

Politics According to the Bible

Immigration

Matthew 25:31-46

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Immigration

Scripture

Ethnic jokes exploit ethnic stereotypes. The format is usually where the butt of the joke is a person who belongs to an ethnic group singled out for abuse. So, for example, the English tell jokes about an Irishman, the Canadians about a Newfoundlander, the Americans about a Polish person, and the English-speaking South Africans about a character named “Van der Merwe.”

When I was in the Evangelical Free Church of America, I learned that the Swedish people told ethnic jokes about the Norwegians. The President of the Evangelical Free Church of America at that time, Dr. Thomas MacDill, loved to tell jokes, and he often told ethnic jokes about the Norwegians.

One evening, while addressing several thousand people at the Free Church’s General Conference, in an apparent sense of contrition about the inappropriateness of ethnic jokes, Dr. MacDill said the following, “For years I have made fun of the Norwegians. I realize now that making fun of another ethnic group is insulting and offensive. But I have so many jokes, and I wondered if there was a way to use my jokes without insulting any ethnic group. Then I thought about the Hittites. They lived back in Old Testament times, and there are no Hittites today. So, I won’t be in any danger of offending anyone if I tell jokes about the Hittites.”

Then Dr. MacDill proceeded to tell a joke, “There were two Hittites. Their names were Olie and Sven. . . .”

Ethnic jokes often poke fun at immigrants. Immigrants are at a disadvantage because they are usually not in a position to respond without negative repercussions.

We are currently in a series titled, “Politics According to the Bible.” We are examining key political issues that confront us today in light of the Bible.

Today, as we continue in our series on “Politics According to

the Bible” I want to examine “Immigration.” What does the Bible have to say about immigration? How should we vote regarding immigration?

I would like to draw your attention to Matthew 25:31-46:

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

Introduction

One of the important issues in this election is immigration.

In 2007 the *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007* was a bill discussed in the 110th United States Congress. The bill would have provided legal status and a path to legal citizenship for the approximately 12 million illegal immigrants currently residing in the United States. The bill was portrayed as a compromise between legalization of illegal immigrants and increased border enforcement: it included funding for 300 miles of vehicle barriers, 105 camera and radar towers, and 20,000 more Border Patrol agents, while simultaneously restructuring visa criteria around high skill workers. The bill received heated criticism from all sides in the debate, and was never approved as it died through a series of votes on amendments.

One critic of the immigration reform bill said, “It’s a disaster for national security, for keeping Islamist jihadists out of the country, for exploding the costs of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, for preserving the rule of law, and for that quaint principle called national sovereignty.”¹

Another critic said that American taxpayers would be saddled with a huge bill to pay for the social services needed by the illegal immigrants. The immigrants would receive \$2.5 trillion more in social service benefits than they would pay through taxes.²

Regardless of one’s view, immigration is a divisive issue. What does the Bible say about immigration? One person wore a T-shirt that asked the question this way: *Who would Jesus deport?*³

Lesson

Interestingly, the Bible has something to say on the issue of immigration. And so, as we consider politics according to the Bible, let us examine what the Bible says about immigration.

Let me use the following outline to guide us:

¹ “Immigration Debacle,” *Washington Times*, May 21, 2007, 36, www.washingtontimes.com/oped/20070520-094056-4013r.htm.

² David Limbaugh, “It’s Not About Ethnicity; It’s About the Law,” *Washington Times*, May 28, 2007, 30.

³ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *How Would Jesus Vote?: a Christian Perspective on the Issues* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2008), 146.

1. What does the New Testament teach about immigration?
2. What does the Old Testament teach about immigration?

I. What Does the New Testament Teach about Immigration?

First, then, what does the New Testament teach about immigration?

The words “immigration” or “immigrant” do not appear in the Bible. But that does not mean that the issue is not found in the Bible.

The first thing to note is that there are not many races; there is only one race—the human race (aka *Homo sapiens*). This is one of the most widely misunderstood concepts, even by Christians.

One often finds a question on application and other forms that asks for one’s “race.” Then follows a list, such as “Caucasian,” “African American,” “Native American,” etc. I always want to check off that I am an African American!

