

We live in a world today where xenophobia (fear of strangers) has taken hold. Many people have a negative view of immigrants. But if we want to follow Bible principles, how should we view immigrants?



How should we view immigrants?

“Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith” (Romans 4:11 NLT). Did you know that **“a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down to Egypt, where he lived as a foreigner” (Genesis 12:10 NLT)**? How would God view someone who would refuse to help, or even attempt to deport Abram? The Mosaic Law included this principle: **“Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO BE FOREIGNERS, because you were foreigners in Egypt” (Exodus 23:9 NLT).** The entire nation of Israel lived in Egypt as foreigners for many years, and was not treated well during the final years. Instructive for us is: **“Yahweh then said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt’” (Exodus 4:7 NJB).** Yahweh sees all. Did you know that young Jesus and his parents lived for a while as refugees in Egypt **(Matthew 2:13-15)?**

The Bible has a number of principles we can apply as to our viewpoint and attitude toward immigrants. Number one, of course, are the two greatest commandments:

1. **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind”—Matthew 22:37**

NIV

- a. How does this apply? **“Love your enemies . . . that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous . . . And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?”—Matthew 5:44-47 NIV.** To really apply this greatest commandment, we should welcome immigrants.
 - b. **“Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you”—Romans 15:7 GNB**
 - c. **“Practice hospitality”—Rom 12:13 NIV.** The Greek word for “hospitality” is Philoxenia, which means “loving strangers”. This is the opposite of Xenophobia (fear of strangers). Obviously then, we should be welcoming, and not be suspicious, without good reason, toward strangers and immigrants, in order to practice the greatest commandment.
 - d. **“I will come near you for judgement . . . against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me”—Malachi 3:5 NKJV.** Turning away foreigners, immigrants, etc. violates God’s principles.
2. **“Love your neighbor as yourself”—Matthew 22:39 NIV.** How does this apply to immigrants, since we may not have thought of foreigners as being our neighbors?
 - a. **“Who is my neighbor?”—Luke 10:29 NIV.** In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the beat-up, half-dead Jew was ignored by his Jewish brothers, the priest and the Levite, who both passed by without even checking on him. But the despised Samaritan, not only took care of the man’s wounds, but paid his own money to have him taken care of at an inn (**Luke 10:30-35**). Jesus said that the lesson for us was to, **“Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37 NIV)**. Xenophobic feelings toward immigrants is the opposite of Jesus’

teaching. The two Jewish full-time religious workers would not even lift a finger to help their Jewish brother. We do not want to imitate the priest and Levite in our attitude toward helping others. Adding to the picture Jesus draws is the well-known fact that, **“Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans” (John 4:9 NLT)**. The last person on earth that a Jew in those days would help was a Samaritan! A Jew would let a Samaritan die before he would help him. One of the subtle ironies of this account is that the Samaritan knew that if the situation was reversed, and he was the half-dead man lying on the road, no Jew would help him! But he did the right thing anyway! This is the example we should follow: Help even those whom we don’t think deserve help.

b. **“‘I was a stranger and you invited me in . . . Lord . . . when did we see you a stranger and invite you in?’ . . . Then the King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me’” (Matthew 25:35-40 NIV.)** Obviously, taking care of strangers, even if they are immigrants, is an essential part of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus considers such action as being done “for me”.

c. **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14 NIV)**. The principle here is to help those who cannot help themselves, and this would include poor immigrants. This is an important principle for Christians to follow.

d. **“Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers” (Hebrews 13:2 NIV)**. This shows that we have a tendency to forget about this responsibility, thinking it is not necessary. But it is!

Jesus' parable of 'the sheep and the goats' shows us that one of the things that God judges us on is our whether or not we have shown love and hospitality to **'strangers'** (**Matthew 25:35,43**), and immigrants certainly qualify as 'strangers'. May we imitate 'the sheep' in Jesus' parable, and "practice Philoxenia" (hospitality), even toward immigrants.