

‘Not My Jesus’ Author: The Real Problem With the Separation of Church and State

Editor’s Note: In light of the recent “zero tolerance” immigration controversy, Charisma spoke with several popular faith leaders about how religion influences politics and current events, especially immigration. Here’s one perspective.

Where do you stand on the recent immigration policy, and how does the Bible influence your position?

The treatment of people seeking to enter this country must be ordered, dignified, compassionate and merciful.

Biblical Support

“For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in” (Matt. 25:35).

“Therefore, love the foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19).

“The foreigner who dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:34).

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unknowingly” (Heb. 13:2).

What would be a better approach to this “zero tolerance” policy?

Zero tolerance doesn't have to mean zero common sense.

If you want to have zero tolerance, it should be applied equally, across the board, with all laws. *No one* wants to live in that world. When faced with the choice of splitting a family, it is ludicrous and lacking in all human decency to take children from their families. If you insist on the zero tolerance policy, then keep the entire families together, either in or out. But you don't separate them. That is lacking common sense in every way.

How can we be the hands and feet of Jesus during this time?

Christians enjoy receiving the grace, mercy and love of God. That is what defines us. Unfortunately, we are not known as people who give those gifts away as eagerly as we received them. I think it is critical for us to get back to being conduits of Christ. We must ask the questions, "What is the most loving thing I can do for all involved?" For our angry friends, for our leaders who defend or decry this behavior, for the border guards, for the children, for the parents. What is the most loving thing we can do? (Think Golden Rule as well as "Love your neighbor as yourself.") We can ask similar questions about grace and mercy. How can we be the most gracious and merciful people? Once we have framed our approach from that place, we may find a better way to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

What is the spiritual significance of separating children from their families vs. following the law of the land?

Somewhere along the line, the United States, in her effort to keep church and state separate, has allowed nationalism and Christianity to intertwine. Maybe it was Manifest Destiny, but we have a real problem. Some believe this is a Christian nation. Some think that because you invoke, as Mr. Sessions has done, Romans 13, that all the government does is ordained by God and to go against the government is to go against God.

If that is the case, abortion, a government approved and funded practice, should be OK. That is horrible theology and even worse practice.

I suppose you could argue that families split up when a person breaks the law, and the lawbreaker goes to jail. It happens all the time. The zero tolerance policy moves this practice to when you enter the country. It sends a clear message that would likely prevent people from trying to come into the country illegally. Given our Christian faith, would we rather follow the law of the land or the grace, mercy and love of Christ?

Do you have any personal experience with immigrants/refugees in your community?

My family and I have enjoyed the benefits of having a Rwandan refugee live with us for the past three years. Naomi has a university degree and is intelligent, funny, gracious and wise. She is helping us see who Jesus is in a way we could never see without her. Her perspective on life and faith comes from a place of suffering, injustice and radical trust in Jesus. We have so much around us that keeps us from seeing things the way she does. Without her with us, we miss a significant part of who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

Just because we are American doesn't mean we have it all figured out. I believe this is the best country in the world because we give people unprecedented opportunities to thrive. Socially and economically, our lowest standards still outstrip the average standard of living for those around the globe. People without our advantages walk closely with Jesus without their Starbucks, SUV, comfortable church and Amazon Prime. How do they do it? The answer is that Jesus is *all they have*. We haven't had the learn that lesson. It would be of great benefit for the church of North American to walk with, care for, listen to and love the immigrants and refugees in our

communities. We might learn about a Jesus we didn't know and we may even like him.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Shout out to our Jeff Sessions and other people in government positions. I just want to ask him not to use the Scriptures in his arguments without thoroughly vetting them. A great principle to follow is to read them in context. You can always find a verse to justify your position. It is easy to do. However, understanding what the passage is saying in its context is vital. Romans 13 is perhaps the worst example of this behavior I can imagine. Our relationship with the government is to be informed by our faith. Our faith is never to bend to the will of the government. Mr. Sessions is pro-life when it comes to abortion, how is it he can ask us to be pro-law when it comes to Romans 13 and the immigrant issue? Bad form, Mr. Sessions.

Bob Fabey speaks, writes, and mentors helping people to embrace their God-given dignity and give it to others in extravagant ways. An ordained minister based in Arizona, he is the host of 3rd Space Podcast and has just released the book *Not My Jesus*, a humorous yet poignant look at faith, culture and life: