

**CLARITY**  
IN CONTROVERSY

The background of the entire page is a photograph of the Statue of Liberty in New York City. The statue is shown from the waist up, standing on its pedestal. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple, indicating a sunset or sunrise. The statue's torch is lit, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow.

# Borders and the Beatitudes: A Christian Approach to Immigration



**American Council**



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible.

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This resource is designed for educational and discipleship purposes and is not intended as legal or medical advice. The views expressed herein reflect the theological convictions of The American Council.

# About this Resource

Etched into the State of Liberty is "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus, written in 1883. It is engraved on a bronze plaque inside the pedestal of the statue.

*"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-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Immigration is one of the most pressing and polarizing issues in our cultural moment. On one hand, we hear cries for national sovereignty, border security, and the rule of law. On the other, we see heartbreaking stories of families fleeing violence, poverty, and persecution, seeking refuge and opportunity.

For Christians, the question is not merely political; it is deeply theological.

- How do we promote strong borders without hard hearts?
- How do we welcome the sojourner without endorsing lawlessness?
- How do we live out both Romans 13 and Matthew 25?

This eBook is written for those who feel the tension and want to think biblically. Our goal is not to offer policy prescriptions, but a principled posture rooted in Scripture: one that champions order and compassion, sovereignty and solidarity, citizenship and the image of God.



# God, Government, and the Gift of Borders

From the earliest pages of Scripture, God reveals Himself as a God of order. The creation account itself is an act of bringing order out of chaos. This order extends not only to the natural world but also to the structures of society.

In Acts 17:26, Paul preaches that God "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." National borders, then, are not the invention of modern politics. They are part of God's sovereign design in human history. Just as a home has walls and a family has rules, a nation must have borders to govern its people rightly and steward its responsibilities wisely.

Romans 13 affirms that the governing authorities are God's servants for the good of society. This includes the power to enforce laws and secure national integrity. A borderless nation is a vulnerable one, not only to economic instability and criminal exploitation but also to the breakdown of shared responsibility.

Christians, therefore, should not be ashamed to advocate for secure borders. It is not a betrayal of compassion. It is a reflection of biblical stewardship. But let us never use the necessity of borders to justify the hardness of heart. Strong borders must never become an excuse for strongholds of fear or indifference.





# The Imago Dei Does Not Stop at the Border

Every human being is created in the image of God. This truth, found in Genesis 1:26-27, is the foundation of Christian anthropology and ethics. The doctrine of the Imago Dei means that every person, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, language, or legal status, possesses inherent worth and dignity.

Immigrants are not statistics. They are image bearers. Many have fled unspeakable violence, persecution, or grinding poverty in search of hope. The Christian cannot see a border crosser merely as a legal issue. We must see them first and foremost as a neighbor. As the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches, our neighbor is not defined by proximity or shared citizenship but by our willingness to show mercy.

Jesus Himself was a refugee. When Herod sought to destroy Him, His family fled to Egypt for safety (Matthew 2:13-15). The incarnate Son of God was once dependent on the hospitality of a foreign land. This should sober us. It should also shape us.

To be pro-immigrant does not mean being anti-border. But it does mean being pro-dignity. It means treating every person at the border not as a threat to be avoided but as a soul to be considered with compassion and care.



# The Role of the Church and the Role of the State

A critical theological distinction must be made between the calling of the Church and the role of the State. The Church is a spiritual body tasked with proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and embodying the mercy of Christ. The State is a civil institution tasked with preserving order, executing justice, and defending the public good.

In Romans 13, Paul outlines the God-given authority of government to wield the sword. This authority is not given to the Church. Conversely, the Church is called to extend grace, hospitality, and reconciliation in the name of Jesus. When these roles are confused, both institutions suffer.

The Church must not demand that the State abdicate its responsibility to regulate immigration law. The State must not suppress the Church's mission to care for the stranger and love the outsider. These are not competing mandates. They are complementary ones.

The Church can champion border security while simultaneously caring for the immigrant. We can defend national integrity while demonstrating Kingdom generosity. This is not hypocrisy. It is biblical tension held with spiritual maturity. We must refuse to flatten this issue into binaries that Scripture never demands.





# Welcoming the Sojourner: A Biblical Tradition

Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to welcome the sojourner. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were reminded of their own history as immigrants and slaves in Egypt. This memory was not meant to produce guilt but to cultivate humility and empathy.

Leviticus 19:34 says, "The sojourner who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself." This radical command of neighbor-love extends beyond the ethnic boundaries of Israel to the foreigner in their midst. Deuteronomy 10:18-19 speaks of God Himself loving the sojourner by providing food and clothing. His people are then commanded to imitate His example.

