



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Bible and Immigration

151ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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FACT SHEET

“The Bible and Immigration”

CAPITOL COMMISSION – GEORGIA
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Introduction

Engraved on the Statue of Liberty are these famous 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-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” Lady Liberty was a welcome greeting to immigrants as their boats navigated toward Ellis Island (mostly between 1820 and 1900). The majority of those who became a part of the immigrant experience were motivated by the search for the American dream. Nevertheless, the estimated 5 million people in the United States, who lack “proper papers,” have made illegal immigration a challenging issue.

Few subjects are so fraught with misinformation and lack of information, complexity and paradox, political interest and governmental neglect, social concern and human callousness, careful economic analysis and fiscal incertitude.¹

Scripture does address the immigration issue. The purpose of this fact sheet is not to minimize the issues, but to provide the biblical teaching as a resource in formulating responses to immigration reform.

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

God redeemed Israel from the status of slavery to being a free nation. Therefore, it was imperative for the nation to have a detailed code by which their lives would be governed. For this reason, God supplied the Mosaic covenant (law). The Mosaic law was not designed to provide salvation but to reveal sin. Romans 3:20 states, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin” (cf. Rom 8:1-4; Gal 3:10-13; Jas 2:10). God designed the law to define sin and to contrast it with His

grace (Rom 5:20). Consequently, there is a rightful use of the Mosaic law even today.

The Ten Commandments (or Decalogue) were first revealed in Exodus 20. The subsequent chapters merely elaborate upon the Decalogue, especially with regard to ceremonial, civil, and moral issues. The Ten Commandments indicate the nature of God’s law. The most logical division of these commands is between the first 4, which outline responsibility to God, and the last 6, which outline responsibility to one another. In Luke 10:27-28, the Lord summarized the Decalogue: “And he answered, “YOU SHALL 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 YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.”

ONLY WHEN WE ARE IN PROPER RELATIONSHIP TO GOD ARE WE ABLE TO FULFILL OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHERS.

When Christ asked a question with regard to the nature of the law, the answer he accepted as correct was to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. There are two lessons to learn from the Lord’s response. *First*, the epitome of the law is love (cf. John 13:34-35). *Secondly*, it is only by recognizing our responsibility according to the first 4 commands that we will be able to fulfill the last 6 responsibilities. Only when we are in proper relationship to God are we able to fulfill our responsibilities to others.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

There are several statements in the Old Testament with regard to strangers (foreigners) among the Israelites. God’s people were to have a compassionate attitude and analogous actions toward any strangers among them. For instance, God’s people were not to exasperate or oppress any strangers in their land (Exod 22:1-2). Chapters 18-20 of Leviticus are an additional application of the Ten Commandments, especially with regard to prevalent non-Israelite customs. The Lord God commanded the Israelites not to glean their vineyards nor gather the fallen fruit of their vineyards; rather, they were to “leave them for the needy and for the stranger” (Lev 19:10). Boaz is an example of a godly landowner because he was obedient to the precepts of the law by allowing workers to

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glean in his field (Ruth 2). God's people were commanded to practice justice and mercy toward strangers (Deut 10:17-29; 24:17-21; Jer 7:5-8; Mal 3:5).

GOD'S PEOPLE WERE COMMANDED TO PRACTICE JUSTICE AND MERCY TOWARD STRANGERS...

Caution is necessary here for those who seek an immediate application by the United States toward the commands already specified. For example, if one is to be consistent in applying Old Testament passages to immigration reform, there are other commands to consider. Israel was commanded not to allow strangers to observe the Passover unless they assimilated into the nation by practicing circumcision (Exod 12:19-49). Those who did not assimilate were "cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether [they were] an alien or a native of the land." Moreover, there were laws with regard to interest being charged "to a foreigner," yet forbidding interest charges toward fellow "countrymen."

Consequently, there was a fundamental difference between the manners in which "countrymen" were treated in comparison "to a foreigner" (cf., for example, Lev 17:10-12). Moreover, the Hebrew verb גָּר (gurr) translated "sojourn" throughout the book of Leviticus indicates dwelling for a time (as opposed to remaining permanently). Merely examining the Old Testament *alone* would require immigrants (foreigners) to assimilate and would demand some conditional (and some unconditional) restrictions.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

To develop this resource further, the biblical teaching with regard to the poor is necessary, particularly because most immigrants who journey to the United States are poor in comparison to American economic standards. The Old Testament is explicit with regard to those who were poor (cf. Lev 19:10; Deut 15:11; Prov 21:13). The poor of the church were to receive care (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; Gal 2:10), especially widows (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 5:5-16). With regard to the poor of the world, the book of James (1:27; 2:6) instructs:

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

Compassion toward the poor is taught throughout Scripture. The applicability of God's Word is universal because its truth is absolute. Since obedience to God always brings blessing (cf. Ps 24:1-5), it is prudent to propose and enforce legislation consistent with His revealed Word. Compassion must be an

essential component for any response(s). However, with regard to immigrants (whether legal or illegal), the issue is admittedly complex because one can easily discern an environment in which any support system for the poor eventually becomes unviable due to the vast numbers. For this reason, one should consider the wisdom of God in requiring borders and boundaries (cf. Exod 19:12; Numb 2:17; Deut 32:8; Prov 22:28; Isa 9:7). There is minimal biblical support for someone to claim a "right" to live somewhere illegally.

Furthermore, since the gospel of salvation (by grace through faith in Christ) transcends racial distinctions (Eph 2:1—3:7), one may expect and value racial diversity, and to evangelize those who are without knowledge of God (cf. Luke 10:30-37; Acts 17:24-27). One may also respect the motivations of those who have concern with regard to leniency toward immigration, without shouting "racism" to seek responses in their favor.

Is it possible to be a restrictionist without also being a racist? Is it possible to favor strong measures to prevent illegal immigration from Mexico without being driven by xenophobia? I believe it is. There is a morally credible case to be made for more restrictive policies. This position should not be branded as inherently racist. The restrictionists raise legitimate concerns that must be carefully addressed, not simply dismissed out of hand.²

God has declared that in His kingdom, believers of "all the peoples, nations, and *men of every language*" will serve Him (Dan 7:14). God loves diversity and so should His people.

In conclusion, it is crucial to understand that God establishes civil authorities to preserve order, protect citizens, and punish wrongdoers (Matt 22:21; Rom 13:1-7). The only reason to disobey a law would be if it demanded something contrary to God's command (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; cf. Exod 1:15-22). All humanity is accountable to God (Rom 1:18-20); therefore, it would be wrong to allow or encourage anyone to disobey the rule of law, whether biblical or civil (cf. 1 Tim 1:5-11; Rom 13:1; Tit 3:1). Those who are partners in the ministry of Capitol Commission pray earnestly that our legislatures will propose both biblical and practical solutions.

¹ David W. Haines and Karen E. Rosenblum, eds., *Illegal Immigration in America: A Reference Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999) 1.

² Dana W. Wilbanks, *Re-creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 83.

ABOUT CAPITOL COMMISSION

Capitol Commission state directors are pastors/missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come. With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you. The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and to pray for their eternal salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). The desire of Capitol Commission is to witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.