

## Lesson VI: The Puritan Life

### I. Puritans & Work

- Puritanism rejected the false distinction between sacred and secular work common in medieval Roman Catholicism
- Puritans emphasized the sanctity of all honest work
- Puritans believed that God called and equipped everyone for their vocation whether that be as a preacher, farmer, tradesman, mother, maid, etc (no secular-sacred division)
- Puritans believed that one should work diligently in their vocation because it glorifies God and benefits society
- *“In the Puritan ethic, the virtue of work depended almost wholly on the motives with which people performed it... To work with zeal and yet not give one’s soul to his or her work was what they strove for.”* - Leland Ryken
- *“Choose that employment or calling in which you may be most serviceable to God. Choose not that in which you may be most rich or honorable in the world; but that in which you may do most good, and best escape sinning.”* - Richard Baxter (1615-1691) on Work

### II. Puritans & Marriage

- The Catholic church had a predominantly negative view of marital relations since the days of the Early Church Fathers
  - Common view was that marital sex was sinful and virginity superior
  - Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, John Chrysostom, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, etc. all had negative views of marital sex
- The Puritans believed that marital sex, or “due benevolence,” was good and an act not only for procreation but also necessary for the remedying of sexual sin and mutual society
- Due benevolence was more than a physical act. As Leland Ryken states, *“The Puritan ideal was wedded romantic love.”*
- Many patristic and medieval Catholic texts characterized women as “snares” to men and “necessary evils”
- The Puritans, in contrast, exalted women as wives & mothers
  - *“They are a sort of blasphemers then who despise and decry them [women], and call them a necessary evil, for they are a necessary good.”* - John Cotton (1585-1652)
  - *“Most true it is that women are as men are reasonable creatures, and have flexible wits, both to good and evil... And although there be some evil and lewd women, yet that doth no more prove the malice of their nature than of men, and therefore the more ridiculous and foolish are they that have inveighed against the whole sex for a few evil.”* - Robert Cleaver (d. 1613)
- The idea of companionate marriage elevated the status of women

### III. Puritans & Money

- The Puritans did not idealize wealth or poverty but they generally believed that money was a good thing when viewed as a gift of God & tool for good

- *“As riches are not evidences of God’s love, so neither is poverty of his anger or hatred.”* - Samuel Willard (1640-1707)
- Prosperity, while a gift of God, could also be a significant source of temptation for Christians
  - *“Religion begat prosperity and the daughter devoured the mother.”* - Cotton Mather (1663-1728)
  - *“Adversity hath slain her thousands, but Prosperity her ten thousands.”* - Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)
- Puritans believed in a life of moderation based on: (1) contentment with a moderate lifestyle; (2) voluntarily setting limits on indulgence; and (3) putting wealth & possession in perspective

#### IV. Puritans & The Family

- Spouses
  - Puritans believed that the family was the foundational unit of society and its primary purpose was to glorify God
    - *“A household is as it were a little commonwealth, by the good government whereof God’s glory may be advanced, the commonwealth which standeth of several families benefitted, and all that live in that family may receive much comfort and commodity.”* - Robert Cleaver (d. 1613)
  - Puritans believed in a hierarchy of authority within the family. This hierarchy was *“a matter of function and not of worth”* - Ryken
    - Male headship: The husband was the accountable leader of the family
    - Female submission: The wife was to submit willingly to the headship of her husband while sharing authority with him over the guiding of the family
- Children
  - Puritan Thomas Watson said that true Christian parents endeavored, *“that their children may be more God’s children than theirs.”*
  - Puritans like Cotton Mather (1663-1728) believed in strict parental discipline because children were *“Better whipt, than damned”*
    - Discipline should be gentle and adapted to the temperament of the child
    - Children were *“innocent vipers”* that needed correction & example
  - Puritans believed in family worship & catechizing
    - Family worship could include prayer, confession, reading, & singing
    - Catechizing was a question-answer format that taught biblical doctrine
  - *“All this that we here suffer is through you; you should have taught us the things of God, and did not; you should have restrained us from sin and corrected us, and you did not; you were the means of our original corruption and guiltiness, and yet you never showed any competent care that we might be delivered from it...Woe unto us that we had such carnal and careless parents, and woe unto you that had no more compassion and pity to prevent the everlasting misery of your own children.”* - Richard Mather’s (1596-1669) view of Children Addressing their Parents on the Judgment Day

