

Introduction

Today we want to take look at immigration. Our primary concern will be to lay a Biblical foundation for how we can interpret the practical reality around us, the facts that are presented to us and the legal structure in which we live and operate.

3 Perspectives about What is an immigrant?

We all have a perspective on what is an immigrant so I thought it would be useful for us to look at how an immigrant is defined Biblically, socially, and legally as we enter into a discussion on the topic.

Our English Bibles us words like Sojourner or Stranger. In contemporary language we might use the word Foreigner, and in law we get the term "Alien."

The Biblical View of an Immigrant

The two Biblical words most often used are:

- In the OT the Hebrew word " ger " often translated Stranger or Sojourner,
- In the New Testament we have the Greek word " xenos " most often translated Stranger, but sometimes Alien

OT -Sojourner/Stranger

The word most often used in the bible for immigrant is " ger " and it is used more than 92 times. It encompass both the temporary and the permanent type of foreigner. Moses named his son with the word ger som - "I have been a foreigner in a foreign land" - Exodus 18:3

It refers especially to those who are displaced from customs and family. Examples of this are:

- Genesis 23:4 Abraham was a ger, his intent was to permanently dwell in Canaan.
- When Job examined himself before his accusers he says in 31:32 "I have never turned away a ger stranger (the ger) but have opened my doors to everyone.

The Bible does not distinguish between the immigrant's intent. There were not city-states in Bible times so those questions of intent were not directly addressed

NT & Hospitality

Throughout the entire Bible God demonstrates and commands his followers to practice hospitality. Our English word "hospitality" comes from the NT Greek word philoxenia which is from two root words meaning foreigner phil stranger and the word xenia which means love. In other words we are to show love to strangers, hospitality to others.

Philoxenia ● Hospitality or "Love of strangers" is used in **Romans 12:13** to show us one of the defining characteristics of a Christ follower.

Philoxenia ● In **1 Timothy** is one of the qualifications for a pastor/elder.

of Hospitality what comes to mind perhaps is Martha Stewart and we set aside to entertain guests. But biblical hospitality is more of a style It is a life defined by the love of strangers (the other) not by a s.

We on the other hand are often taught from an early age to avoid people that we do not know or who are different from us. How many of you remember the campaign aimed at children called "Stranger Danger"? I know it had good intentions, and perhaps teaches a valuable lesson to protect children, but God encourages not to have suspicion of strangers, but rather to see them as a

blessing. He even tells us that an angel might even appear to us in the form of a stranger -

Philoxenus **Hebrews 13:2** "Be careful to show hospitality to strangers), because some have hosted angels unawares! Just think if we are to entertain an angel it might be in the form of a stranger!

Did this ever happen before? Well actually it did. This passage hearkens back to the OT and Abraham at _____ !

The Good Samaritan

The most recognizable demonstration of the Biblical hospitality in the New Testament was the parable that Jesus told when asked by that smart-alec lawyer who was the neighbor that we are supposed to love. Jesus's answer shocked his listeners. From the perspective of Jesus audience, the Samaritan was himself *Philoxenus* "foreigner", but it was he who demonstrated "_____ as he stopped to help the "foreigner." Could it be that Jesus was actually telling us that the second greatest commandment includes loving even the immigrants in our life? Well it is completely consistent with the Old Testament teaching and latter the new Testament teaching on hospitality!

The Social View of an Immigrant: Foreigner

Our perceptions of immigrants are shaped by our exposure to them. Trying to help our children understand the nature of who an immigrant is, in this day and time, brought some interesting observations up. Jubilee, our oldest daughter, explained to us how she understood that Africans are..... BALD. So, we have a friend from South Africa who is as white as we are. Judah, our son, said, "But Mrs. Diane isn't bald!"

Generally speaking anyone who doesn't look or sound like they are from "our" country are considered immigrants/foreigners. The Biblical view of what an immigrant view is compares to the current social view of immigrant: someone from another place, However our country is so diverse that the categories get confusing. This difficulty in identifying accurately who is an immigrant has led us to assume that anyone who does not look like me, or my family or who speak any language other than ours must be an immigrant.

Here is a funny video to demonstrate this. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ>)

The Legal View: Alien

Now if anyone here is an immigration lawyer or accredited representative this explanation may give you heartburn, but this is a simplified explanation of one of the two most complex bodies of law in US jurisprudence...those being immigration and tax law. □

Alien is the legal term is used to refer to someone who belongs to another country.

