

The History & Theology of the

PURITANS

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Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609337

Website: calvarypandan.sg

Email: enquiry@calvarypandan.sg

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FOREWORD

By Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew

It is the tradition of the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore to commemorate the 16th Century Reformation. The B-P Church of Singapore founding father Rev Dr Timothy Tow understood the signs of the last days. He knew that what happened in that Reformation must not be forgotten by future generations. To forget this key spiritual point in church history will be the end of fundamental Christianity within the Bible-Presbyterian movement. Sadly the evil one has succeeded. Most of the B-P churches in Singapore today have become neo-evangelicals. One of the hallmarks of neo-evangelicals is to believe in a Bible with mistakes. They live carnal lives as if they are holy. They espouse some truths of the Bible to maintain their deception and continue to dupe their spiritually blind followers.

Many attempts have been made by the evil one to cause an amnesiac generation of B-P members. One of the ways was the birth of the ecumenical movement in 1948 to unite all churches and religions. 21stC discerning believers are able to see the “success” of this diabolical movement. An important point to note is the apology from the Pope for persecuting the Protestants in the past. *“ROME (Reuters) - Pope Francis asked Protestants and other Christian Churches for forgiveness for past persecution by Catholics as the Vatican announced on Monday he would visit Sweden later in the year to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.”* [WORLD NEWS, January 25, 2016 by Philip Pullella] An apology of such magnitude from the Pope was unthinkable

50 years ago. So if an apology has already been made, why is there a need to remember the 16th Century Reformation?

If an apology of this nature is to be made, it must be made to the right Person. It ought to be made to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and not to the Protestant community. For the apology to be sincere there must be a dismantling of the vast Roman Catholic system of Christian idolatry. Were there fruits of repentance?

With the Bible-Presbyterian movement in sad decline and the vast community of 21stC Christianity in the ecumenical movement, it is more needful to remember the impact of the 16th Century Reformation today than when it was born 500 plus years ago.

This year we remember the puritans. They were the devoted and courageous believers who lived out the Bible doctrines in their lives. The psalmist summed it well in **Psalm 119:9-16**, *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.”*

WHO WERE THE PURITANS?

INTRODUCTION

What comes to mind when you hear the name “Puritans?” Some would associate the Puritans with a very strict kind of Christianity. They would see the Puritans as a group of people who were very concerned with living pure and holy lives, but who seem to pursue holiness in a way that is almost legalistic. It is easy to understand why some would have such an impression regarding the Puritans. After all, the name “Puritans” was first given to a group of 16th Century Protestant Christians because of their separatist stand and their call for further reforms within the Church of England.

Yet when we look at the lives and the writings of the Puritans, we realise that they are a greatly misunderstood group of people. They are a people whose only desire is to live in obedience to God’s Word. The Puritans had a very high view of the Word of God, and they saw the corruption that was creeping into the Church. With the 16th Century Reformation came a revival, but there also soon followed a spiritual regression. Satan will always seek to oppose the work of God in the Church. This was what the Church in England was facing towards the end of the 16th Century. When the Puritans saw that inconsistency within the Church and in the lives of Christians, they responded by preaching the Word of God and writing.

More recently, Christians have also learned to better appreciate the writings and the testimony of the Puritans. The Puritans have left behind a wealth of sermons and writings for us today. When we read their works, we realise that this is not a group of extreme or legalistic Christians. Rather, what we see is a group of Christians who loved God, who communed with God, and who sought to please God in every area of their lives. They sought to live a life that was based upon the Word of God, recognising that the Bible is their supreme authority in faith and practice.

It is difficult to define puritanism because puritanism is a movement and is not contained within an institution or organisation. This movement came about in the wake of the English Reformation. During the Marian exile (1553-1559), English Protestants were forced to flee England and they fled to cities such as Geneva where they were they learned of Reformed Theology. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), this same group of English Protestant Reformers returned back to England, and sought to bring about further reforms within the Church of England. Their reforms were not well-received by the Church. The first time the term “Puritan” was used was in 1567. It was a derogatory term and a term of insult designed to humiliate and mock these English Reformers. Soon this name

became an identity, referring specifically to this group of English Reformers who were at the heart of the English Reformation. The Puritans by and large stayed within the Church until 1662 when they were kicked out during the Great Ejection. Puritans were those who, generally speaking, held on to Calvinism and the simplicity of worship and experiential Christianity.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE PURITANS

The Puritans rose out of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. The Reformation movement had spread to England, and through the ministry of men such as Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell and William Tyndale, the Reformation movement also took root within England.

Soon after the Reformation movement spread to England, Mary Tudor, *aka* “bloody Mary”, became the Queen of England (1553-1558). She was a devout Catholic and was determined to “reform” England again, this time to purge it from Protestantism and restore Catholicism. In 1554, she revived the “Heresy Acts”, which gave her the power to repress “heresies” and to punish “heretics.” Given those circumstances, more than 800 Protestant bishops and leaders fled England to other cities such as Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Strasbourg, and Frankfurt. Underground churches were formed, and printers had to flee abroad. Many of the English reformers, including Thomas Cranmer, who remained in England were persecuted and martyred. By the time of Mary’s death in November 1558, an estimated 300 people had been burned at the stake. Foxe’s book of martyrs presents Mary’s reign as one that was marked by unmitigated wickedness and slaughter. Mary Tudor died in 1558 during an influenza epidemic and her sister,

Elizabeth I, succeeded the throne to great celebration throughout England.

