Much is Expected

by Herb Silverman

While I have many problems with the Christian Bible, there are some portions I agree with. One is Luke 12:48: "To whom much is given, much is expected."

I recognize how fortunate I am to have been born in a country and a family where I had ample opportunities to attain a decent education and standard of living. But I ask myself what we should do about those to whom much is not given, whether born in this or another country. And I've noticed that people opposed to helping immigrants also seem less charitably disposed toward helping some of our least fortunate Americans.

To give but one example, Americans who want to abolish estate taxes (which only kick in above $12 million) use the misnomer "death taxes" and have a silent mantra: "To whom much is given, much more should be given."

Passing tax-free wealth to the next generation of family members who have been financially privileged since birth is welfare for the rich. Their estates can provide more than adequate annual tax-free support to family members. The estate tax, in my opinion, should be used to help level the playing field by taxing inheritances at a higher rate. This would generate more federal revenue and could provide extra funding for programs to benefit low-income workers.

As bad as things are for some of our poorest Americans they are usually worse for illegal immigrants, who live in the shadows of our bountiful American plenty. Do we expect them to suffer in place under the dreadful circumstances they are trying to escape?

Americans should realize how fortunate we are that we don't have to sneak into other countries to find work to feed our families. I wish we would find more ways to help desperate citizens in other countries, so they would not risk their lives to come here.

We know we can employ millions of illegal immigrants because we already do. They are grateful for any menial jobs. Further, the status of illegal immigrants keeps their wages so low that Americans think such work is beneath Americans. Most immigrants who are dying to come here will do any kind of work, and even immigrant children are found illegally working in dangerous slaughterhouses or in roofing or construction.

Of course we can't open our borders to everyone, but we should be able to provide a rational immigration process consistent with available jobs. In my view, an ideal solution would combine stronger border enforcement with more resources to decide cases quickly, and it would clear new ways for people to apply for legal immigration.

Also, ending the so-called "War on Drugs," and improving government-sponsored information about the dangers of some drugs, would stop people from coming to America to sell drugs illegally. After all, we don't hear about illegal immigration to sell cigarettes.

Unfortunately, a lot of lawmakers have as a higher priority preventing illegal crossings rather than expanding legal immigration.

Immigration once made America great, but now we seem to have a public relations problem with this issue, along with politicians who like to demonize immigrants.

I wish we could live up to the standards of the poet **Emma Lazarus**, whose words are on our Statue of Liberty:

> *"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these the homeless, the tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door."*

Except for the refugees at our border?

Some Americans take pride in having pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. Let's at least give immigrants and the unfortunate Americans among us some bootstraps with which they can pull themselves up. This should include providing skills for prisoners to help them get jobs when they leave prison.

But that leaves me still wondering how I can personally help (it's the "much is expected" part).

In addition to many secular organizations that do high quality work, I've found two religious organizations that need money to help immigrants and poor people. One is Jewish Family Service in San Diego that assists newly arrived immigrants locally and on their journey to other places in the country.

https://www.jfssd.org/our-services/refugees-immigration/

The other, founded by a Muslim, immigrant doctor in Charleston, is the Shifa Clinic providing free medical care to uninsured sick people, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin:

https://www.freeclinics.com/det/shifa-free-clinic-charleston

Neither of these organizations asks clients about their religion or has a religious criterion for offering help.

Since I started with a biblical quote, I'll close with another one.

The mythical Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer and Abel raised livestock. They both brought offerings to God. Cain chose some of his vegetables as an offering, while Abel chose some of his livestock. God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's offering. Apparently, God loved to eat meat and hated vegetables.

In a jealous rage, Cain killed his brother Abel. So, the first religious ceremony was responsible for the first murder.

When this omniscient God somehow could not find Abel, God asked Cain where Abel had gone. Cain replied to God that he didn't know and asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

As a humanist I think we all have an obligation to help the least fortunate among us and be our brother's and sister's keeper.

Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to the quarterly publication *The Freethought Society News*. His past submissions can be found at the following Freethought Society website page:

https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/

Silverman is the author of two books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*.