

# Immigration

By Dave DeWitt

With many variations, there are two basic ideas prevalent among Christians on this subject:

1. As Christians, Jesus wants us to be merciful and compassionate toward those in need, and that includes those from other countries seeking asylum in our country. Abraham, Jacob, and Ruth were immigrants. Many are escaping poverty and oppression and want a better life for their families.
2. As Christians, Jesus wants us to protect our families and our neighbors against violence, immorality, drug abuse, and foreign religions. So immigrants should be legal and properly vetted. Illegal immigrants have broken the law and should be treated as all other lawbreakers.

In this paper, I would like to add another perspective to this issue. I am not the only one to recognize this, but most authors on the subject seem to mention this in passing, and I think it is the foundational principle that should steer our other thoughts on the subject.

## **Compassion is for individuals Immigration regulation is for governments**

For example, if you know of someone who needs help, whether they are an immigrant or not, whether they arrived legally or not, you should be compassionate and help them in any way you can, without breaking the law or jeopardizing the safety of your family. But the role of government is protection and justice, not mercy and compassion. People are to love their neighbors. Governments are to protect its citizens and enforce the nation's laws.

## **Jesus Gave No Commands for Governments**

The words of Jesus should never be used to guide government policies. Everything Jesus said was addressed to individuals. Jesus said only three things about government:

**First**, He was not forming one:

*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36).*

**Second**, we should pay our taxes:

*And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).*

**Third**, His authority came from heaven, not from any government, civil or religious:

*The chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, and they spoke, saying to Him, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?" Jesus answered and said to them, "I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me: 'Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?'"...So they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Luke 20:1-8).*

## **Jesus Did Not Address Governments Because His Focus Was Heavenly**

What Jesus did that turned Judaism on its ear was to bring an eternal perspective. Jesus' total focus was on a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one. That's why Jesus had nothing to say about governments. When God addressed governments, their judgment was always on this earth. God judged Egypt, Babylon, Israel as a nation, and the nations that surrounded Israel—here on this earth. He will also judge the

future government of the antichrist—here on this earth. When Jesus comes back, *the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). But two things should be observed about our earthly governments: (1) They are not eternal. None of them will go to heaven or hell. All corporate judgment, i.e. the judgment of a body politic, is always carried out on this earth. (2) Governments govern individuals who disagree with them. Those individuals cannot be adequately judged by judgment on their governments. Individuals can only be adequately judged when their life is over (Mark 12:40; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 10:25ff; Revelation 20:11-15). So the directives for individuals are very different than those for governments. And Jesus focused on eternal individuals, not temporal governments.

### **Individuals Are to Be Merciful and Compassionate to Other Individuals**

- **Matthew 9:13** — *But go and learn what this means: “I desire **compassion**, and not sacrifice,” for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners [Jesus quoting Hosea 6:6].*
- **Matthew 9:36** — *Seeing the people, He felt **compassion** for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.*
- **Matthew 20:34** — *Moved with **compassion**, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.*
- **Luke 10:33** — *But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt **compassion**.*
- **Galatians 6:10** — *So then, while we have opportunity, **let us do good to all people**, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*
- **Colossians 3:12** — *So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of **compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

### **Applying to Governments what Jesus Said to Individuals Ends in Perversion**

I recall hearing Hillary Clinton (some time ago) say, “The Democrat Party is more like Jesus than the Republican Party because it helps people” (my recollection, not a direct quote). Jesus said, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). But Jesus’ commandments were all for individuals. If we take Jesus’ commandments and apply them to government, as in what the government should do about immigration, we will have a disaster.

Let’s see what happens when we take Jesus’ commandments and direct them to government. Just as an example, let’s direct Jesus’ sermon on the *level place* in Luke 6:20-33 to government. Here are just a few of His statements, taken as a government mandate:

- *Blessed are you who are poor.* So the economically poorer the government is, the better.
  - *Blessed are you when men hate you... Woe to you when all men speak well of you.* So everybody should hate their government.
  - *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.* So our government should do good to terrorists, dictators, genocidal maniacs, and anyone else that hates our government and is trying to destroy us.
  - *Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.* So when Osama bin Laden attacked the twin towers in New York, we should have offered him the Empire State Building as well.
  - *Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.* So any murderous, terrorist regime that demands support, our government should give them whatever they ask and not ask for anything in return.
  - *Love your enemies, ...do good, ...lend, expecting nothing in return.* So our government should only make bad financial deals, operate with a trade deficit, and never expect to have a positive economy.
- Obviously, if we direct Jesus’ commands to governments, we will have a disaster.