Among the aliens that our law recognizes, it distinguishes between two types,

Immigrants and non-immigrants. Those who intend to make the US their home and those who are here for a temporary purpose.

(Lawful Permanent Resident) LPR is the only pathway to citizenship in the US immigration law! In terms of an immigrant, there are 3 basic ways to immigrate to the US:

1. Through a family relationship.
2. Humanitarian reasons.
3. To have an employer who has petitioned for you to come and work for him.

Family Immigration

The family is considered two categories: Immediate relatives and Preference category

Immediate relatives of US Citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents normally include:

- Spouses and
- Unmarried children under 21

Preference relatives normally are

- Adult children Unmarried
- Adult children Married
- Parents

By and large immediate relatives can immediately immigrate, but preference categories have a waiting time of up to 23 years depending on country caps.

Example

A pastor from Asheboro called me this year who is a USC. He and his wife are in their 80's and have not been able to travel for several years. They have two adult sons in Mexico. They called to find out what possibility they had of getting their sons to come and transition to leadership in the church that he currently pastors. He explained to me about their education, how well behaved they were, respected in the community, love the Lord, educated in the Scriptures, how they would be such a blessing to the church and that they are hard workers. As it turns out he could apply for them as their father but the wait time would be 18 years. He told me in tears that he did not expect he or his wife to live that long, wasn't there anything I could do.

Humanitarian Immigration

By and Large, the only type of relief for humanitarian immigrant status from outside the US is "refugee." There is only one condition under which a person can enter the country as an immigrant for humanitarian reasons. Those conditions are determined by the UN. However there are several ways a person can obtain immigrant status under humanitarian visas once they arrive in the US.

- Victims of violence crime, or traffic victims or
- TPS,
- Asylum.

Example

I have a client right now who is 20 years old. She has been repeatedly violated by several men and boys since she was 15. She is targeted in some part because she is indigenous, and mentally underdeveloped. She fled Guatemala after the father of her second child attempted to kill the unborn baby while in utero. The journey to the US brought her across Mexico with a newborn and a 2 year old. That journey lasted 2 months and they endured unspeakable hardships on the journey.

She asked for asylum and was allowed to enter in order to prepare and present her case before an immigration judge. She does not speak English and Spanish is her second language. She was told to find a lawyer to represent her and her children. She came to our offices to see what help there was for her. It appears that she has a possible weak claim to asylum but we don't do defensive asylum cases yet. The cost for a private attorney who can take this case are expensive, and it is a long shot that she will qualify for asylum. She has no other options.

Employment Immigration

The employment category requires that the prospective alien has

- a specific employer with a specific job that requires specialized or very advanced education or skills
- OR more than \$1 million to invest, a recognized genius or artist,
- OR a religious worker from a particular denomination coming with training from that denomination.

Example

I had a couple in my office from Colombia who studied and taught in a Baptist University in Colombia. They have 2 children who are here in NC on non-immigrant student visas. Their church is a large one, and is considered a denomination in Colombia because there are several across the country. They desire to come to the US to open a work here, but as of right now there is no way for them to immigrate to the US.

The husband and wife are here on tourist visas.

Diversity Lottery

The diversity lottery is exactly as it sounds. Each year 50,000 names are chosen from a lottery system that is applied for online. There is a cost to apply and one must renew their application each year.

How can one come to the US

So in terms of coming to the US, If one does not have a

- Qualifying relative,
- Extraordinary tragedy
- Very specialized education, skill or job offer
- A huge amount of money
- The luck of the draw

There is simply no way for most people in the world to come into the US legally. Gone are the days of Ellis or Angel Island where you show up get a physical, and accepted or rejected. Most people of the world have no options to legally enter the US. The Statue of Liberty is a nice ideal, but no longer applies to the US immigration system.

Other than Legal Aliens

- **EWI** (entered without inspection) - not a felony but rather a civil infraction much like transporting fruit across state lines.
- **Overstay** - about 40% of aliens that do not have legal status were qualified to enter, but overstayed their visa allotted time.
- **Legal Presence/no Legal Status** - persons who have been given a deferment from deportation in the national interest or humanitarian reasons
- **Asylum Seekers** - Awaiting the adjudication of their cases
- **Legal Limbo** - there are a myriad of quirky legal conundrums that have not been resolved

Newcomers to NC

There are almost 800,000 immigrants that live in NC. That is about 8% of the population. This gives a tremendous opportunity to practice hospitality the Christlike way!

