

## Lesson V: Puritan Theology

### I. Puritans & The Bible

- Puritanism was a Bible movement at its core
  - Spurgeon’s description of John Bunyan is appropriate for Puritanism in general. *“Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God.”*
- Their insistence on a new Bible translation yielded the KJV in 1611
- The Puritans were competent exegetes of Scripture and their expositions were nothing short of comprehensive
  - Owen’s exposition of Hebrews is almost 3400 pages, Caryl’s exposition of Job is 6000 pages, Goodwin’s exposition of Ephesians 1 is almost 600 pages, Manton’s exposition of Hebrews 11 is 698 pages, Gurnall’s exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20 is 800 pages, Robinson’s exposition of Colossians 3:11 is 700 pages, etc.
- Puritans & The Bible: A Historical Example
  - *He [Thomas Goodwin] told me that being himself, in the time of his youth, a student at Cambridge, and having heard much of Mr. Rogers of Dedham, in Essex, purposely he took a journey from Cambridge to Dedham to hear him preach on his lecture day. And in that sermon he falls into an expostulation with the people about their neglect of the Bible [I am afraid it is more neglected in our days]; he personates God to the people, telling them, “Well, I have trusted you so long with my Bible; you have slighted it; it lies in such and such houses all covered with dust and cobwebs. You care not to look into it. Do you use my Bible so? Well, you shall have my Bible no longer.” And he takes up the Bible from his cushion, and seemed as if he were going away with it, and carrying it from them; but immediately turns again and personates the people to God, falls down on his knees, cries and pleads most earnestly, “Lord, whatsoever thou cost to us, take not thy Bible from us; kill our children, burn our houses, destroy our goods; only spare us thy Bible, only take not away thy Bible.” And then he personates God again to the people: “Say you so? Well, I will try you a little longer; and here is my Bible for you, I will see how you will use it, whether you will love it more, whether you will value it more, whether you will observe it more, whether you will practice it more, and live more according to it.” But by these actions [as the Doctor told me] he put all the congregation into so strange a posture that he never saw any congregation in his life. The place was a mere Bochim, the people generally [as it were] deluged with their own tears; and he told me that he himself when he got out, and was to take horse again to be gone, was fain to hang a quarter of an hour upon the neck of his horse weeping, before he had power to mount, so strange an impression was there upon him, and generally upon the people, upon having been thus expostulated with for the neglect of the Bible.*
- Puritan Scriptural Interpretation
  - Literal and grammatical
  - Consistent and harmonistic
  - Doctrinal and theocentric

- Christological and evangelical
  - Puritan Thomas Adams wrote that Christ is the “*sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line... Christ is the main, the centre whither all these lines are referred.*”
  - Adams also wrote, “*the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus.*”
- Experimental and practical
- Faithful and realistic application
- Puritanism’s Six Questions to Ask When Interpreting Scripture
  - What do these words actually mean?
  - What light do other Scriptures throw on the text? How does it fit in the biblical revelation?
  - What truths does it teach about God and man’s relationship to Him?
  - How are these truths related to the saving work of Christ?
  - For what practical purpose does this text stand in Scripture?
  - How do these truths apply to me and others? What are they telling us to believe and do?

## II. Puritans & The Trinity

- The 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of Socinianism in England
  - Rejected the doctrine of the Trinity (God is one person in one essence)
  - Beliefs enshrined in *The Racovian Catechism* of 1605
  - Parliament ordered this catechism burned in 1652 because it, “*doth contain matters that are blasphemous, erroneous, and scandalous.*”
- The Puritans were stalwart defenders of the Trinity
  - God is three persons in one essence (Nicene orthodoxy)
  - Francis Cheynell (1608-1665), Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), and John Owen (1616-1683) wrote extensively on behalf of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity
- The Puritans saw communion, or fellowship, with the persons of the Trinity as foundational to Christian life and worship
  - Thomas Goodwin wrote, “*We should never be satisfied till all three persons lie level in us, and all make their abode with us, and we sit as it were in the midst of them, while they all manifest their love unto us.*”
- John Owen’s *Communion with God* (1657) was the greatest Puritan work written on how to enjoy distinct communion with each person of the Trinity (in Volume II of his collected works)
  - We commune with God the Father in His love
  - We commune with God the Son in His grace
  - We commune with God the Holy Spirit in His comfort
- John Owen on the Trinity and the Christian Life
  - *What is so high, glorious, and mysterious as the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity? Some wise men have thought meet to keep it veiled from ordinary Christians, and some have*

*delivered it in such terms as that they can understand nothing by them. But take a believer who hath tasted how gracious the Lord is, in the eternal love of the Father, the great undertaking of the Son in the work of mediation and redemption, with the almighty work of the Spirit creating grace and comfort in the soul; and hath had an experience of the love, holiness, and power of God in them all; and he will with more firm confidence adhere to this mysterious truth, being led into it and confirmed in it by some few plain testimonies of the word, than a thousand disputers shall do who only have the notion of it in their minds. Let a real trial come, and this will appear. Few will be found to sacrifice their lives on bare speculations. Experience will give assurance and stability.*

### III. Puritans & Sin

- As the federal head of humanity under the covenant of works, Adam’s first sin immediately imputed the guilt and corruption of sin to the human race (Adam’s federal headship mirrors Christ’s federal headship of the elect under the covenant of grace)
  - Our guilt from Adam is remedied through justification in Christ
  - Our corruption from Adam is overcome through sanctification in Christ
- Puritan Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) stated there were three types of sin:
  - Original: Loss of original righteousness in Adam (imputed)
  - Actual: Personal transgressions of the law of God (result of original sin)
  - Habitual: Frequent sins committed by people (indwelling sin)
- The Puritans had a profound sense of the sinfulness of sin
- Christians are not immune from the power of indwelling sin and so they must seek to mortify (put to death) sin in their life. John Owen *Of the Mortification of sin in Believers*:
  - *“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

