

Voices: The immigration rule that violates our stated principles

August 14, 2019

“Purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 1:8).

The U.S. government recently announced an expansion of an existing rule which would [deny green cards](#)—permanent residency in the United States and a path to citizenship—to immigrants who make use of government-funded social programs, such as food assistance and Medicaid.

In other words, as some headlines report it, the new policy will [“favor wealthy” immigrants](#).

My personal bias

I will admit freely to having trouble being unbiased about this change. I am biased because I know too many immigrants who once were on social programs and then worked their way into independent incomes. I know too many children, born here in the United States, whose immigrant parents depend on such programs to help feed and care for them and who came to this country specifically to provide a better future for their children. I know them from my hometown in East Texas, from the church I pastor in Mesquite, and from the churches we partner with in the colonias of South Texas.

Considering the facts

The justification for this policy change is that it will prevent immigrants from becoming a drain on government resources. This justification ignores the facts that the average stay of a family on social programs is 8-10 months and that immigrants provide a net economic gain over the long run.

This change is short-sighted, poorly justified, and, as [Olivia Golden](#), an advocate for low-income people put it: “The proposal at its core says that work and family don’t matter; wealth and income are what matters.”

Beware of double-mindedness

The United States, as a sovereign nation, certainly has the right to determine by law and policy who is worthy of becoming a citizen.

But beware of double-mindedness.

We like to tell certain stories about ourselves as Americans. We say we are founded on Christian principles and should be governed by Christian principles. We say we are a land of opportunity. We symbolize it with a large statue in New York Harbor bearing an inspiring [inscription](#) inviting the exile, the poor and the homeless to join us in freedom.

In reality, however, we prefer independently wealthy people to be our neighbors, our co-workers and our children’s classmates.

Which makes us double-minded.

A Christian response

What would be your attitude if your pastor stood up this Sunday and said the church would not accept as a member anyone on government social

programs? It would rankle most of us, though some would be pleased.

We know we are not to show partiality in the body (James 2:2-5). As believers, we instinctively should feel that wealth is a very dubious measure of someone's worth. We should all have some notion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's caution in *Life Together*: "Every Christian community must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship."

Comparing the United States and the kingdom of God

Is the United States greater than the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God makes no distinction of citizenship based on wealth. In fact, Jesus said the greater the wealth the harder it is to get in.

The United States has the right by law and policy to limit its incoming citizens to the wealthy, but it cannot then claim to be governed by Christian principles. It cannot claim to be a land of opportunity for the tired, poor, wretched refuse, homeless.

What to do with the Statue of Liberty

As for what to do with the statue in the harbor? I have two suggestions.

Option 1: Leave it as is, but replace Emma Lazarus' inspiring words with words more in the spirit of our laws and policies, such as the lyrics from Barrett Strong's 1976 hit "[Money \(That's What I Want\)](#)."

Option 2: Tear the thing down and replace it with a much larger version of the Wall Street Bull. And make it out of gold. Bronze just looks cheap.

Patrick Adair is the pastor of The Crossings Baptist Church in Mesquite, Texas. The views expressed are those solely of the author.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For an interview in which Ken Cuccinelli explains the new rule to NPR Host Rachel Martin, click [here](#).