The Bible teaches that there is only one race, but many ethnic groups. Acts 17:26 says, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” The *New King James Version* puts it this way, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men. . . .”

That is what the Bible teaches: one race, but many ethnic groups or nations. We are all connected by one blood.

Pulitzer Prize winning playwright John Guare, in his 1990 play *Six Degrees of Separation* and the subsequent movie of the same name, proposes the theory that everyone on the planet can be connected to everyone else on the planet by no more than six steps. As one of the characters, Ouisa Kittredge, states,

I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation between us and everyone else on this planet. The President of the United States, a

gondolier in Venice, just fill in the names. I find it extremely comforting that we're so close. . . . I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people.⁴

The second point to note from Acts 17:26 is that God determines “the allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” In other words, just as God raises up leaders, so he also raises up nations, and allots them boundaries. Some argue that borders and boundaries are artificial, man-made barriers. However, the Bible teaches that God has sovereignly determined the boundaries of each nation, and it is right for nations to recognize and protect their borders.

Third, the New Testament uses three different terms to describe immigrants: “foreigner,” “pilgrim,” and “stranger.” Let’s look at each in turn.

The word “foreigner,” which is sometimes also translated as “sojourner,” “stranger,” or “resident alien” comes from the Greek word *par-oikos*. It literally means to have a home (*oikos*) near or beside (*para*). It corresponds to our concept of resident alien. Abraham’s descendants were resident aliens in Egypt where they would be in bondage to the Egyptians for four hundred years. Acts 7:6 (NRSV) says, “And God spoke in these terms, that his descendants would be *resident aliens* in a country belonging to others, who would enslave them and mistreat them during four hundred years.”

The word “pilgrim” comes from the Greek word *parepidemos*. This corresponds to our concept of an exile. The apostle Peter combines it with sojourner to remind believers that we are only passing through this world on our way to our glorious eternal home in heaven. He says in 1 Peter 2:11, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” Peter’s point is that believers are ultimately citizens of another world. We are to view ourselves as sojourners and exiles in this world.

⁴ Memorable quotes from *Six Degrees of Separation*. Accessed August 16, 2008 from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108149/quotes>.

The word “stranger” comes from the Greek word *xenos*. Jesus used the word in a description about the final judgment. He said in Matthew 25:35, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a *stranger* and you welcomed me.”

In a very real sense Jesus is a stranger to this world. He left the glories of heaven in order to come and live among us to reconcile us with his Father.

Moreover, he calls his people to reflect his own attitude and actions to others. And so, when the righteous at the judgment asked him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” Jesus answered and said, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:37-40).

Unfortunately, the Greek words are not always translated consistently, and that leads to some confusion. Nevertheless, we can affirm certain principles.

These words affirm that there are foreigners, pilgrims, and strangers. When the words are used in a spiritual sense, they remind us that just as Jesus was a foreigner, pilgrim, and stranger to this earth, we too are to recognize that our ultimate citizenship as Christians is now in heaven.

Another principle that we glean from the New Testament is that we are to treat strangers well. Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:37-40). We are to treat all people, including strangers, well, as if we were dealing with Jesus.

Mother Teresa used to say that she saw the face of Jesus in every poor, sick person she treated. That is the way we should view everyone, even those who are from different ethnic and national backgrounds.

II. What Does the Old Testament Teach about Immigration?

And second, what does the Old Testament teach about immigration?

God often reminds the Israelites in the Old Testament that they were strangers in a foreign land, and therefore they should show mercy to the strangers among them. So, we read in Leviticus 19:34, “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

I think it is important to note this because there is a sense in which so many people are immigrants, or, at least, are descendants of immigrants.

I remember preaching on the streets of Chicago in 1984, during the height of apartheid in South Africa. Eventually, I was talking to a black American. He detected that I had an accent, and wanted to know where I was from. When I told him I was from South Africa, he flew into a tirade against apartheid. Finally, he told me that all the whites should leave South Africa and go back to Europe. I was somewhat taken aback by the ferocity of his verbal attack, but managed to ask him where he was from. Of course, he said he was an American. “But,” I said, “if you go back far enough, where are your ancestors from?” He had to admit that they were from Africa. However, he did not think that he had to return to Africa.

