



Today we continue our series called Trending Now and we are looking at possibly the most controversial topic in our sermon series: Immigration. Immigration is defined as “the action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.” For our purposes today we’ll be considering how humanity treats people who are seeking refuge and/or opportunity in a country different from their homeland.

America has been built on immigration. James Madison said, “America was indebted to immigration for her settlement and prosperity. That part of America which had encouraged them most had advanced most rapidly in population, agriculture and the arts.” There’s a poem on the Statue of Liberty that ends with these words: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Recently, the ethics and practices of immigration have become more complicated and more politicized. It appears that the greatest controversy isn’t whether immigrants can come to America. In my research, I didn’t find anyone supporting a position of no immigration. The controversy is about the scrutiny of people’s background and illegal immigration. What does our nation do about people entering America with intention to hurt people or people entering the country illegally? How do we handle situations where sending illegals back to Mexico would separate families?

You have Marco Rubio saying, “Conservatives aren’t anti-immigrant; conservatives are pro-legal immigration.” You have Donald Trump pledging to build a wall and ban immigration from certain countries of origin. And you have President Obama’s 2014 SCOTUS Immigration Reform Act. In it the President sought to shield more than 4 million people—mostly Latinos—from deportation. But lower courts blocked its implementation after Texas and 25 other states sued, claiming the President had no power to order the changes.

In June of 2016, the Supreme Court delivered a split decision 4-4 on the legality of this immigration plan. Today it’s in legal limbo awaiting a ninth judge to be added to the Supreme Court. That person’s opinion will determine the future.

Interestingly, a massive “free-pass” has been given to illegal immigrants before. In 1986 Congress and Ronald Reagan passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which granted a

one-time amnesty to about 3 million illegal immigrants. It was supposed to be a one-time fix that would solve the problem of illegal immigration into the United States. None of the experts would say this Act accomplished its goal. It did not slow down or stop illegal immigration.

### **Why are Immigrants Coming to America?**

- To escape past or future persecution based on race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion.
- To escape conflict or violence.
- To find refuge after being displaced due to environmental factors.
- To seek superior healthcare.
- To escape poverty.
- To offer more opportunities to children.
- For family reunification.

Because people want these so badly, if the process of legal immigration is too prohibitive, many will come anyway and live in an illegal status.

### **What’s the Impact of Illegals on American Life?**

The Center for Immigration Studies estimates 13 million illegal immigrants are in America today. This represents 4% of our nation’s population. These illegal immigrants bring a financial cost to the American people. In 2002 that cost was \$10.4 billion or \$2700 per household. That’s an annual cost. You might wonder, What are we paying for? Medicaid, food stamps, WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutritional program for women, infants and children), free school lunches, federal prison and court systems, federal aid to schools.

I’m not a politician, nor do I fully understand all the complexities around this topic. This is a very complicated and expensive issue. But, here’s what I do know. Immigration is not just a political issue; we are talking about real people and their families. We are talking about people made in the image of God. So, the question for us is, as followers of Jesus, how should we respond? How are we to develop a biblical, graceful, loving ethic around immigration? How do we love God and love our neighbor? To answer this, I want to turn to scripture. First, we’ll look at Old Testament practices regarding the “foreigner” and then we’ll look at Jesus’ teaching on loving people.

## What Does the Bible Say about Immigration?

A lot. In fact, the Hebrew word *ger*, the closest word to our concept of a legal immigrant, appears 92 times in the Old Testament alone. *“Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt”* (Ex. 22:21). *“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt”* (Deut. 10:17-19).

What we see here is a window into the heart of God. God says, don't mistreat a foreigner. God loves the foreigner because he loves everybody. Based upon this, God instructs His people, the nation of Israel, to treat foreigners well, to defend them, to pay them fairly, to give them proper respect!

Why would God need to instruct his followers to not mistreat a foreigner? Because history reveals there's a natural tendency in humanity to mistreat them. When the U.S. was building their railroad across the nation, Chinese immigrants were paid a fraction of the wage that Caucasians were paid. The white Americans had all of the power and they used their position to exploit people in a weaker position. God doesn't like that! God wants people with power and influence to bless the weak, not mistreat them.

