

What Does the Bible Really Mean in Romans 13?

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?

Both Old and New Testaments call believers to give away freely what God has given them in Christ: Unconditional acceptance, compassion and mercy. No serious theologian disputes that because it reflects the character and nature of God himself. Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give."

The apostle Paul even takes it one step further by declaring that a believers "grieves" the Holy Spirit when they have experienced God's grace and compassion and fail to give it away to others. In short, a Christian should be striving to give away to others what they have received from Christ. That truth, however, can be "pimped" or used by partisan politics, taken out of context and applied to serve a political agenda, which is exactly what I see happening. This wouldn't be the first time the Bible has been leveraged to equivocate a partisan agenda via the Trojan horse of religion, which is always dangerous—for both parties.

In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome he makes very clear that God expects us to obey the laws of the government. That passage doesn't give a believer permission to violate the law because they perceive it as unjust. This is mission critical. There is nothing in the Bible that prevents any country from having totally open borders or totally closed borders—but all

countries have to deal with illegal immigration through the laws of their land.

The Romans passage gives freedom to countries to punish anyone who breaks those laws. Selective partisan theology would have people believe that good goals or motivations justify the breaking of laws to achieve a good end.

That is not biblical. Emotions on an issue always obscure clarity on any issue worth debating and this is no different. Following the law and caring are not mutually exclusive, but partisan agendas are better served when they are, and that is what you see. Labeling any group discompassionate or immoral has been a political hammer from the dawn of government and gives the ones asserting it the moral high ground.

The problem, in this case, is that emotional partisans forget that freedom is never free, that it must be protected and stewarded responsibly in order for it to flourish. That's what laws and the ability to enforce them are intended to do—preserve and protect freedom so that it remains available for future generations to enjoy.

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

The problem is that adults are using and exploiting children to come across the border. There has to be assessment. I was listening to the head of the U.S. Border Patrol talk about this phenomenon. Parents are sending children unaccompanied, and those children are being co-opted by adults seeking an easier path to entry, or worse, being forced or threatened to do the same. You have to separate to assess the reality of the connection and then reconnect the families. When people break laws as U.S. citizens, they are separated from their families. This is the risk any citizen or illegal immigrant faces when they are breaking laws. Good men and women are doing their best to assess, reconnect and comfort in the midst of

lawbreaking.

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

I am a native Californian living in Orange County (Southern California), so illegal immigration is a part of the fabric of my life. Men and women here illegally from south of the border are here because they are doing what all parents do—seeking a better life. Over the years, I have had working relationships with amazing immigrants, both legal and illegal. In relationships, I treat them the way Christ calls me to treat them—with respect, compassion and full dignity as image-bearers. If the law was broken coming here and they are caught, I can lament the situation, but I cannot fault the law someone chose to transgress. I am praying that a path to citizenship is made available and the fear hanging over the heads of those who have made it here can be lifted through a process that gives them the dignity and choice to become legal U.S. citizens along with the pride of being an American.

“For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. It is the will of God that by doing right you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. As free people, do not use your liberty as a covering for evil, but live as servants of God” (1 Pet. 2:13-16).

Don’t break the law, or you risk the consequences. But we can do everything legally in our power to get a law changed that is uncaring or discompassionate. Congress—in this instance—is constitutionally empowered to do that on behalf of the people.
{eoa}

Kenny Luck *is the founder of Every Man Ministries and host of The Every Man Show. His latest book, Dangerous Good: The Coming Revolution of Men Who Care will be released July 3.*