## The Apostles Saw Government As Responsible for Justice

Peter wrote:

*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 (1 Peter 2:13-14).*

Paul told the Romans:

*For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil (Romans 13:3-4).*

Like Jesus, the apostles had no advice for governments. Their commands were for individual believers and they included a submission to their government. And keep in mind that the one most of the apostles were in submission to was the Roman government of Nero. But if we look at their commands from the government side, we can see what God expects of a government. In these passages, the job of government included:

- The one who will *bear the sword... The punishment of evildoers*
- *The praise of those who do right...a minister of God to you for good*
- *Being an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*

**Individuals** are to speak out, fellowship, instruct, and correct.

**Governments** are to regulate, control, manage, and contain.

**Individuals** are responsible to discern, approve or condemn, forgive, discipline, and show compassion.

**Governments** are responsible to enforce laws, execute justice, use the sword, reward, and punish.

Can the directives to one be applied to the other? Yes, but only within its commanded parameters. For example, a government can apply compassion to free its slaves, but not to free its criminals. Individual parents can apply management to their families, but not use the sword to do it.

Therefore, when it comes to immigration, individuals can show compassion, but a government has the responsibility to vet those wishing to come into the country. Individuals can discern an immigrant's need for fellowship. The government must determine if those who are immigrating are going to *do right* or be one who *practices evil*. Where an individual might protect an immigrant from persecution, a government has to protect a specific body politic from being exploited. Illegal immigrants have broken the law. Individuals might forgive, governments have to be *an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*.

If immigrants are not properly vetted by the government, there is no way to know if they are going to keep the laws of the land. Quite often, an immigrant is a refugee fleeing from an oppressive government. But they may also be fleeing from a government that is oppressive because it is following an evil culture or an immoral religion. If that's the case, then the question is, "Are they bringing that evil culture or immoral religion with them as they immigrate to a new country?" Because if they are, then they will likely reproduce the problem they left when they get where they are going. For example, consider when Protestants fled the oppression of Catholicism in Europe to come to America in the 1600s and 1700s. The Protestants' culture and religious understanding was that Catholicism was wrong, and they had a Reformation that turned them back to their Book, the Bible, and their founder, Jesus Christ. It was a Reformation of mercy, compassion, truth, and the Gospel. But Muslims also have a reformation and follow their book, the Koran, and their leader, Mohammed. Their reformation brings a religion of hate, revenge, and a determination to not be in submission to the western cultures, which they consider to be

“the great Satan.” Remember, Osama bin Laden was a “Martin Luther” of Islam. The Taliban, Hamas, and Isis **are** the reformation of Islam.

## **Old Testament Israel Treated Immigrants as Guests, Not Citizens**

Whereas the church is not a government but a plurality of believers living under different governments all over the world, Israel was a government. So what can we learn from God’s commands to the nation of Israel about immigration? First of all, we must say that the immigrants living in Israel were not exactly the same as immigrants to our countries. Since Israel was a racially-oriented theocracy, foreign immigrants were never completely assimilated (Deuteronomy 14:21; 15:1-3). The closest Hebrew word to “immigrant” would be the common word גֵר (*ger*). Here is how it is translated: alien (40), aliens (11), foreigners (1), immigrants (1), sojourner (5), sojourners (2), stranger (25), stranger’s (1), strangers (6).

### **Here Are Three Relevant Principles**

1. No גֵר (*ger*) “immigrant” was to be immediately assimilated into the nation, especially if they had a history of treating Israel poorly.
  - Deuteronomy 23:3-4 — *No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.*
2. No גֵר (*ger*) “immigrant” was to be treated unjustly just because they came from a different country or were of a different race. The government was to instruct its citizens to support every גֵר (*ger*) “immigrant” who needed support, as they would their own orphans and widows.
  - Deuteronomy 24:17-18 — *You shall not pervert the justice due **an alien** or an orphan ... 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.*
  - Ezekiel 22:29 — *The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the **sojourner** without justice.*
3. Every גֵר (*ger*) “immigrant” who immigrated into the nation was to keep the religious customs of the nation. They were not allowed to import their religious customs.
  - Exodus 20:10 — *but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or **your sojourner** who stays with you.*
  - Joshua 23:7 — *... you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods.*

## **Conclusion**

Individuals should treat immigrants as they would any neighbor. Immigration policies are to be determined by governments. Christians should not suppose, expect, or encourage their governments to follow the compassion-oriented commands of Jesus or the apostles because those were given to individual believers, not governments. If we see Jesus’ commands about turning the other cheek, loving your enemy, and giving to those who hate you, as pertaining to government, then government would not carry out its two prime objectives: (1) to protect its people and (2) to defend the justice written in its nation’s laws.

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