



An Open Letter to Evangelical Leaders on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

As people of faith we are called to ground our conduct and treatment of others in our reading and understanding of scripture and what God, as revealed through scripture and through Jesus Christ, instructs and teaches us to be and to do. As such, our views on immigration are to be grounded and reared in Biblical Revelation. As we examine what the bible says about immigration, we quickly encounter that the seeds for the establishment of Israel and all Christianity begin with the following statement:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1

The people we come to know in the scripture as Israel, and we as a Christian people, begin our history by God ordaining immigration. It was God's call to migration and immigration that changed human history.

God called one man to leave the known for the unknown, hence, to be immigrants – aliens in a strange land. Abraham's motivation was God's call to build a great nation of promise and blessing (*Genesis 12: 2-3*). It is a promise of something better – a better life, a better future and it motivates sojourns into the desert in search of a better tomorrow.

This is one of many immigration stories found in scripture. It creates an understanding, a call from God to never forget this history and requires of God's followers specific treatment of those called strangers, aliens, and immigrants. God instructs us, His people, "*to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt*" and to treat strangers by providing a place of rest, food and hospitality (*Genesis 18:4, 5; Deuteronomy 10:19*).

This model of hospitality and treatment informs the development of a biblical policy of care for the stranger. It is a policy grounded in the actual experiences of God's people who traveled to strange lands and who were often abused and exploited, as was the case of the people of Israel during the time of Moses. These experiences taught and required God's followers that care and treatment of the immigrant needs to inform our activities in this day. The Scripture clearly says,

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33, 34

Do not mistreat the alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know what it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. Exodus 23:9

Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow. Deuteronomy 27:19

Throughout the Old Testament, lack of fidelity to a true worship of God as expressed in the ignoring of these precepts of fairness and justice were reasons for God's judgment against His people and their impending tragedy.

In the New Testament, this theme of the treatment of aliens and strangers or immigrants is continued. We find early in the narrative that our Savior was an immigrant forced to flee to Egypt. It is this history and experience of being an immigrant people that inform the words of Jesus throughout the gospels and which are clearly expressed in Matthew 25:37. The passage teaches to us about how we should treat others and it states, *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me"*.

It is a call from Christ to all of us that are His followers to treat the alien, the stranger the immigrant with fairness, justice and hospitality. It is a call grounded in years of history and personal experience. It is the same call to the care of others that God expects throughout the Biblical narratives from His people. It is a call grounded in what God seeks from His children and it is to be expressed in their works today (*Matthew 25:40*).

As a faith-based organization, Esperanza USA is called to live and act in the requirements articulated in scripture. These principles or calls to service are clear and definitive. They require demonstrations and actions that show concern for the immigrant by showing hospitality, providing shelter and care.

It is our Christian responsibility to care for those that live among us today. Given this understanding, Esperanza USA believes that:

- We must secure our borders.
- Our long term border security and national security interests will never be met until the 12 million undocumented workers are "out of the shadows."
- We should not inflict inhumane and unreasonable demands on those living here today --- those who are hard working, contributing members of society -- simply to rectify our policy failures of the past. We must not punish good people caught in a bad system.
- For reform to work, it must have real, permanent advantages. Fixing our broken system for legal entry and residence must correct the flaws of the past and reflect current and future economic and workforce requirements.
- Legislative attempts to criminalize routine acts of mercy, compassion, spiritual counsel and humanitarian aid are unchristian. Christians are called to be engaged in the acts of kindness H.R. 4437 would criminalize.
- Legislation should not include amnesty, but rather a probation period for those who entered illegally but wish to stay in the United States. For those who have broken no other law besides immigration law, this probation period would allow for undocumented workers to remain in the country, work as they have been, pay taxes as they have been, while also paying fines for having broken federal law. After this probationary period, they would then be allowed to wait behind those already in application for residency and, if desirable, citizenship.

The United States must remain the land of opportunity. We call on our Evangelical brothers and sisters to denounce unchristian policy reform and to stand for reform that reflect the values expressed in our history as followers of Christ. The religious and faith-based

community is obligated to help those in need – the weak, the immigrant – it can do no other.

These principles are in our opinion the most Christ-like way to deal with the need for immigration reform. As Hispanic evangelicals we are asking you, an Evangelical leader, to speak out on behalf of comprehensive immigration reform and support of us in this struggle for a Christ-like face to this problem.

Would you please fax, email or send us a letter by mail, indicating your support for these principles. This country and the millions of Hispanics of faith need to know you stand with them.

Please pray with us as we work to find a solution to this divisive issue. May God bless you and bless our United States of America.

In Christ's name,

Rev. Luis Cortés
President
Esperanza USA