

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON IMMIGRATION



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IMMIGRATION



How should we think about the current debate about immigration? How do we apply a biblical perspective to this complex issue?

In developing a biblical perspective, we must first acknowledge that there are two conflicting issues that generate lots of emotion. On the one hand is the concern of national security and a belief that citizens and aliens alike should obey the law. On the other

hand, is a concern for the poor and needy who want to come to this great country.

Government and the Rule of Law

The Bible instructs us to obey government: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1). Later in this passage, Paul reminds us that the government “does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God” (Romans 13:4). We are to be in subjection to governing authorities not only to avoid punishment, but also to be good citizens. Peter expands on this motivation in 1 Peter 2:13-15 – “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For

such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

You can also make the case that border security is biblical: “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples” (Deuteronomy 32:8). We are warned, “Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28; 23:10).

There are good reasons for a government to control its borders. First, is the issue of national security. Some of the people at our borders or who enter this country through a visa intend us harm. Even in the nation of Israel, the foreigners dwelling among them were required to enter into a covenant or obey God (Deuteronomy 31:12-13). A country must be able to

protect its citizens from harm that can be caused by criminals and terrorists.

A second reason to control our borders is economic prosperity. Every nation (including the US) has limited resources. A flood of aliens and immigrants does affect the economic status of a country. Countries have the right to enforce borders. In fact, a country that does NOT enforce its borders essentially ceases to be a country.

Third, border security is important for cultural integrity. A country has a right to maintain its democratic institutions and its historic traditions. If aliens and immigrants do not assimilate, then those values and traditions begin to disappear. Even in the nation of Israel, foreigners were prohibited from participating in the Passover unless their entire household was circumcised (Exodus 12:43-49).

America has a responsibility to make sure that people coming to this country support the US Constitution and the principles of our republic and society.

Compassion Towards Aliens and Immigrants

In addition to those biblical convictions about the rule of law and border security are other biblical principles that encourage us to also have biblical compassion toward aliens and strangers in the land.

The Old Testament called for Israel to treat aliens with respect. Exodus 22:21 says, "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt." We find a similar passage in Deuteronomy 10:18-19, "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love

the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” They were to remember their history as aliens dwelling in Egypt.

In Israel, the alien was put in the same category as widows and orphans. They could receive a portion of the tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). They had access to the gleanings in the field (Deuteronomy 24:19-22). It is also worth noting that these provisions did not apply to the foreigner who was temporarily in the country for work or other purposes.

But we should also understand the unique nature of the Old Testament theocracy and not make a one-to-one application to our country today. As I just mentioned, Deuteronomy 31:12-13 required that all foreigners dwelling in Israel must enter into the covenant to obey God. Those that did

not support God's leadership were not allowed to enter the land. We don't require and should not require that aliens and immigrants must be Christians who enter into a covenant with God. Another example has to do with the rights afforded to aliens in Israel. They were not given the same status and rights as Jews in the land (Deuteronomy 1:16, Numbers 15:16). These aren't policy positions that anyone would like to implement in America today.

We also have New Testament verses that apply. There are the commands of Jesus. For example, He teaches that we are to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan as an admonition for us to show kindness to strangers. And he instructed His disciples that "as you

did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:40). Hebrews 13:2 says we are not to “neglect to show hospitality to strangers.” Each person is created in the image of God and worthy of our love and concern.

Additional Biblical Principles

In addition to our biblical convictions about compassion, we should also apply a biblical standard of fairness. Why do so many millions around the world want to come to America? That is because living in the US and becoming a citizen is the highest achievement they could ever consider. It is almost like winning the lottery. In fact, many enter into what looks like a lottery to see if they might have an opportunity to come to this country and eventually become a naturalized citizen. The best estimates are that

about five million people around the world are on a waiting list to come to the United States and eventually become citizens.

Some members of Congress want to provide a pathway to citizenship for the approximately millions of people in this country here illegally. Some crossed our borders illegally. Others came here legally and overstayed their visas. And still others are children who were born here to parents who were here illegally.

Critics of the citizenship provision rightly argue that everyone should play by the same rules. We wouldn't put up with someone cutting ahead of us in line. We don't want to reward bad behavior. Yet, that is what could happen with a provision that provides a pathway to citizenship for people who broke the law and are here

illegally. They jumped in line ahead of the millions overseas who have been waiting to legally come to this country. Their presence in this country began with a violation of the law. Either they broke the law or else their parents broke the law. Any proposal adopted by Congress should also consider what is fair not only to people in this country but also fair to others who have waited their turn to come to America.

America has been blessed with a rich cultural and religious diversity. We are truly a "melting pot of people." We welcome a million immigrants to our nation each year. Many more come to this country illegally or overstay their visas illegally. But there should also be unity in the midst of our diversity. It is not too much to ask

that our government enforce the laws and require a uniform acceptance of the Constitution and principles of democracy and equality.

Whatever policies our government implements and whatever views we as Christians hold, we should attempt to balance our biblical convictions (about government and the rule of law) with our biblical compassion (toward the alien and immigrant).

Additional Resources

A Biblical Perspective on Immigration Policy

<https://cis.org/Report/Biblical-Perspective-Immigration-Policy>

Immigration Debate

<https://probe.org/one-christian-perspective-on-the-immigration-reform-debate/>

Immigration and Families

<http://www.breakpoint.org/2018/06/breakpoint-immigration-security-families/>

Jim Denison, Chapter Six: "Illegal Immigration," 7
Critical Issues (Denison Forum, 2016).

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