



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Reason for Our Thanksgiving”

**November 22nd, 2009
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Informed. Insightful. Intelligent.



The Reason for Our Thanksgiving

Romans 13:8-10

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, I made the point that our relationship with Jesus Christ is intellectually based upon two concepts, one being our knowledge of the objective history and doctrine of Jesus Christ and the other being our understanding of the love that He has for us and that He wants us to have for one another.

In the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, God designed and created the earth and gave mankind limited dominion over the environment. To wield our dominion in a godly fashion, first we need intelligence, which is decision making ability, and second, we need a grasp of the principles by which our decisions should be made. In Old Testament times when God’s interface with mankind was the Nation of Israel, the principles that we needed to know were contained in the Laws of Moses. In New Testament times, in which God’s interface with mankind is the Holy Spirit, the principles of God in the Law are replaced by the commandment to love. **Romans 13:8-10** tells us:

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The role of the Christian church in the New Testament dispensation is to



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spread the gospel, meaning the objective history and salvific doctrine, of Jesus Christ, and to model the love that Jesus Christ calls for us to have for one another to the world. Jesus Himself tells us, in **John 13:34-35**:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The admonition to love begins with the premise, given in **Genesis 2:18**, that it is not good for man to be alone. Part of God's design for man is that human individuals require company in order to function optimally. God was a social being even before He created man, as He reveals to us in His record of the creation of man, in **Genesis 1:26-27**:

26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

God refers to Himself as Us, as Jesus clarifies in His commandment to the disciples, in **Matthew 28:19**:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We generally refer to God the Father, God the Son, which we know as Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit as the Godhead. God the Father is the designer of the universe and the one that executes His will upon it, God the Son is Jesus Christ, who is both one with the Father and is the one that God the Father sent to us to save us from our sins, and God the Holy Spirit is also one with both of them and was sent to empower the disciples and us with the ability to carry out the mandates of God the Son, Jesus Christ, of which we read last week in Acts chapter 2. The Godhead is a cooperative coalition that interacts with man to empower us to execute the plan of God for our lives. And I mean that literally. The three persons of the Godhead still, in our day and time, interact with man to empower us to do God's work. Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would indwell and empower them, and in **Matthew 28:19**, tells the disciples to use the ceremony of baptism to inform the nations that the Holy Spirit would continue to do so until He returns. **Matthew 28:20** completes the previous lection:

20 teaching [the nations] to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

As we carry on the Christian task given to the disciples by Jesus, we are instructed to preach the Gospel and model love until the end of the age, transmitting the history of Jesus Christ in the preaching of the Gospel and using



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the power of the Holy Spirit to model love. By and large, men understand the gospel as a function of their intellect, however, as I mentioned last week, mere intellectual assent is not usually sufficient to overcome our normal cognitive dissonance to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus radically refines our reality by His teaching, as **Matthew 5:43-48** tells us:

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Although Jesus modeled this teaching on love in His self-sacrifice on the Cross, giving Himself that the sins of His enemies might be forgiven, people generally disagree with Jesus’ teaching on the benefits of sacrificing oneself for those that hate, spitefully use and persecute us. Generally speaking, we do not have a positive emotional attachment to our enemies, which is why we consider them our enemies. But “agapao”, the Greek word for love that Jesus uses in **Matthew 5:43-48**, does not mean a positive emotional attachment. Jesus would have used the word “phileo” to denote the emotional attachment that we generally call love. “Agapao” means that we choose to do that which is objectively in someone’s best interest to show love in spite of our emotions.

Think of a fireman that goes into a burning house to rescue the members of the family that live there. The fireman risks his life for the family members whether or not he knows them or has any emotional attachment to them. As a matter of fact, the fireman will risk his life to save the life of his enemy should his enemies’ house catch on fire. The personal relationship between the fireman and the people that need saving is not the determinative factor; but rather that the fireman has made the conscious choice to take on the job of attempting to rescue whomever is in need of saving. This is an example of ‘agapao’ love.

“Phileo” love, the emotional relationship that we generally define as love, generally does not come before we do that which is in the best interest of others, but afterward.

Think of the establishment of a love relationship between a man and a woman. From the man’s perspective, the love relationship begins with “eros” love, which is an animal magnetism or a physical attraction. The fashion and



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beauty industries exist to stimulate “eros” love between men and women. Once a man is attracted by “eros”, he may then choose to activate his “agapao” love by doing things for the woman that are in her best interest, such as paying attention to her and taking her out on a date. If the man and the woman find themselves compatible through the “agapao” stage, “phileo” love may develop, and they may choose to marry one another.

Thus, “agapao” is a prerequisite for “phileo”, meaning that we have to treat someone well before we develop emotional feelings for them. I don’t develop for love you just because I am physically attracted to you, but rather, I develop love for you because of our interaction when I choose to do something in your best interest. For example, **John 3:16-17** tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The word “whoever” in verse 16 tells us that God’s love shown in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is “agapao” rather than “phileo”. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was not “phileo” in that Jesus did not die personally for any individual, but rather, Jesus died “agapao” to help anyone that needs Him, just as the fireman does not come to your house because of any personal affection for you, but because you need him to put out the fire.