The fact is that most of us, if we go back far enough, will discover that we are immigrants of some sort.

However, the fact that strangers (or immigrants, if you will) were to be treated *kindly* did not mean that they were treated *equally*. For example, the immigrants in the Old Testament could not participate in the temple activities.

God said in Exodus 12:48, “If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.”

Now, I understand that participation in the Passover is a reli-

gious celebration. However, Israel was a Church State. Identification with the state of Israel meant identification with the worship of Israel. We don't have that kind of government in our country, although we do have that kind of government in many Islamic countries.

The principle is that in order to participate in the nation one has to be willing to submit to laws of the nation. If one is not willing to submit to the laws of the nation, one cannot be a member of its society.

This principle is misunderstood by many in our country today. Let me ask you a question: "What makes you a citizen of the United States of America?" Most of you will say that you are a citizen of our country because you were born in the USA. Others might say that you are a citizen of our country because you became a naturalized citizen. Do you realize that such an answer is wrong?

Let me tell you why that answer is wrong. Edward J. Erler, in a fascinating article in a recent *Imprimis*, said the following:

Citizenship, of course, does not exist by nature; it is created by law, and the identification of citizens has always been considered an essential aspect of sovereignty. After all, the founders of a new nation are not born citizens of the new nation they create. Indeed, this is true of all citizens of a new nation—they are not born into it, but rather become citizens by law.

Although the Constitution of 1787 mentioned citizens, it did not define citizenship. It was in 1868 that a definition of citizenship entered the Constitution, with the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. Here is the familiar language: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." Thus there are two components to American citizenship: birth or naturalization in the U.S. *and* being subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S.⁵

Most people believe that anyone born in this country is au-

⁵ Edward J. Erler, "Birthright Citizenship and Dual Citizenship: Harbingers of Administrative Tyranny," *Imprimis*, July 2008, Volume 37, Number 7, page 2.

tomatically a citizen of this country, and that simply is not the case. In order to be a citizen of this country one must be born or naturalized in this country *and* submit to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Constitution.

I think that naturalized citizens perhaps have an advantage here, because they explicitly and intentionally submit to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Constitution. When I became a citizen of the United States on July 4, 2008, I attended a Naturalization Oath Ceremony. During the ceremony I had to take the Oath of Allegiance. This is what I said:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.⁶

One implication of a correct understanding of citizenship is that children of illegal immigrants are *not* automatically entitled to citizenship in this country. They are not thus automatically entitled to all its services and welfare.

Certainly, we are to treat immigrants, even illegal immigrants, with kindness, grace, and compassion. But, that does not mean that immigrants are entitled to everything that citizens are entitled to either. Our politicians have a difficult task of balancing all the difficult issues regarding immigration.

⁶U.S. Oath of Allegiance, found at the US Citizenship and Immigration Services website on Aug. 16, 2008: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=931696981298d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=d6f4194d3e88d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD>.

Conclusion

So, how should a Christian vote regarding the issue of immigration?

I believe Christians should vote for a politician who understood and balanced these various considerations. We should vote for a politician who understood that there are not many races, and that there really is no place for racism.

We should vote for protecting the borders. Our country has many enemies, and it is right to take appropriate protections on our borders and at the various ports of entry.

We should vote for treating immigrants with compassion and kindness.

And we should vote for allowing immigrants who are willing to submit to the jurisdiction of our country to become citizens. I don't believe that we should support laws that allow illegal aliens to stay in this country.

Come back next week as we learn about politics and marriage. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O God, thank you for your Word. Thank you for what we learn about politics according to the Bible.

As we think about the upcoming general election and our responsibility (and privilege) as citizens to vote, help us to understand politics according to the Bible.

O God, your Word teaches us about immigration. Your Word has much to say about that. Your Word teaches us that there is only one race, but many ethnic groups or nations. There is no place therefore for racism. Your Word teaches us that it is right to protect our borders, especially from those who would harm us. Your Word teaches us that we are to treat immigrants with kindness and compassion. Your Word teaches us that only immigrants who are willing to submit to the jurisdiction of this country should be allowed to become citizens.

Would you raise up political candidates who understand immigration, and can balance all the difficult issues regarding it?

And all of this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.