Demographics in NC

- While Latin America represent almost 60% of the population of immigrants in NC, the Asian population is growing very rapidly
- More than 1 in 10 North Carolinians are Latino or Asian.
- Less than 5% are undocumented.

Immigrants in NC come from all over the world

To provide some perspective on the growth of the immigrant population and its effects on the Demographics consider that in 2012 43% of all NC Public school Children were either Asian Black or Latino or 17% Asian or Latino.

Consider if we were to suddenly stop all immigration today this country would continue to brown so that in 2 decades there will be a majority minority. Even if we were to deport the 5% of our NC population that is undocumented we still will be dealing with a major population shift. Of note also, the white population has a birth rate of about 1/2 that of immigrants and are on average about 15 years older.

Given that we have aborted a huge section of our workforce, and the lower birthrates, could it be that part of the blessing of immigrants is that they are a younger and eager workforce?

Contribution of Immigrant to NC

Immigrants have learned English and become an integral part of the society

- 8.6% of all business owners in NC are foreign born and make up only 8% of the population.
- 31.9% - are eligible to vote
- Almost 80% of immigrant children are considered English proficient

Why Does It Matter (from a Christian Perspective)?

Since we are quickly becoming a majority minority society. It makes one wonder what God thinks of all these people immigrating all over the planet. Immigration was part of God's original plan – "Replenish the earth." When man refused to immigrate at Babel, God forcibly immigrated them. What could be God's interest in the immigration of people on the earth? **Acts 17:26-27** give a little hint as to His plan.

A Christian Blind Spot

By their own admission, most Christians do not think about immigration from a biblical perspective. Just 12% of white evangelicals say that their views on immigration are primarily influenced by their Christian faith. Perhaps that is because just 16% of white evangelicals have heard about immigration from their pastor. That is not however because the bible has little to say on the subject.

Many Heroes of the faith were Immigrants

- Abraham - Perhaps illegal (false pretenses)
- Rebekah - Family
- Joseph - Trafficking
- Ruth - Economic immigrant
- David - Asylum seeker
- Jesus - Refugee/ Celestial Immigrant
- Paul - Employment-Based Immigrant

God's Law for the Israelites repeatedly insists that the native-born and the immigrant be treated equally.

- The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you (Exodus 12:49 NIV)
- Just like the citizens, immigrants were entitled under the law to:
 - Fair treatment as laborers (Deuteronomy 24:14)
 - A Sabbath rest from work (Exodus 20:10)
 - Prompt payment for labor (Deuteronomy 24:15)
 - Equal treatment when accused of a crime (Leviticus 20:2, 24:16, 24:21-23)

God recognizes immigrants as uniquely vulnerable to injustice, alongside the fatherless and the widow

- The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow (Psalm 146:9 NIV)
- "Cursed is anyone who obstructs the legal rights of immigrants, orphans, or widows." All the people will reply: "We agree!" (Deuteronomy 27:19 CEB)
- If you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; if you stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, only then will I dwell with you in this place (Jeremiah 7:6 CEB)

Somehow I had confused the meaning of Justice with only something imputed that He did for me in Salvation , and not something He does through (active) me in a Redemptive way! Rom 6:19 We are to yield our bodies to justice that is what is approved or deemed right in His eyes. So, Justice includes something that He allows me to do on His behalf. Isaiah 58 tells what He sees as Justice (or righteous) is connected directly to how we deal with the vulnerable or marginalized.

Christians are to uphold Justice

- "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 3:5 NIV)
- Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion... Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor" (Zechariah 7:9-10 NKJV)
- Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place (Jeremiah 22:3 ESV)

In the New and Old testaments our acts of virtue and justice are often measured in terms of how we treat the widow orphan and stranger. In Malachi we find depriving justice for strangers in the list with some pretty otherwise "bad" sins, sorcery, adultery, lying, robbery, extortion, and unbelief

In Zechariah we see mercy and compassion linked with how we treat the window orphans and the ger. In Jeremiah we see the profit describing justice and righteousness in terms of not wronging the ger.