### IV. Puritans & Salvation

- The vast majority of Puritans were orthodox Calvinists
  - The lifeblood of Puritanism was that *“Salvation is of the Lord.”* - Jonah 2:9
- William Perkins’ (1558-1602) masterpiece *A Golden Chaine* (1591) is an excellent example of doctrine linked to experience
- Perkins’ *Ordo Salutis* (order of salvation): The Decree of Election à God’s Love for the Elect in Christ à Effectual Calling (Effectual Preaching, Breaking of the Sinner’s Heart, & Saving Faith) à Justification (Remission of Sin & Imputation of Righteousness) à Sanctification (Mortification, Vivification, & Repentance) à Glorification

## V. Puritans & The Blood of Christ

- The blood of Christ was essential to Puritan piety
- Cleansing through the blood: (1) Substitution; (2) Imputation; (3) Justification
- Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664): *“O the curse and bitterness that our sins have brought on Jesus Christ! When I but think of these bleeding veins, bruised shoulders, scourged sides, furrowed back, harrowed temples, digged hands and feet, and then consider that my sins were the cause of all; methinks I should need no more arguments for self-abhorring! Christians would not your hearts rise against him that should kill your father, mother, brother, wife, husband; dearest relations in all the world! O then how should your hearts and souls rise against sin? Surely your sin it was, that murdered Christ, that killed him, who is instead of all relations, who is a thousand, thousand times dearer to you, than father, mother, husband, child, or whomsoever; one thought of this should, methinks, be enough to make you say, as Job did, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,” Job 42:9. Oh! what is that cross on the back of Christ? My sins; oh! what is that crown on the head of Christ? My sins; oh! what is the nail in the right-hand, and that other in the left-hand of Christ? My sins; oh! what is that spear in the side of Christ? My sins; what are those nails and wounds in the feet of Christ? My sins. With a spiritual eye I see no other engine tormenting Christ; no other Pilate, Herod, Annas, Caiaphas, condemning Christ; no other soldiers, officers, Jews, or Gentiles doing execution on Christ, - but only sin. O my sins, my sins!”*
- Sanctification Through the Blood of Christ
  - o Enlivening our Repentance
    - *“It is a ‘look upon Christ pierced’ that pierceth the soul, Zech. 12:10. Would not this blood acquaint us that the malignity of sin was so great, that it could not be blotted out by the blood of the whole creation! Would it not astonish us that none had strength enough to match it, but one equal to God!” - Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)*
  - o Enlivening our Faith
    - *“When we behold a Christ crucified, how can we distrust God, that hath in that, as a plain tablet write this language, that he will spare nothing for us, since he hath not spared the best he had. What greater assurance can he give? Where is there anything in heaven or earth that can be a greater pledge of his affection?” - Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)*
  - o Enlivening our Prayer
    - *“Be enlarged, O my soul! Sound forth the praises of thy Christ. Tell all the world of that warmest love of Christ, which flowed with his blood out of all his wounds into thy spirit; tune thy strings aright, and keep consort with all the angels of heaven, and all his saints on earth.” - Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664)*
  - o Enlivening our Holiness
    - *“We should see no charms in sin, which may not be overcome by that ravishing love which bubbles up in every drop of the Redeemer’s blood. Can we, with lively thoughts of this, sin against so much tenderness, compassion, grace, and the other perfections of God, which sound so loud in our ears from the cross of Jesus? Shall we consider him*

*hanging there to deliver us from hell, and yet retain any spirit to walk in the way which leads thereto?"* - Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

- Enlivening our Comfort
  - *"Let us look upon a crucified Christ, the remedy of all our miseries. His cross hath procured a crown, his passion hath expiated our transgression. His death hath disarmed the law, his blood hath washed a believer's soul. This death is the destruction of our enemies, the spring of our happiness, and the eternal testimony of divine love."* - Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)
- Thomas Brooks on the Blood
  - *"That even those very sins that Satan paints, and puts new names and colours upon, cost the best blood, the noblest blood, the life-blood, the heart-blood of the Lord Jesus."* - Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

## VI. Puritan Practical Theology: Conscience & Casuistry

- Conscience was a key concept in Puritan practical divinity
  - William Ames (1576-1633) said that conscience was, *"A man's judgment of himself according to the judgment of God on him."*
  - Beeke & Jones *"Simply put, conscience is judgmental knowledge of our thoughts, words, and actions as God Himself knows us."*
- All people have a conscience but it is corrupted due to the Fall
- The Restoration of the Conscience
  - Conscience must be awakened by Preaching
  - Conscience must be informed by Scripture
  - Conscience must be healed by the Gospel
  - Conscience must be exercised by Self-Examination
- Casuistry = cases of conscience
- Casuistry was, *"the art of moral theology applied with biblical integrity to various cases that a person is confronted with in his conscience or life."*
- Puritan lessons on casuistry for biblical counseling today
  - Labor to become competent for soul care
  - Focus on a good conscience before God
  - Promote holiness by divine truth, not human theories
  - Do counseling first in public instruction, then in private visitation
  - Do more than listen; give specific directions
  - Be a faithful preacher of the Word, not only a prober of feelings