

Biblical Studies Program Spring 2012

Politics and the Bible

Lesson Six

Immigration and Taxation

I. Immigration ¹

A. Biblical teaching

1. The Old Testament has many verses that command the people of Israel to treat the “sojourner” fairly and with kindness
2. Ex 22:21 – *“You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”*
 - a. The word translated in the Old Testament “sojourner” or “stranger” describes “a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognize standing as a resident alien” ²
 - b. Other people, who did not have this recognized standing, were simply termed “foreigners” and did not have the same benefits or privileges that sojourners did
3. *“...illegal immigrants should not expect the same privileges from the state whose laws they disregard by virtue of their undocumented status... Therefore, it is legally and morally acceptable for government to deal with those in the country illegally according to the nation’s legal provisions. The Christian insists, however, that they be dealt with in a humane manner.”* ³
4. After a survey of the biblical data, Hoffmeier concludes, *“Nowhere in the Old Testament is there any sense that a nation had to accept immigrants, nor was being received as an alien a right.”* ⁴
5. In light of Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14 (that it is the general responsibility of governments to seek the good of the nations that they rule), the immigration policies of a nation should be designed to bring benefit to that specific nation

B. Application

1. The United States should control all immigration processes so that the country gives priority to accepting those people who will most likely make a positive contribution to United States society
2. It is appropriate to exclude the following:

¹These principles come from chapter twelve “Foreign Policy” in Wayne Grudem’s *Politics According to the Bible*, pages 470-483.

²James Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*, quoted by Wayne Grudem in *Politics According to the Bible*, page 470.

³*Ibid.*, page 471.

⁴*Ibid*

- a. Those with a criminal record
 - b. Those who have communicable diseases
 - c. Those who otherwise give indication that their overall contribution would likely be negative rather than positive, in terms of advancing the well-being of the nation
- C. Today, we are facing a “historically different” situation with regard to immigration
1. The argument is made that America is a nation of immigrants
 - a. This is certainly true
 - b. Almost every nation is a nation of immigrants
 2. The implication is then made by some that both legal and illegal immigration is a moral imperative justifying the transformation of the civil society
 3. Yet, the Declaration of Independence provides guidelines on this issue
 - a. It states that *“to secure these [unalienable] rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”*
 - b. Moreover, *“it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish [the government], and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness...”*
 4. The Declaration of Independence communicates that the principal responsibility of the government is to the citizens of that nation; otherwise, the government ceases to be legitimate
 - a. *Have the governed – the citizens of the United States – consented to the current state of legal and illegal immigration in the nation?*
 - b. *Do current immigration policies and enforcement practices affect the safety and happiness of the people?*
 5. No society can withstand the unconditional mass migration of aliens from every corner of the earth
 6. “The government, therefore, is not only justified but obligated to qualify immigration to those most likely to contribute to the well-being of the civil society, and to create the conditions in which aliens of differing backgrounds can be absorbed into the American culture.”⁵
 7. Grudem highlights two problems:
 - a. Illegal immigrants (those who enter the country illegally)
 - b. Permanent lack of assimilation

⁵ Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, page 163.

- (1) Too many immigrants who have come here legally (within the last forty years) do not seem to be assimilating well into American culture
- (2) They are forming their own ethnic communities in which their primary loyalty is not to the United States but to their nation of origin
- (3) In addition, many of these immigrants remain unskilled laborers, unable to rise above the lowest levels of annual income

D. Solutions to the two problems presented

1. Close the borders
 - a. The United States must take immediate action to effectively close its borders, especially the border with Mexico (from which most of the illegal immigrants originate)
 - b. As long as the borders are ineffective, the United States has no control and no ability to keep criminals, terrorists, and others who would do harm to our nation from entering
 - c. Even those who enter with no intent of breaking any further laws are acting in a way that is unfair to those immigrants who decide to abide by the law and wait years to be legally admitted
 - d. Illegal immigration creates a permanent “underclass” that is not protected by law, because the legal system does not have a record that they even exist
 - e. American citizens are not protected from the harm that dangerous illegal immigrants might do to others, because the legal system has no way to track them if they commit wrong
 - f. Illegal immigrants are more likely to form isolated communities (whose first loyalty to their country of origin)
 - g. Many do not feel responsible to contribute to the well-being of the United States society
 - h. Because their status here is “illegal,” their presence generates disrespect for the rule of law in the nation as a whole
2. The United States should enact comprehensive reform of the immigration system
 - a. Stop “chain migration” and begin exercising rational control over immigration
 - (1) Prior to 1965, priority was given to those people who would most clearly bring benefit to American society, as well as to their spouses and their minor children
 - (2) The **Hart-Celler Act of 1965** established a system by