Jesus gives us an example, in His interaction with the Rich Young Ruler in **Mark 10:17-20**:

17 Now as [Jesus] was going out on the road, [the rich young ruler] came running, knelt before [Jesus], and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

18 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’”

20 And he answered and said to [Jesus], “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”

The rich young ruler was pleased with himself, as he had never been charged with a violation of the letter of the Law of Moses. But Jesus loved the young man and wanted the best for him, which meant that Jesus wanted the young man to go beyond the external Law of Moses to actually be born again, and so, in **Mark 10:21**:

21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”



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Now, telling someone to sell all that they have and give it away is not exactly how we usually plan to get to someone's heart. But Jesus was not trying to endear himself to the rich young ruler's heart, but rather, to get the rich young ruler saved. The ruler heard that which Jesus said, but did not respond positively to Jesus' teaching, as **Mark 10:22** tells us:

22 But [the rich young ruler] was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus' analysis shows us why He gave the young man the answer that He did. In **Mark 10:23-25**:

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

In order to make it possible for us to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus gave His heavenly glory, His heavenly riches, and His very life. The rich young ruler, however, couldn't even bear to give his temporary possessions, which would be worthless to him at his death, to enter the eternal kingdom of God. Just think about it. If you were given the choice between being poor for eighty years on earth and then going to heaven for eternity, or being rich for eighty years on earth and then going to hell for eternity, which would you consider to be the wise choice? And Jesus was not asking the ruler to just give up his riches to embrace poverty, but rather to become a disciple, to take up the cross and to follow Him.

Consider that which Jesus was offering the rich young ruler. The ruler could have been remembered along with Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul. In fact, the rich young ruler probably had the educational background to take the place among the disciples that the Apostle Paul eventually took, as the intellectual leader and chief author of the New Testament.

Although Jesus was offering the rich young ruler a great role in Christianity, the rich young ruler did not recognize it. The rich young ruler had the choice between being a rich man temporarily and a great man everlastingly, and he chose the temporary riches. Not the best choice in the long run, but, as Jesus said, it is hard for those that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.

To exhibit "agapao" love is often a difficult choice. Just ask the fireman. "Agapao" generally calls for self-sacrifice, and it is difficult for anyone that trusts in riches, comfort, or anything besides Jesus Christ to sacrifice themselves to enter the kingdom of God, because whatever else in which we trust will seem to be more fulfilling than the kingdom. Yes, we rationalize to ourselves that we need the things of this world to survive, but Jesus tells us, **Matthew 6:31-33**:



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31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Here is a new perspective on life. Stop worrying and seek the kingdom of God. If the rich young ruler had this perspective, he would immediately have organized an estate sale. He would have given up His earthly riches in order to obtain everlasting riches. Jesus did not accumulate riches, but rather power with God, as He showed when tax time came, as **Matthew 17:24-27** tells us:

24 When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?”

25 He said, “Yes.” And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”

26 Peter said to Him, “From strangers.” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.

27 Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.”

Why did Jesus not have or need a bank account? Simply because He had access to the riches of God whenever He needed them, so there was no reason for Him to accumulate earthly riches. When the disciples went fishing and caught nothing, Jesus gave them some fishing instructions, after which the fish jumped into their nets so fast that the men could not bring them all in. When the disciples were short of food for the multitude, Jesus blessed the little food that they had, instructed the disciples to pass it out, and there was enough for everyone to eat and to spare.

Am I saying that we should emulate Jesus’ instructions to the rich young ruler? No. I can neither call disciples nor allocate God’s resources, as did Jesus. But I can say to you that which Jesus told me to say, in our text for today, **Romans 13:8-10**:

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.



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The “agapao” determination to love one another is actually nothing more than practice for our life in the Kingdom of God. I am a trained concert pianist. When I was in training, during the four years that I took lessons from an artist teacher at the Chicago Musical College in Roosevelt University, I learned that in order for me to successfully master the physical skill of playing concert piano, I had to devote seven hours of practice for each hour of lesson time. A couple of years ago, Marie and I took up urban ballroom dancing. When I started, I had no dancing skill at all, but now, wherever we go dancing, people come up to us and tell us how well we dance and how much they enjoy watching us. We can dance well now because when we were learning, the two of us danced every day, and probably spent at least seven hours practicing the dance lessons that we learned for each hour that we spent in dance class.

I need to translate my music and dancing experience to my study of Christianity. Loving one another as Jesus instructs is actually nothing more than practice for our future life in the Kingdom of God. For each lesson in love that we learn intellectually, we need seven times as much experience practicing “agapao” love in order to become functionally accomplished in being loving. If I want the same accolades when I enter the kingdom of Heaven that I receive from the crowd when I sit down to perform on the piano or on the dance floor, I need to put in the same amount of practice performing “agapao” as I did learning my physical skills. Jesus invited the rich young ruler to follow Him because the rich young ruler had learned the principles, which is why the ruler confessed to having kept them, but his plenty precluded him from positively practicing the principles that he perceived.