## V. Puritans & Preaching

- The preacher was “the hero of sixteenth-century Puritanism”
  - o “*The popularity of Puritan preaching in its day was breathtaking. Henry Smith was so popular and his church so crowded that (in the words of Thomas Fuller) ‘persons of good quality brought their own pews with them, I mean their legs, to stand upon in the aisles.’*” - Leland Ryken
- Puritan sermons were typically an hour long and ministers gave three to five sermons per week in addition to catechizing families
  - o Most ministers preached from notes but some from full manuscripts
  - o The standard Puritan sermon outline consisted of: (1) Exposition or “opening of the text”; (2) Doctrine; and (3) Application
- J. I. Packer identified four axioms of Puritan preaching: (1) belief in the primacy of the intellect; (2) belief in the supreme importance of preaching; (3) belief in the life-giving power of Holy Scripture; and (4) belief in the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. These axioms lead to preaching that was:
  - o Expository in method (*the minister explicated what the text actually said or implied*)
  - o Doctrinal in its content (*the minister proclaimed the faith and fed the sheep*)
  - o Orderly in its arrangement (*the minister arranged the sermon for ease of listening*)
  - o Popular in its style (*the minister ‘crucified their style’ so that all might understand*)
  - o Christ-centered in its orientation (*the minister’s sermon revolved around Christ*)
  - o Experimental in its interests (*the minister sought to bring men to know God*)
  - o Piercing in its applications (*the minister spoke to specific spiritual need*)
  - o Powerful in its manner (*the minister sought to preach ‘as if death were at his back’*)
- “*Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened, either here or in hell. Look around upon them with the eye of faith, and with compassion, and think in what a state of joy or torment they must all be for ever; and then, methinks, it will make you earnest, and melt your heart to a sense of their condition. Oh, speak not one cold or careless word about so great a business as heaven or hell.*” - Richard Baxter (1615-1691) on Preaching

## VI. Puritans & Worship

- Puritan views of church government have already been discussed
- Principles of Puritan corporate worship:
  - o Orderly and clearly organized (see next slide)
  - o Curbed ceremony and ritual (“*The more ceremonies, the less truth*”)
  - o Simplified church architecture and furnishings (rectangle, white walls, etc)
  - o Simplified church music (congregational singing of psalms)
  - o Simplified sacraments (signs and seals)
  - o Clearly defined goals (honor God, edify believers, increase the Kingdom)
- Typical Puritan Service
  - o A confession of sins
  - o A prayer for pardon
  - o A metrical Psalm
  - o A prayer for illumination

- Scripture reading
- Sermon
- Baptism and publication of Banns
- Long prayer and Lord's prayer
- Apostles' Creed
- A metrical Psalm
- The Blessing

## VII. Puritans & Education

- The Puritans were zealous advocates for education
  - Christianity is a text-based religion so literacy was most-highly valued
  - God made man in His own image which included rationality
- The Puritans believed that all truth was God's truth
  - Emphasized classical liberal arts education in addition to religious instruction because they saw no distinction between religious and secular truth
  - *“truth comes from God, wheresoever we find it, and it is ours, it is the church's... We must not make an idol of these things, but truth, wheresoever we find it, is the church's; therefore, with a good conscience we may make use of any human author.”* - Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)
- William Perkins (1558-1602) admirably summarized the Puritan theory of education by stating, *“where ignorance reigneth, there reigns sin.”*
- Education was one of the great strengths of the Puritan movement in both Old & New England
  - The vast majority of Puritan ministers were college educated men from Cambridge or Oxford (John Bunyan and Richard Baxter being notable exceptions in the later days of English Puritanism)
  - Harvard was founded in 1636 to train new ministers in America
- The Puritans created and endowed numerous schools throughout England, Massachusetts Bay, and Connecticut
  - Number of grammar schools in England doubled under Puritan influence and new colleges were founded at Cambridge and Durham

## VIII. Puritan Faults (Ryken)

- The Puritans were **sinner**s saved by grace. Their faults included:
  - An inadequate view of recreation
  - Too many rules
  - Too many words
  - Too much pious moralizing
  - Male chauvinism
  - Partisan spirit
  - Insensitivity to other religious groups
  - Puritan extremism