The New Testament continues this theme. Hebrews 13:2 urges believers not to neglect hospitality to strangers. Jesus identifies Himself with the stranger in Matthew 25, declaring that to welcome the outsider is to welcome Him.

Welcoming the sojourner does not mean endorsing every cultural value they carry. It does not mean dissolving borders or discarding prudence. But it does mean adopting the posture of Christ...open-handed, open-hearted, and open to the Spirit's leading.

Welcoming the sojourner is not about forfeiting national identity. It is about embodying Kingdom hospitality in the way we treat the vulnerable in our midst.



# Justice, Law, and the Border Crisis

God is a God of justice. His laws are righteous. His ways are just. To love what God loves is to love justice. This includes respecting the laws of the land, honoring governing authorities, and discouraging lawlessness.

Illegal immigration, while often driven by desperation, is still a violation of legal order. Christians should not wink at lawbreaking. But neither should we wield the law as a weapon devoid of grace.

Micah 6:8 calls us to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.” Justice without mercy becomes cold and cruel. Mercy without justice becomes chaotic and enabling. The border crisis calls for both. Secure borders protect the vulnerable from trafficking, exploitation, and corruption. But our policies must also reflect mercy, especially for children, asylum seekers, and victims of persecution.

We must oppose dehumanizing practices, family separations without cause, and indefinite detentions. We can uphold the law while still advocating for reform that reflects the values of the Kingdom. Christians must think not only about what is legal, but what is just, wise, and redemptive.

We are called to build systems that uphold truth and preserve life, not merely to win arguments or score political points. A biblical view of justice compels us to love both the land we steward and the neighbor we serve.





# Citizenship in Heaven, Stewardship on Earth

Philippians 3:20 reminds believers that “our citizenship is in heaven.” This heavenly citizenship does not negate our national responsibilities. It reorders them. We are called to seek the welfare of our earthly cities (Jeremiah 29:7) while keeping our ultimate allegiance to Christ.

To be a Christian citizen means to steward influence, vote wisely, and advocate for policies that align with biblical values. It also means remembering that nations rise and fall, but the Kingdom of God endures forever. Christians must be careful not to confuse patriotism with discipleship.

Immigrants often arrive with hope for earthly citizenship, but our ultimate aim is to point them to heavenly belonging. The Church should be a preview of that eternal Kingdom; a place where the outsider is welcomed, the broken are healed, and every tribe and tongue find their unity in Christ.

Faithful Christian citizenship means we do not disengage from national issues but engage them with a Kingdom-first mindset. When we hold earthly stewardship in one hand and eternal hope in the other, we reflect the heart of Christ to a watching world. Immigration is one of the great tests of how well we understand the gospel we claim to preach.



# Practical Principles for the Local Church

How then should local churches respond to immigration in faithful and practical ways? Consider the following:

**Teach theological clarity.** Avoid partisan talking points. Teach Scripture with depth and balance. Help your people think biblically before they think politically.

**Develop ministries of mercy.** Partner with organizations that serve refugees and asylum seekers.

**Foster intercultural discipleship.** Equip immigrants to grow in Christ. Raise up leaders from within immigrant communities. Model the multiethnic reality of the Kingdom.

**Engage in public advocacy.** Speak with boldness for policies that protect the vulnerable and promote lawful order. Advocate not for party allegiance, but for gospel reflection.

**Love immigrants as people, not projects.** Listen to their stories. Share meals. Build friendships. Move beyond charity to solidarity.

When the Church engages immigration through this lens, we cease to be culture warriors and become culture witnesses. We stop reacting in fear and start responding in faith.





# A Better Kingdom Witness

In an age of shouting, may we speak with substance. In a world of fear, may we act with faith. In a time of division, may we be people of divine reconciliation.

Jesus did not come to take sides. He came to take over. His gospel is not defined by left or right, open borders or closed gates. His Kingdom transcends nations but transforms them through the lives of faithful citizens.

Let us be the kind of people who hold the line of righteousness while extending the hand of redemption. Let us not confuse firmness with hostility or compassion with compromise. The world will not be changed by our slogans. It will be changed by our Savior.

Jesus is still the way. Still the truth. Still the life. And still the hope for every refugee, every border patrol officer, every policymaker, and every person caught in between.

This issue will not be solved by slogans or by silence but by Spirit-filled believers who model conviction and compassion. Let us walk the narrow road between fear and compromise, and be known as a people who welcome, protect, and proclaim. In a fractured age, may we reflect the wholeness of Christ through our words, our works, and our witness.