

Faith in Jesus Christ Is the Cornerstone of Why Pilgrims Matter

For a reminder of the historical significance of Thanksgiving, the American Family Association Journal (AFAJ) shares an interview with Dr. Stephen McDowell, president of Providence Foundation. He discusses the true story of the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving.

AFAJ: What is the greatest threat today to the truth about the Pilgrims and their history?

McDowell: While some books and educators directly lie about the Pilgrims and their primary Christian motive for starting a new colony in America, the greatest threat to the truth about their story is what is left out when their story is told.

Revisionist history gives a false picture of these devoted Christians. For example, one elementary public-school textbook gives 30 pages to present the story of the Pilgrims without once [making] any reference to religion; thus at the end of [the Pilgrims'] first year, they "wanted to give thanks for all they had." But there is no mention that it was God they were thanking.

Teaching about the Pilgrims without referencing God causes people to think that Christianity was not important to them. Revisionist history is a primary reason for the secularization of America. People are taught our history without mentioning Christianity, or if it is cited, it is often presented in a negative light, when in reality it is the most important influence in the birth, growth and development of the nation.

AFAJ: Why do some contemporary educators revise U.S. history, particularly the story of Thanksgiving?

McDowell: Most teachers in our schools today are ignorant of the true story of Thanksgiving and the Pilgrims. They never learned it in school and few search out primary source documents so as to get to know the Pilgrims via their own writings.

William Bradford, governor of the Pilgrims for 33 years, wrote their history—*Of Plimoth Plantation*—which is one of the great historical and literary works of all American history, but few teachers have even heard of it, much less read it. You only need to read a few pages to see the sincere and deep faith of these men and women who served as “stepping stones” for those who would follow.

Some educators who know the history yet ignore it, evaluate the Pilgrims through their own secular bias—that is, the Pilgrims may have had a deep faith, but God is a construction of the human mind and consequently is not relevant, so they do not need to mention God when recounting their story. Or they have such a dislike for God that they do not want to give Him any place in history.

AFAJ: Why is it important that we remember and pass on the truth about the Pilgrims?

McDowell: The Pilgrims’ story teaches us many lessons. We learn of the great sacrifice they paid to exercise their freedom of religion and to plant the early seeds of our nation. Half of them died the first winter after arriving at Plymouth, and most of the others suffered from sickness and hunger. At one time, only six or seven could get out of bed, but they toiled night and day to assist their brethren.

In the words of Bradford, they “fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed their meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them. In a word, they did all the homely and necessary offices for them which queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named—and this willingly and

cheerfully, without any grudging in the least." Their care for one another reveals their Christian character and practical love, "a rare example and worthy to be remembered."

Their motive to spread the gospel is evident from Bradford's words (which are inscribed on his monument in Plymouth): "A great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing of the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world."

The Mayflower Compact, a document the Pilgrims drafted and signed before going ashore, shows their ability to reason biblically regarding civil affairs: "Having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith ... [we] do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic."

Learning the unique covenant nature of our founding political documents is an important lesson in understanding why America was founded as the freest nation in history.

AFAJ: What is the most important aspect of the Thanksgiving story that parents can teach their children?

McDowell: The most important thing parents can teach their children about the Thanksgiving story is the most obvious: We call it Thanksgiving for a reason. Our Pilgrim forefathers, who are reflective of most of the founders of America, were firmly devoted to Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ. In recognition of His gracious hand upon them, they set aside regular public days to give thanks and glorify Him.

This was not done merely once or twice but regularly throughout their entire lifetime. They set an example that was followed by those who came after them, even up until today. Throughout most of our history, Americans understood thanksgiving days were to thank God. The Pilgrims' love and

devotion to God, and their reliance upon Him in abundance and lack, are evidenced not only by their private lives but also by their public days of thanksgiving. {eo}

The interview was first published in the AFA Journal.