

## Lesson 1: The Puritans

### I. Puritanism

- George Whitefield (1714-1770) on the Puritans:
  - *When cast out by the black Bartholomew Act, and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in a special manner wrote and preached as men having authority. Though dead, by their writings they yet speak: a peculiar unction attends them to this very hour; and for these thirty years past I have remarked, that the more true and vital religion hath revived either at home or abroad, the more the good old puritanical writings, or the authors of a like stamp who lived and died in communion of the Church of England, have been called for... Their works still praise them in the gates; and without pretending to a spirit of prophecy, we may venture to affirm that they will live and flourish, when more modern performances of a contrary cast, notwithstanding their gaudy and tinsel trappings, will languish and die in the esteem of those whose understandings are opened to discern what comes nearest to the scripture standard.*
- Common Views of Puritans & Puritanism
  - Puritanism has always had detractors:
    - A contemporary of the Puritans, Thomas Manningham, stated that a Puritan was *“such a one as loves God with all his soul, but hates his neighbor with all his heart.”*
    - 20<sup>th</sup> century journalist H. L. Mencken stated, *“Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”*
    - Kenneth Hare poetically quipped, *“The puritan through life’s sweet garden goes to pluck the thorn and cast away the rose.”*
    - Bishop J. C. Ryle, an admirer of the Puritans, wrote that, *“There are more baseless and false ideas current about them than about any class of men in British history.”*
  - Deprecating the Puritans is easy but defining Puritanism is much more difficult because they were never a well-defined movement
- Puritanism Defined: A Tricky Business
  - English Puritanism was a movement from roughly 1560-1660
  - Puritan was a term of insult first used in 1564 (they were also called Precisionists, the Godly sort, the hotter sort of Protestant, etc.)
  - The definition of historians John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim is solid: *“Puritanism is the name we give to a distinctive and particularly intense variety of early modern Reformed Protestantism which originated within the unique context of the Church of England but spilled out beyond it, branching off into divergent dissenting streams, and overflowing into other lands and foreign churches.”*
  - Theologian J. I. Packer’s definition is about as simple as it gets: *“Puritanism I define as that movement in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England which sought further reformation and renewal in the Church of England than the Elizabethan settlement allowed.”*

## II. Why Study the Puritans?

- J. I. Packer
  - They were mature about their faith in a way that is lacking in our day and age
  - Puritanism was a spiritual movement that was profoundly God-centered
  - Puritans demanded a theological, and not pragmatic, justification for everything that they did
  - Three groups of Christians that could particularly benefit from practical Puritan theology:
    - Restless experientialists
    - Entrenched intellectualists
    - Disaffected deviationists
- Joel Beeke & Randall Pederson
  - They shape life by Scripture
  - They marry doctrine and practice
  - They focus on Christ
  - They show how to handle trials
  - They show how to live in two worlds
  - They show us true spirituality
- The Puritans: God's Pilgrims
  - The Puritans saw themselves as pilgrims wandering through this world on their way from the city of destruction to the celestial city
  - Dr. Joel Beeke identifies six facets of the Puritan pilgrim mentality that are vital to the Christian life
    - Biblical Outlook
    - Pietist Outlook
    - Churchly Outlook
    - Warfaring Outlook
    - Methodical Outlook
    - Two-Worldly Outlook

## III. Puritan Literature

- Why Read the Puritans? (Kistler)
  - They will elevate your concept of God
  - Puritans had a "love affair" with Christ, and they wrote much about the beauty of Christ
  - The Puritans will help us understand the sufficiency of Christ
  - The Puritans help us see the sufficiency of Scripture for life and godliness
  - The Puritans can teach us about the heinous nature of sin
  - The Puritans will help us with practical living
  - The Puritans will help us with evangelism that is biblical
  - Reading the Puritans will help us have right priorities
  - The Puritans can help us clarify the issue of how a man is made right with God
  - The Puritans supremely valued the authority of God's Word

- ***The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson**
  - Watson’s 1668 work based on Acts 26:20, “*that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*”
  - Sin is deceitful and a person may demonstrate *counterfeit repentance* through legal terrors, resolutions against sin, and the leaving of many sinful ways without true repentance
  - The Nature of True Repentance consists of six necessary ingredients:
    - Sight of Sin (*Sin must first be seen before it can be wept for*)
    - Sorrow of Sin (*A broken heart and a broken Christ do well agree*)
    - Confession of Sin (*A gracious soul labours to make the worst of his sins*)
    - Shame for Sin (*Did he [Christ] wear the purple, and shall not our cheeks wear crimson?*)
    - Hatred for Sin (*Those who have no antipathy against sin are strangers to repentance*)
    - Turning from Sin (*Dying to sin is the life of repentance*)
- ***The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan**
  - This 1678 work is considered the most widely read book of all time outside of the Bible (in English)
    - Sold 100,000 copies in it’s first decade. The population of England at the time was only 5.2 million people
    - It has never been out of print in 340 years
    - Reprinted in over 1500 editions and translated into more than 200 languages
  - An allegorical story of a man named Christian on his journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City
- ***Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ* by John Bunyan**
  - Published in 1681 and based on John 6:37, “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*” Meant to elaborate on how and why a sinner comes to Christ
  - A tour de force of experiential Calvinism:
    - Total depravity teaches the coming sinner that he has nothing to offer God for his soul
    - Unconditional election and irresistible grace teach the coming sinner to see God as the author of salvation and the effectual means of accomplishing it in time
    - God’s absolute promise to save the coming sinner means that his salvation and perseverance are assured
  - “*For upon this one question, Am I come, or, am I not? hangs heaven and hell as to thee. If thou canst say, I am come, and God shall approve that saying, happy, happy, happy man art thou! But if thou art not come, what can make thee happy? yea, what can make that man happy that, for his not coming to Jesus Christ for life, must be damned to hell?*” - John Bunyan (1628-1688)