which citizens of United States could sponsor *not only* a spouse and immediate children for immigration but *all of their* brothers and sisters, as well as their parents who are living in other countries

- (a) There was no limitation on the number of people who could become legal immigrants by this chain migration process
 - (b) As a result, the United States no longer has effective control over either (1) the number of immigrants that come into the country or (2) the qualifications that it can expect from immigrants
 - (c) The historical basis for making immigration decisions has been radically altered – aliens themselves decide who comes to the United States through family reunification
- (3) The United States no longer has the ability to decide who can enter the nation *based on giving priority to those who show that they will contribute in the most positive way to the well-being of the nation as a whole*
- b. Needed patriotic and educational reforms in the schools and the migration process
- (1) There must be reform in the educational system in the United States, so the cultural ideals and values that made America great are taught and passed down to each succeeding generation
 - (2) There should be much greater emphasis on the need for all immigrants from every nation to learn English well
 - (a) The United States needs a population that speaks the same language so that people can communicate well with each other in all parts of the nation and gain a sense of being one nation and one society
 - (b) The lack of knowledge of English seriously hinders the ability of people to achieve and advance in society
- c. Expanding the number of skilled workers who are admitted to the United States
- (1) The Hart-Celler Act has resulted in higher preference given to relatives of citizens and permanent resident aliens than to applicants with special job skills

- (2) Immigration reform should expand the number of highly-skilled people allowed to enter the country each year
 - 3. Enforce tighter regulations on employers with regard to illegal immigrants
 - a. Two kinds of harm:
 - (1) First, the immigrants themselves can be exploited
 - (2) Second, it provides incentive for other illegal immigrants to try to enter the country, thinking they too will find jobs
 - b. E-Verify program is a voluntary for most employers
- E. **The most difficult problem:** *What is to be done about illegal immigrants who are already here?*
 - 1. Before this issue can be effectively addressed, there must be an effective stopping of the flow of illegal immigration into the United States
 - 2. Suggested steps:
 - a. Deport all known criminals
 - b. Require immediate temporary registration of some kind for immigrants to receive any service from any facility in the United States
 - (1) Must know who and where they are
 - (2) They will not be immediately deported
 - (3) Proof of temporary registration required before any kind of benefit:
 - (a) Non-emergency medical care
 - (b) Welfare
 - (c) Public school attendance
 - (d) Working at any job
 - c. Extending the biblical requirements of mercy and compassion to those illegal immigrants who want to stay in the United States and who abide by the (new) law and are contributing most positively to American society
 - d. Requirements for citizenship:
 - (1) A fine (an acknowledgment that the person has broken the law)
 - (2) The need to learn a good working knowledge of English
 - (3) The need to swear allegiance to the United States above any other country
 - (4) The need to learn the values of American society and culture

- (5) The need for a background check to show that there is no prior criminal record
 - (6) For those who have been in the country and working illegally
 - (a) The need to show a record of employment
 - (b) Some arrangement regarding back-taxes that need to be paid
- F. What should American churches do about immigrants?
- 1. Taken full advantage of the opportunity to present the gospel
 - 2. For legal immigrants:
 - a. Be a welcoming community
 - b. Assist in helping families from other nations adapt to life in this country
 - c. Churches must remind employers (and others) to treat legal immigrants justly and fairly
 - 3. For illegal immigrants:
 - a. Churches must kindly counsel illegal immigrants that the Bible teaches that we are all “to be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom 13:1)
 - b. Illegal immigrants are obligated before God to obey the immigration laws of the United States
- G. Additional questions for consideration and discussion ⁶
- 1. People who enter the United States illegally have broken the law, but did they sin?
 - 2. Do people who want to enforce the law by adopting policies of forced repatriation of all who have entered the United States illegally violate many of Christ’s commands with regard to the poor and homeless?
 - 3. Given the tens of millions of people immigration laws would effect, where does “immigration policy” rank (in the order of key political issues) when we, as Christians, evaluate candidates for office?
- II. Taxes
- A. Taxes were a source of controversy even in Jesus’ day
 - 1. Matt 22:17 – *“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*
 - 2. Matt 22:21 – *“...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”*
 - B. Rom 13:6-7 – *“For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. (7) Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”*
 - 1. Therefore, it is right to pay taxes to the civil government