In both of these passages I read God reminds the Israelites that they were once welcomed into Egypt as foreigners with open arms during a severe famine. Joseph brought his family there and introduced them to Pharaoh. But, after Joseph died, the Pharaohs forgot about him and at some point enslaved the Jews. What started as a relationship of mutual dependence turned into oppression for 400 years. The Israelites were well acquainted with the weight of oppression and being the outsider. God points to that history and reminds them—don't mistreat foreigners. You didn't like it when you were a foreigner and I don't like it when any foreigner is mistreated. He commands Israel to love foreigners.

Immigration is also a theme in the book of Ruth. Ruth was a poor Moabite (non-Jew) while Boaz was a rich Israelite. Boaz was willing to be generous to Ruth, a foreigner, and allowed her to glean in his harvest fields. Ruth and Boaz got married and many generations later God's Son, Jesus Christ, was born from this lineage.

### **Biblical Theme #1 – Since God loves foreigners, his followers should love them too.**

This seems straightforward. But it gets more complicated with two main views regarding immigration.

#### **Regardless of legal status**

Based upon sections of scripture like these, some Christians conclude that they should love, defend and care for all immigrants,

regardless of their legal or illegal status in our country. Debra Haffner, a Unitarian Universalist minister, a denomination not known for taking Scripture seriously, offered a recent critique of the Arizona illegal immigration law in *The Washington Post* online (May 25, 2010), saying “It's as if the 70 percent of Arizonans who support the law have forgotten the Biblical injunction to ‘love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’”

#### **Conditional on legal status**

Some biblical scholars and theologians like Wayne Grudem and Professor of Old Testament James Hoffmeier would disagree with this approach. Based upon the Hebrew language and the Hebrew word *ger*, Hoffmeier says “these verses about the sojourner and foreigner refer to legal immigrants into a country ... other people who did not have this recognized standing were simply termed a *nekhar* and they did not have the same benefits of privileges that sojourners did.” If someone was in Israel illegally, these privileges did not extend to them.

### **Biblical Theme #2 – Most of the OT verses about foreigners are speaking about legal immigrants.**

#### **The Christian's relationship to the government**

People in the Conditional on Legal Status group would then look to scriptures on governance. They would ask, does the Bible give countries the authority to rule their land and make laws? Yes. Would these laws be extended to legal and illegal entry into their country? Yes.

Romans 13 instructs a Christian to submit to their governing authorities and not rebel against them. The government and those in authority over us are sovereignly put in our lives by God for our good, our protection and His plans. This means, as followers of Jesus, we need to obey the laws of our country, unless obedience to the laws is in direct contradiction to God's Word. In extreme situations, Christians should disobey the law of their land. Thank God Christians disobeyed the Nazi regime and illegally hid Jews in their homes and aided their escape through the underground railroad.

Does the immigration situation in America fit the parameters of disobeying our government? I couldn't find any scholar who said we should. Our immigration laws are in need of reform but they aren't so unbiblical that disobedience would be justified.

### **Biblical Theme #3 – God instructs his followers to submit to the laws of their country.**

The question then becomes not whether we break the laws but what should the laws be? Many well-intentioned Christians hold to the belief that our borders must be closed, immigration policy must be reformed, employees must be held accountable for hiring illegal immigrants, we should deport all known criminals, and finally, we should put together a difficult but possible path to full citizenship for illegal immigrants who are already here. However, other well-intentioned Christians would argue that

the easy thing is to lash out at all undocumented immigrants and call them “lawbreakers” while citing Romans 13 and demanding their deportation. They would argue that the issue is far more complicated than that. Yes, undocumented immigrants are violating the law, but their behavior is justified because they’re working to provide for their families back home and they’re leaving awful situations back home as well.