Had it not been for the practice of the principles of “agapao” love, it is likely that our country would not have developed as it did. History tells us that the Pilgrims, who celebrated the first thanksgiving in America, fled religious persecution in their native England and migrated to Holland in 1609. After a few years their children were speaking Dutch and began to emulate the Dutch way of life. The Pilgrims considered Dutch ideas a threat to their children’s education and morality, so they decided to leave Holland for the New World. Their trip was financed by a group of English investors, for whom the Pilgrims agreed to work for seven years in exchange for supplies and passage.

On September 6, 1620, the Pilgrims set sail from Plymouth, England on a ship called the Mayflower with 44 Pilgrims and 66 others aboard. During the cold, damp 65 day trip, the Pilgrims could not cook, but had to eat their food cold to avoid setting fire to the wooden ship. Many passengers became sick and one person died by the time land was sighted on November 10, 1620.

The Pilgrims settled at Plymouth, which had been named by Captain John Smith in 1614. Plymouth offered an excellent harbor. A large brook offered a resource for fish. The Pilgrims’ biggest concern was attack by the local Native Americans, but the locals were peaceful and were not a threat.



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The first winter was devastating to the Pilgrims. The cold, snow and sleet were exceptionally heavy, interfering with the workers as they tried to construct their settlement. Of the 110 who left England, less than 50 survived the first winter.

On March 16, 1621, a Native American man walked into the Plymouth settlement and called out “Welcome” (in English!). His name was Samoset. He had learned English from the captains of fishing boats that had sailed off the coast. After staying the night, Samoset left the next day and returned with another Native American man named Squanto who spoke better English than he. Squanto told the Pilgrims of his voyages across the ocean and his visits to England, where he learned English.

Squanto showed the “agapao” love of God to the Pilgrims. His importance to them was enormous and it is likely that they would not have survived without his help. Squanto taught the Pilgrims which plants were poisonous and which had medicinal powers. He taught them how to tap the maple trees for sap, how to plant Indian corn by heaping the earth into low mounds with several seeds and fish in each mound to fertilize the corn, and to plant other crops with the corn.

The harvest in October was very successful and the Pilgrims found themselves with enough food to put away for the winter. There was corn, fruits and vegetables, fish to be packed in salt, and meat to be cured over smoky fires. The Pilgrims had much to celebrate; they had built homes in the wilderness, they had raised enough crops to keep them alive during the long coming winter, they were at peace with their Native American neighbors. They had beaten the odds and it was time to celebrate.

The Pilgrim Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving to God to be shared by all the colonists and the neighboring Native Americans. They invited Squanto and the others to join them in their celebration. Their chief, Massasoit, and 90 Native American men came to the celebration which lasted for 3 days. The Native American men and the Pilgrims celebrated and thanked God together for the bounty that they received through their cooperation with one another.

The following year the Pilgrims harvest was not as bountiful, as they were still unused to growing the corn. The third year brought a spring and summer that was hot and dry with the crops dying in the fields. Governor Bradford ordered a day of fasting and prayer, and it was soon thereafter that the rain came. To celebrate, November 29th of that year was proclaimed a day of thanksgiving. This date is believed to be the real true beginning of the present day Thanksgiving Day.

The custom of an annually celebrated thanksgiving, held after the harvest, continued through the years, but there was no national celebration until the pivotal Civil War year of 1863. After issuing the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves in the United States of America in January, 1863, and after the



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pivotal battles of the Civil War at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July, 1863, both won by the Union Army, and the historic Gettysburg address in November, 1863, dedicating the Gettysburg National Cemetery and commemorating the 50,000 soldiers that died in those battles, President Abraham Lincoln appointed a national day of thanksgiving to celebrate the intervention of God in the crumbling of the resistance of the South and the success of the Union Army. Since then each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation, usually designating the fourth Thursday of each November as the holiday.

Had it not been for Squanto showing the “agapao” love of God to the Pilgrims, and the successful prosecution of the Civil War and the liberation of the slaves, it is likely that American history would have been very different. But as the Native Americans helped the Pilgrims and the Union soldiers gave their lives to free the slaves, **Romans 13:8-10** instructs us to love and help one another, whether we have an emotional attachment to one another or not, as it says:

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

As we sit around the table of our bounty and consider the blessings that the Lord has given us this coming Thursday, let us remember the reason for the season. We are here because Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us, and also because someone that we don’t know loved us and gave themselves for us. As we consider our blessings, let us resolve to return the blessing that we received to someone else, to be like the firemen, to love and give ourselves even for those that we do not know in order to be able to convincingly witness to them about the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the meaning of **John 13:34-35**, which tells us:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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