- ***Indwelling Sin in the Believer* by John Owen**
  - Published in 1667 and based on Romans 7:21, “*I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*”
  - Owen’s stated purpose was, “*to speak of the indwelling sin that remains in believers after their conversion to God, and of its power, efficacy, and effects.*”
  - Indwelling sin is a law (a principle that drives actions) that:
    - Always remains in the soul
    - Is always ready to act
    - Works with great ease
  - Owen points to his previous work, *The Mortification of Sin*, for how Christians are to mortify indwelling sin in their lives
    - “*Observe, first, that the ultimate end of sin, and its tendency in its own nature, is death, the everlasting death of the sinner. But sin deceitfully hides this end. To realize this is a blessed means of preventing its victory.*”
    - “*A great part of the deceit of sin is to present thoughts that diminish sin to the mind. ‘Is it not a little one?’ or, ‘There is mercy provided’, or, ‘I will soon give it up,’ is sin’s language in a deceived heart.*”
    - “*A determined will to sin is sin.*”
    - “*That which can prevail with men, wise, sober, and prudent about other things, to despise the love of God, the blood of Christ, the eternal welfare of their souls, must have an astonishing force and power about it.*”
    - “*A commandment always practiced is always new, as John says of love. If we apply gospel truths, though we hear them a thousand times, they will always be new and fresh to us. Others allow them to become commonplace, so that they grow burdensome and stale. They loath the manna that they are so accustomed to.*”
- ***The Mortification of Sin* by John Owen**
  - Published in 1656 and based on Romans 8:13, “*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*”
  - Mortification is the practice of putting sin to death
    - “*Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.*”
    - “*Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts.*”
    - “*Watch against all eruptions of thy corruptions.*”
  - According to Owen, the mortification of a lust consists in three things:
    - An habitual weakening of it
    - Constant fighting and contending against sin
    - Finding out the subtleties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin
- ***Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices* by Thomas Brooks**
  - Brooks’ 1652 work was based on 2 Corinthians 2:11, “*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*”

- Brooks demonstrated that “*Satan hath his several devices to deceive, entangle, and undo the souls of men.*”
- Brooks stated that his purpose was to:
  - Prove the point
  - Show Satan’s several devices
  - Show the remedies against his devices
  - Show how he has so many devices
  - Lay down propositions to combat Satan’s devices
- ***The Letters of Samuel Rutherford***
  - Rutherford’s letters were published posthumously in 1664 (many of them were written during his exile from his parish in Anwoth, Scotland)
  - Fellow Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-1691) wrote that apart from the Bible, “*such a book as Mr. Rutherford’s Letters the world never saw the like.*”
  - Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) stated, “*When we are dead and gone let the world know that Spurgeon held Rutherford’s Letters to be the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men.*”
- ***The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes**
  - Based on Isaiah 42:1-3, “*...A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth*”
  - The bruised reed is the man in misery who sees sin as the cause of that misery.
    - Bruising is needed **before** our conversion because, “*Our hearts, like criminals, until they be beaten from all evasions, never cry for the mercy of the Judge.*”
    - Bruising is needed **after** conversion, “*so that reeds may know themselves to be reeds, and not oaks.*”
    - Sibbes exhorts us to remember in our bruising, “*Let us lament our own perversity, and say: Lord, what a heart have I that needs all this, that none of this could be spared!*”
  - The smoking flax is the bruised reed who has the “*spark of hope*” from Christ but is still plagued by doubts and fears that are the result of his manifold corruptions. Christ will not quench this smoking flax however because, “*this spark is from heaven: it is his own, it is kindled by his own Spirit. And secondly, it tends to the glory of his powerful grace in his children that he preserves light in the midst of darkness, a spark in the midst of the swelling waters of corruption.*”
- ***The Fountain of Life* by John Flavel**
  - This 1671 work’s full title is *The Fountain of Life Opened Up: Or, A Display of Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory*
  - 42 sermons on Jesus Christ from various biblical texts
  - One biographer of John Flavel wrote, “*He preached what he felt, what he had handled, what he had seen and tasted of the word of life, and they felt it also...He was a mighty wrestler with God in secret prayer, and particularly begged of him to crown his*

*sermons, printed books and private discourses, with the conversion of poor sinners, a work which his heart was much set upon."*

- *"Alas! I write his praises but by moon-light; I cannot praise him so much as by halves. Indeed, no tongue but his own (as Nazianzen said of Basil) is sufficient to undertake that task. What shall I say of Christ? The excelling glory of that object dazzles all apprehension, swallows up all expression. When we have borrowed metaphors from every creature that hath any excellency of lovely property in it, till we have stript the whole creation bare of all its ornaments, and clothed Christ with all that glory; when we have even worn out our tongues, in ascribing praises to him, alas! We have done nothing, when all is done."*