God commands His people to remember their own immigrant history

- You must not oppress foreigners. You know what it's like to be a foreigner, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt (Exodus 23:9 NLT) See also Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 10:19
- Paul encourages us to remember that we too were strangers to the grace of God in Ephesians 2
- Most North American Christians also have immigrant histories, (spiritually and politically) which we would do well to remember, and to allow to inform how we treat immigrants

Christians are to obey the law

- Most immigrants in the US have legal status
- But about 1/3 of immigrants are present unlawfully, so we also need to wrestle with passages that speak to how Christians should relate to the law.
- Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God (Romans 13:1)
- For the US citizen, there is no conflict between welcoming immigrants and following the law (at least for now)
- Were laws to change, and ministry to be made illegal, Scripture makes clear that there are certain instances where "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

Legislation has been introduced in the "Safe Act" which could have made it illegal to transport a person who is undocumented to church or offer a cup of cold water, or obey most of what Matthew 25 tells us to do. I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was in prison and you visited me, I was a _____ and you welcomed me.

Can you think of any person in your experience who more embodies the very person that Jesus was referring to in Matthew 25:35 than the boy or girl who comes looking for refuge from unimaginable suffering who arrives after having been trafficked across a foreign country and having walked across a desert, and now is detention awaiting an opportunity to present his or her case before judge. Hungry, thirsty, worn out clothes, immigrant, incarcerated?

Immigrant Christians need wrestle with it!

Undocumented brothers and sisters need to wrestle before God with their situation. Many came out of desperation, seeking to provide for their families, and Scripture tells us that "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). Most undocumented immigrants within the Church are eager to get right with the law, but current law does not allow for this reconciliation.

Example

A friend of ours in the area is a Mother of two children. She is Christian and an active member in a big local church. Most of her church does not know that she is not currently here legally. She is a small group leader, and volunteers as the church about 20 hrs per week. Se is very close with many of the leaders in the church who love her dearly. She Speaks English very well and has a post Grad education. They have 2 Children (1 is a US Citizen). Currently it is not safe for her to return to her home country especially with her US born child. Her husband has already been deported after losing his asylum appeal, and is in hiding in the home country. He is currently looking for a safe place in the world to reunite his family.

She is considering what are her best options. She is concerned obviously for their safety, but also for her foreign born oldest child who will lose any chance of remaining or returning to the US if she is to leave, and yet she has grown up here in the US and is culturally and linguistically “American.”

She does have to wrestle with what is the correct path for her to take. Should she work when it is against the law? Drive? How is she to live. Should she go back to the home country where she will certainly become a target of the government for at best jail or at worst death! How about her children, one from the US and one from the home country?

You see, Romans 13 looks easy until the “law of the land” crosses your other priorities!

Our current immigration system— where laws are selectively ignored— mocks the ideal of the rule of law; we can all advocate for a more functional system that restores the rule of law.

A Missional Opportunity

Bill Hyles has said, “As we’ve ministered to immigrants, many have come to know Jesus. Immigration presents an opportunity to “make disciples of all nations” right in our own neighborhoods! **The immigrants in our church – some of whom brought a vibrant faith with them to the United States and others of whom met Jesus here for the first time – have blessed us in a myriad of ways and become powerful agents of God’s mission.** My hope and prayer is not only that many of the undocumented immigrants in our country would eventually be allowed to become U.S. citizens, but – more importantly – that many more would embrace the God who invites them to be citizens of his eternal kingdom.”

Senior Pastor, Willow Creek Community Church

Evangelicalism would be in decline in the US if it were not for immigrant churches. Yes, they are the most responsive to the gospel, but many of them come to the US with a vibrant faith and breath new life into dying churches. Many of the immigrant Christians have learned to live out their faith in circumstances that we only hear about in the news. They have learned to be Christians in persecution, in poverty, in the minority, with illiteracy, even sometimes without a Bible of their own.

