

# Editorial: Condemn false claims about Haitian immigrants

September 18, 2024

I join the Haitian Christian Leaders Association in their [objection to the false claims](#) against the Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio.

I do this for at least three reasons:

1. Scripture commands us not to bear false witness against others.
2. Scripture instructs us to care for immigrants.
3. Jesus tells us to do to others what we want done to us.

The group of Haitian Christian leaders issued [a public statement](#) on Sept. 12 in response to claims vice presidential candidate J.D. Vance promoted on X (formerly Twitter) that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, were eating people's pets.

The claims resulted in threats of violence against public facilities in Springfield, forcing temporary closures and at least [one church to wonder](#) if it was safe to meet on Sunday. The threats have been enough in just one week to lead some Haitian Springfield residents to consider relocating.

The handful of claims quickly became scads of memes, which quickly became millions of shares on social media. The memes turned into punchlines, and not just about Haitians. [One Christian media outlet](#) used the claims to disparage another ethnicity altogether.

These false claims against Haitian immigrants are despicable. Promoting them is despicable. Threats of violence in response to these claims are despicable. Using these claims to disparage others is despicable, and calling it "satire" doesn't excuse it.

Christians are not to be party to such [slander](#) and hate.

## **Do not bear false witness**

The American Standard Bible, long considered one of the most—if not *the* most—literal English translations, renders the ninth commandment as: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Exodus 20:16), or “Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Deuteronomy 5:20).

Whatever the English translation or location—Exodus or Deuteronomy—we know what the commandment means: Don’t lie about other people. And not just other people. Don’t lie about your neighbor.

We don’t need scholars to break down the passage for us to know what the command prohibits ... unless, that is, we want to make sure our particular lies about others are exempt.

In this instance, Vance and others have maintained, to a certain extent, the validity—the truth—of the claims about Haitian immigrants. If that’s the case, that the claims are true—which they aren’t—then Vance and others might not be guilty of bearing false witness. But they might be guilty of something else.

## **Love the foreigner living among you**

Returning to Deuteronomy, Scripture instructs God’s people to “love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (10:19 KJV). Other versions substitute “alien,” “foreigner” or “sojourner” for “stranger.”

Leviticus 19:34 makes it even plainer: “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (NIV).

I could cite instruction after instruction throughout Scripture about how we are to treat “the foreigner residing among us.” None of them tell us to lie about immigrants, harass them or threaten them. Though I could cite many passages, I will cite just one more.

At the end of Ezekiel, the prophet relates a vision of Israel restored after its exile. It’s a long vision, nine chapters worth of Ezekiel’s prophetic writing.

When the man in the vision tells Ezekiel how the land of Israel will be divided up, the man says: “You shall divide it by lot for an inheritance among yourselves and among the aliens who stay in your midst ... and they shall be to you as the native-born among the sons of Israel; they shall be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel” (Ezekiel 47:22 NASB).

We can get bogged down in interpretation—what exactly is going on, what precisely is meant by this passage and maybe when this is supposed to happen—and miss the overarching message.

The message is this: God makes provision *through us* for “the foreigner residing among you.”

Some still will quibble, saying what the Bible says about caring for foreigners applies only to God-fearing people who aren’t Israelites, or those instructions don’t apply to our situation in the 21st-century United States. How we love to strain out gnats (Matthew 23:24).

## **Do to others as you want done to you**

We might skirt the law against lying. We might skirt the many instructions to care for “foreigners.” But we can’t skirt Jesus’ instruction to do to others as we want them to do to us.

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat

you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12 NASB).

I hardly think those spreading false claims about Haitian immigrants want to have horrid lies spread about them. I seriously doubt they want to be under threat of violent death by those they are lying about.

But, I guess here again one can argue Jesus’ instruction only applies to people who follow him.

[Explaining his Christian faith](#) to the Faith & Freedom Coalition Prayer Breakfast on July 18, Vance said: “I think grace, the way that I understand it, is something that happens over a lifetime, and in ways big and small, if you practice your faith, if you pray, if you think about what it requires of you, then God makes you a little bit better each and every single day, and that to me has been the greatest lesson and the greatest blessing of my faith.”

May J.D. Vance—and all of us—be at least a little bit more like Jesus each and every single day.

For the Christian label to mean anything, it must mean that we who claim it are those who are practicing our faith—or as Jesus said it, learning to obey everything he commanded (Matthew 28:20).

During these days of tribalism in which many identify themselves as God’s people, we do well to pay attention to the kind of God our God is and what God expects. And if we’re going to call ourselves a “Christian nation,” then we are duty-bound to live by Christ’s name.

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