I want to look at two teachings of Jesus on the topic of loving people. The last biblical theme we’re going to see here is this:

#### **Biblical Theme #4 – While governments should and need to think about legalities, followers of Jesus should primarily think about loving others.**

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man (Israelite) was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest (Israelite) happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, (Israelite) when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, (foreigner) as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus’ instruction to love your neighbor is bigger than ethnicity, bigger than cultures, and cannot be limited by the laws of any country. A country can’t legislate who a Christian loves. We are called to love everyone. Here’s another teaching of Jesus.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you ... in these situations?...

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’...

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matt. 25:31-37, 40, 45-46).

Similar to the Good Samaritan parable, this section is describing a Christian’s love for their neighbor. Specific examples are:

- Hungry – gave food
- Thirsty – gave a drink
- Stranger and invited in – that’s hospitality
- Clothing – gave clothing
- Sick – you looked after me
- In prison – you came to visit

How would you describe the person who needs these? Needy and weak. They are **not** powerful. Jesus is saying to love your “weak” neighbor. Do immigrants fit this description? Most of them do. Jesus is teaching his followers that “loving your neighbor,” regardless of ethnicity or cultures, is a revealing sign that someone is actually a Christian.

Let me recap by reviewing the four biblical themes I’ve covered today. Then I’ll close with some applications.

**#1 – Since God loves foreigners his followers should love them too.**

**#2 – Most of the OT verses about foreigners are speaking about legal immigrants.**

**#3 – God instructs his followers to submit to the laws of their country.**

#### #4 – While governments should and need to think about legalities, followers of Jesus should primarily think about loving others.

I see two categories of applications: 1) the role of government and, 2) the role of a Christian.

#### The Role of Government

Immigration legislation and reform is a monumental task to deal with and it brings up so many political and governing challenges. I think it's responsible governing for America to figure out a way to secure the border. One of the people's expectations of their government is protection. Just this past week Germany experienced the horrific complications of this when a refugee from Syria, a 27-year-old Islamic terrorist, blew himself up outside a music festival.

Our laws should hold business accountable for hiring illegal immigrants and exploiting them. America needs a realistic way of either providing legal status for the millions of illegal immigrants who are already here or find a humane method of returning them to their home country.

I would recommend that any laws our country writes should be consistent with Biblical ethics. These would be the **best** laws. But Jesus did not say, "America is the hope of the world." He didn't say any country is the hope of the world. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." While we can reasonably expect our governments of the world to do their best, they will never have all the answers. But Jesus does.

#### The Role of a Christian

I believe, that as followers of Jesus Christ, our compassion demonstrates that our heart has been changed. It means you've moved from a me-centered life to a we-centered life where you seek to meet the needs of others, unconditionally. Here are four specific applications for every follower of Jesus.

#### Pray

All of us can pray for immigrants and refugees who are living in our communities right now.

#### Money

Some of us can donate money to organizations who help those who are vulnerable. Today, you'll have an opportunity to give to World Vision who are working with Syrian refugees.

#### Go

We are sending another missions team to Greece to work with Syrian refugees. If you are interested in going on that trip, email McKenna Mitchell on our North Campus Staff.

#### Do

Every week you have the chance to show the love of Jesus to the "weak" in our cities. When we serve at Street Church we don't ask the Hispanics about their immigration status; we feed them and we share the love of Jesus with them. That's how it should be.

*Blessed are You, Lord Jesus Christ.*

*You crossed every border*

*between Divinity and humanity*

*to make your home with us.*

*Help us to welcome you in newcomers,*

*migrants and refugees.*

*Blessed are You, God of all nations.*

*You bless our land richly*

*with goods of creation*

*and with people made in your image.*

*Help us to be good stewards and peacemakers,*

*who live as your children.*

*Blessed are You, Holy Spirit.*

*You work in the hearts of all*

*to bring about harmony and goodwill.*

*Strengthen us to welcome those*

*from other lands, cultures, religions,*

*that we may live in human solidarity*

*and in hope.*

*God of all people, grant us vision*

*to see your presence in our midst,*

*especially in our immigrant sisters and brothers.*

*Give us courage to open the door to our neighbors*

*and grace to build a society of justice.*

(Dominican prayer)

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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