This is a video of Asian Christians as they receive a box of Bibles.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_NRoZ56zRQ

But many evangelical churches are missing this missional opportunity

- That may be because most white evangelicals say immigrants are “a burden on our country” and that immigration “threatens traditional American customs and values” (Pew Forum Survey, May 2011, analyzed by Christianity Today)
- Just 10% of churches in the US have any sort of ministry or ministry partnership focused on refugees or other immigrants (Harford Seminary Faith Communities Today Survey, 2010)
- And, as a likely effect, fully 60% of those from non-Christian religious traditions in the U.S.—most of them immigrants—say they do not know any Christians (Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 2013)

Pray

Scripture tells us to “pray without ceasing” so prayer should be at the beginning, middle, and end of our engagement with this issue. This issue is a huge issue, and none of us has the authority to change the structural problems in the immigration system... but God does. We can pray in particular

for Immigrants in our community, Our churches, for wisdom and courage in engaging this issue, Our legislators and the President, for wisdom and courage to pass just laws.

For me it is hard to pray about all the things that are needful of prayer. But most of us have several immigrants in our lives. Their lives are pretty complicated. Simply asking the waiter, or hotel maid, or law guy, or painter if there is something that you can pray for them about will begin to change our own heart and allow us to learn to love them like He loves them.

I am amazed at how important this little step is in my life and the life of immigrants. I get to do this almost everyday of my life, and usually there is not a day goes by that I do not see a tear in the eye of an immigrant when I look up from prayer!

Talk

Get the facts and tell others. Encourage your local church to get involved.

Churches could ask a pastor of a nearby immigrant congregation to share with their congregation. Dedicate a Sunday School class, missions conference, or Sunday sermon to looking at immigration in Scripture

Invite a speaker to your church or event. Follow and repost on twitter and facebook. Respond to newspaper as a Christian . Connect with a Christian org like CIR, World Relief, to keep informed.

It is important for us to change the rhetoric around how we as Christians see immigrants the ger/xenos. As we we gather around the water cooler, or over the lunch, or around the dinner table we can begin to share God's heart for the immigrant and start to shape the way in which our churches and society looks at the immigrant.

- We need to be armed with the facts not the nightly news.
- We need to be armed with the Word rather than societal perceptions
- We can arm ourselves with the Word and the facts by being connecting with a few Christian non profits who minister to immigrants on a daily basis, and pray for and study about the policies that govern our society.

Advocate

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- Call/write your Federal Rep & State
- Speak up on local issues
- Run for office - we need candidates with His heart for the immigrant
- Call 866-877-5552

On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see than an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

Expand the Kingdom

Kingdom building is much more than sharing a tract, a testimony, or even a verbal witness!

Luke 4:18 He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

You may say I don't speak the language, but that has stopped us from taking a week off to go on a mission trip. How did you preach the Gospel then?

Luke 4:18 speaks of Jesus's ministry of preaching the Gospel to the poor ("to crouch or cower like a beggar") the marginalized! In this Jesus was announcing that the marginalized had become the center! To the Jews this was not a welcomed message! Jesus declared that his ministry was not in preaching only or primarily, included those things that our mouth could not do.

- Healing the Centurion's Son
- Conversing with the Samaritan woman
- Ministry to Capernaum
 - those were the people of mixed marriages, and immigrants of the time and the marginalized, the outcast from the Temple worship... the blind, lame, lepers. Have you ever wonder why Jesus came into contact with so many of these people. It's because he took his message to Capernaum where they were.
 - The center rejected me I am going to the margins. Jesus brought the margin to the center of His ministry.
 - As we minister to and identify with the marginalized we began to realize how fallible weak we are, and it is then that we begin to experience the heart of Jesus's ministry.

Take a look at Proverbs 9 and see to whom "Wisdom is ready to receive." It was not to those who were well positioned in society. It was to the ignoramuses. What was the problem with the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3... it was "Because You think you have become wealthy and don't need anything. But you don't know that you are really miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." Again we see that Jesus appealed to his ministry to the poor. The margins were brought to the center! As soon as we step out of our own comfort and reach into the margins it helps us identify with the marginalized, and it is only then that we can begin to understand the center of His ministry as we ourselves become and identify with the marginalized. I am beginning to see how marginalized I am and how much He loves those at the margins. Check out David Spickard's blog post "[When Poverty is No Longer a 4 Letter Word](#)"

Books

- Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate by Matthew Soerens & Jenny Hwang (InterVarsity Press, 2009)
- Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible by Daniel Carroll (Baker, 2008)

Websites

- EvangelicalimmigrationTable.com
- G92.org
- Ciraleigh.org
- Worldrelief.org