⁶From Hugh Hewitt’s small group study on government and politics for Christians entitled *The Good and Faithful Servant*

2. And it is right for government to collect taxes to carry out its responsibilities
- C. However, the Bible gives no support to the idea that government should use taxes simply to *redistribute* income from the rich to the poor
 1. The Bible's teaching about the purpose of civil government, about the ownership of private property, and the principles of economic productivity does not support the (Marxist) idea of redistribution of income
 2. The redistribution of wealth is not a biblically-mandated function of government (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14)
 - a. It is not part of punishing evil and rewarding good
 - b. And it is not part of impartially enforcing justice
 - c. Rather, it is carrying out an additional social agenda that the Bible does not support
- D. Taxes are a powerful tool that can either help or hinder economic growth
- E. Two extremes:
 1. If the tax rate is 0%, then the government has no money to support its functions and it cannot carry out its responsibilities
 2. On the other hand, if the tax rate is 100%, then government controls all economic life and no one has freedom to invest, build, or create anything (or give to others)
- F. Every increase in taxes takes away that much more human freedom
- G. The benefit of lower taxes:
 1. When tax rates are lowered, this encourages businesses to invest and grow
 2. This provides more jobs and lower prices, both of which are beneficial for the economy and both of which encourage overall economic growth
 3. As the economy grows, businesses and individuals earn higher incomes
 4. These higher incomes are taxed at the lower rate, but more tax money still flows into the government coffers, because people are paying taxes on so much more income
- H. There is the misconception that imposing high taxes on corporations is just another way of taking money from the rich and that this does not affect ordinary people at all
 1. Higher taxes force corporations to raise the prices of their goods or reduce the number of employees (as part of overall cost reduction)
 2. Therefore, the whole society pays this "invisible tax"
- I. The Bible teaches that each person deserves *what he has legally earned* in each year (Luke 10:7 - "...the laborer deserves his wages")
- J. It is good for society if everyone who earns income pay some taxes, and it

is destructive to society if most people who earn income pay little or no taxes

- K. How much should the rich man pay?
1. The economy as a whole, all the people in the nation, and the government all gain benefits from lower taxes on the rich
 2. Benefits of lowering the permanent tax rates in a nation, and especially the benefits of lowering the tax rates on the wealthier members of society, are these:
 - a. It means that each taxpayer is able to keep more of his own money which not only helps him but also, because the money is quickly put to work, helps others in the economy, and the economy grows
 - b. It gives more incentive for people to work and to be productive, and this also means that the economy will grow
 - c. The government will soon collect more money in taxes
 - d. There will be a significant increase in personal liberty in the nation
 3. Taxing the rich less will help the economy and help everybody; but taxing the rich more will hurt the economy and hurt everyone else as well
- L. A conservative position on taxation ⁷
1. **Eliminate the progressive income tax** – replace it with a flat income tax or national sales tax – for its purpose is to redistribute wealth, not fund the constitutionally legitimate functions of the federal government
 2. **All residents of the country must be required to pay the tax**, so that they have a stake in limiting its abuse
 3. **Eliminate the automatic withholding of taxes**, for it conceals the extent to which the federal government is confiscating income from its citizens
 4. **Eliminate the corporate income tax**, for it is nothing more than double taxation on shareholders and consumers, and penalizes wealth and job creation
 5. **Eliminate the death tax**, for it denies citizens the right to confer the material value they have created during their lives to whomever they wish, including their family
 6. **All federal income tax increases will require a super majority vote** of three-fifths of Congress
 7. **Limit federal spending** each year to less than 20 percent of the gross domestic product

⁷Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, pages 7-8.