

Immigration vs. Illegal Immigration: Does it make a difference?

By Stephen M. Golden
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Recently, a brother rebuked me for making a distinction between Immigration and Illegal Immigration. He indicated my position reflected poorly on my faith and practice of Jesus' love. He said these people are not Illegal Immigrants, they're people.

I was taken aback. Words mean things. They stand for concepts in the real world. How could someone completely ignore the distinction between a legal situation and an illegal one? I responded that what he said was false. Yes, these people are people, but they also are *illegal immigrants*.

He responded that they simply want a better life and if he were in that situation, he'd do the same. He seems to believe that doing what is illegal is justified if it is to get a better life. I'm reminded of the song in the Disney movie "Aladdin" that introduces Aladdin's situation: "Gotta eat to live, gotta steal to eat, otherwise we'd get along." Using this brother's logic, if I want to get a better life, I can break the law to do it; therefore, robbing a bank, a jewelry store, or even *his* home in order to get a better life is an acceptable solution. He might counter that these people are *not* stealing; they are just coming across the border to this country. To this I first reply, "They *are* breaking the law." Then, second, I reply, "And they *are* stealing." They are taking advantages of services offered to citizens of this country: Emergency room, health care, and other welfare and social benefits. These services are not intended for people who are not legally in this country, but through our compassion are still offered to them. They are taking opportunity away from citizens of this country. Some would say that the illegal immigrants' labor keeps our grocery prices low. They say that Americans won't work those jobs. I'm not convinced. That may have been true twenty-five years ago, but it's a smoke screen today. There are over 20 million illegal immigrants in the United States today. There simply aren't that many migrant worker jobs in the U.S.

In good economic times, a hard-working college-educated person can usually find a well-paying job in a reasonable time. However, in hard times such as we're experiencing today, jobs are not that readily available. Many hard-working college-educated people *are* willing to work those jobs. I'm one of them. However, I cannot get even a low-paying job because they're being worked by illegal immigrants. How do I know this? Being currently unemployed, I can't get a job even at McDonald's; I don't speak Spanish. It's interesting that you have to speak fluent Spanish to work at McDonald's in the greater Denver area, but you don't have to speak fluent English. Many of the people who wait on me at McDonald's don't speak fluent English. They simply don't understand the words I'm saying when I order something that deviates from a standard menu item. Whenever I encounter a person at a place of business who doesn't speak fluent English, my suspicions are justifiably raised.

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At one place I worked, new customers had to provide their Social Security number. It was very common for these to be stolen numbers. One man even said, "This is my Social Security number! I bought it with good money!" For those who are uninformed, you cannot legally buy a Social Security number. Only an illegal immigrant or some other criminal would have bought a Social Security number.

Is it about love?

This brother accused me of not caring for these people. He said that because I don't know any of these people, I don't view them as people. I indicated that while I don't spend much time with illegal immigrants, I have met some. Our church helps some through our outreach programs, and I do have a heart for them. Their plight hurts me. I know they just want a better life. I know they are people like you and me. I know that if given the chance, we could be good friends. But I also know that we can't end all suffering in this world. There are people *dying* every day; Children by the thousands! Thousands more live in persecution and oppression. Our country—our economy—cannot sustain everyone who *wants* to come here to live. Our economy can't sustain its current level of government spending on even its *citizens*, let alone millions of illegal immigrants. I understand they want a better life. Nevertheless, they are breaking the law. If they are believers in Jesus, they should realize they are living in sin.

Living in sin

If you are a believer, you may have heard that phrase applied to adulterers, fornicators, and perhaps even GLBTs. But the concept applies equally well here. "Living in sin" describes a state, whether rebellious, ignorant, or remorseful, in which a person lives contrary to God's definition of what is right. Should we, as Christians, overlook a person's life choices which are contrary to God's? As two people, a man and a woman, who, to put it delicately, have an intimate relationship together but are not married, are living in sin, and to be right in God's eyes, need to correct the situation either by getting married or by separating and abstaining from that intimacy reserved for marriage, a person who is in this country illegally needs to reconcile the sinful state by returning to his home country. The Illegal Immigrant is living in sin. Am I saying we should hate the adulterer, the fornicator, the homosexuals and lesbians, or the Illegal Immigrant? Absolutely not! But we are to abhor the sin and condemn the sinful behavior. Can they be forgiven? Yes, after they repent. Repentance means "turning around." They must resolve the sinful situation. They can't just say, "I crossed the border, I prayed, and now Jesus has forgiven me." No, they're still unrepentant. They're still living in sin.

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Consequences of breaking the law

Even though God offers forgiveness, we are still obligated to pay the penalty for our decisions and actions. If we break the law, God's forgiveness does not relieve us of the criminal and civil penalties of having been caught breaking the law. When a person is arrested for stealing, even though he might repent to God and get forgiveness, he is still liable for the penalty issued to him through our legal system. You still have to face the consequences for your actions. In the case of illegal immigration, they have committed a crime by coming into this country illegally. If we're going to follow the rule of law, these illegal immigrants need to be handled according to the law.

The Rule of law

Contrary to popular belief, we don't live in a democracy. We live in a Democratic Republic. Most people who claim we live in a democracy would be shocked if they suddenly found themselves in a democracy. A true democracy is tyranny of the majority. Whatever the majority decides is what everyone has to abide.

No. Instead, we live in a republic. We elect our leaders through a democratic process. We live by the rule of law. No one is above the law. Everyone is [*supposed to be*] treated equally under the law. If a person or group of persons is not treated equally under the law, it strikes at the very heart of the republic and undermines the integrity of all our laws. For many years we have had courts incrementally chipping away at our rule of law, issuing decrees that offer absurd interpretations of established concepts and creating special classes of people. They have even been successful in distorting much of our constitution.

Our government was designed to facilitate equality of treatment under the law, not equality of outcome. We have different strengths and weaknesses. Even in Heaven, we will not have equality of outcome! (Romans 2:6; 1 Corinthians 3:12; Luke 7:28) Some people will receive greater rewards, and others less.

Only Deport the Criminals

Recently our government's policy is to clam to want to deport only the illegal immigrants who are criminals. Oh, wait... by definition, all illegal immigrants are criminals; they have committed a crime to even be in this country. They have committed a Federal offense by breaking our immigration laws. You don't like it? You think it's too difficult to immigrate into the U.S.? Work to change the law! Don't justify the law breakers. Don't downplay *criminal* behavior. Do you think Canada and Mexico look lightly on people who enter their borders illegally? You can be sure they do not. You will be arrested and put in jail. In Mexico, you'll be *lucky* if they deport you. They don't like people disregarding their laws, and they enforce them (*often, with a bias*).

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Then, after considerable discussion of the issue, this brother stated he believes we should close the border—an inconsistency that he would not acknowledge. Doesn't he believe anyone else should have the opportunity to make his or her life better? How can he, in a clear conscience, decide that those who have already crossed are into this country should be allowed to stay, but the person who wants to cross later should not be allowed? How absurd. On the one hand, he wants to justify those who have come here illegally in order to get a better life, but on the other, he wants to prevent others from coming here illegally to get a better life. That is simply hypocrisy.