more about this, I realized that indeed, we are all “gleaners” in the Great field of God’s Grace.

1. Exodus 23:16
2. Leviticus 19:9 and 23:22
3. Leviticus 27:30
4. Hebrews 13:2
5. 1 Corinthians 10:23-24
6. 1 Corinthians 9:22
7. James 1:27
8. Philippians 2:5-8