Many monarchs, having been restrained by the Catholic Church, now sought to assert their authority, and this also affected England and Scotland. This led to the rise of nation states. During the reign of queen Elizabeth I, she passed two acts in Parliament. The first was the Act of Supremacy of 1559 which established Elizabeth as the “supreme governor” of the Church of England, thus marking a break from Rome. The second was the Act of Uniformity of 1559, which regulated the form of worship of every church in England. Every church was to conform to the Book of Common Prayer. Though the heart of Elizabeth’s reformation was very much a Protestant one, in order to prevent a civil war from breaking out and for political reasons, she imposed various sets of beliefs and practices with the hope of finding some middle ground between Protestants and Catholics. This became known as the “*via media*” or the “middle way.”

THE RISE OF THE PURITANISM

Many English Puritans were not satisfied with Elizabeth’s reforms and grew impatient. They saw that there was an increasingly relaxed attitude to Biblical discipline and a carelessness to worship. Responding to this spiritual decline in England, these Puritans began introducing reforms within their own churches. Puritans omitted parts of the liturgy to allow more time for the sermon and the singing of psalms. They were also opposed to the wearing of the white surplice and clerical cap. From the perspective of the Queen, the wearing of the surplice was part of religious uniformity which was essential to civic stability. Elizabeth clamped down on the non-conformists in 1566 by imposing various sanctions on

those who would not commit themselves in writing to submit to the Act of Uniformity. Those who refused to conformed were to be deprived of their living expenses. This had a major impact on puritanism. Sixty-one clergymen conformed whereas thirty-seven did not. This created a kind of an “underground church” in England. Those who refused to conform soon came to be known as the “Puritans”.

The basis for the Puritans’ reformation is the Bible. They had a high view of the Bible and they saw the Bible as the very Word of God that is written. The first chapter of The Westminster Confession of Faith, on the topic of Holy Scripture, reflects how the Puritans viewed the Scriptures. Apart from the Reformation in the Church, the Puritans saw also a need to Reform the government. This was because the Puritans were part of the larger Protestant reformation movement that stood against the Catholic Church in its governance and doctrine. This provides an important context for the Puritans’ influence in the affairs of the state.

PURITANISM UNDER KING JAMES I

Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603 after forty-four years on the throne. This marked the end of the era of the Tudors. In that same year, James I, who had been ruling as the king of Scotland since 1567, arrived in London to succeed Elizabeth who had died childless. Being a Protestant and Reformed, the Puritans hoped that he would be more receptive to their plans for reform. They presented the king with the Millenary Petition even before he arrived in London. This was referred to as “millenary” because it reportedly contained 1,000 signatures from Puritan pastors and Church leaders. It was a petition pleading with king James to make further reforms to the Anglican Church. King James I was

not only a Protestant Christian, he was also a Calvinist. This gave the Puritans much hope that their reforms would be accepted.

James I called for the Hampton Court Conference (1604) to deliberate upon this petition. There were three meetings held over a period of five days. The result of the Conference was not what many had anticipated. James I reinforced episcopacy, and he required ministers to adhere to the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer with some changes to it. Although this was a blow to the Puritans, they were still encouraged by James I’s support of the project to publish a new, authorised translation of the Bible, which would later be known as the King James Version of the Bible, published in 1611.

In 1604, James appointed Richard Bancroft, who was anti-Puritan, to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury. He blocked many of the Puritans’ proposal for reforms in England. Bancroft presented a book of the canon laws which received royal approval. As a result, about ninety Puritan ministers were suspended from office. However, the Parliament of England responded by claiming that Parliament was the only body authorised to pass such laws. James I gave in to the Parliament’s demands and retracted the laws. Because of the increasing persecution against the Puritans, small groups of Puritans had been leaving England for the Netherlands. The Puritans found themselves aligned with Parliament against the king and the bishops. This divide between Parliament and the King would eventually form the basis for the English Civil War in the 1640s. But at the time, though the reform of King James was not what the Puritans had hoped for, the tension was eased, albeit only for a moment, when King James gave his support towards the Calvinist position

at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Some Puritans, such as Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) felt that they could still serve within the Church of England and bring about reforms within the Church.

PURITANISM UNDER KING CHARLES I

In the mid 17th century, there was a crisis that rose up all around Europe. The old feudal order was breaking down and there was a rise of the middle class. The monarchy was desperate to keep things in order and part of that involved the control of the Church.

King Charles I succeeded James I in 1625. There were several issues which brought about conflict with the Puritans. Charles I had married a Roman Catholic one year before he came to the throne of England. William Laud, who was appointed as the Archbishop of Canterbury (1633), was an advocate of Arminian theology. He imposed the use of the clerical dress and conformity to the Book of Common Prayer. He reduced the time given to preaching and wanted more time to be spent on liturgy and prayer during worship services. He resented the Puritans and persecuted Puritan pastors who deviated from the Book of Common Prayer.

Parliament stood opposed to the king, and with the support of the Scottish Presbyterians, Parliament was able to oppose King Charles' policies, forcing him to flee London. Charles' loyal royalist supporters followed him out. Soon, these conflicts would eventually lead to the English Civil War (1642-1651), during which the Puritan supporters of Parliament fought against the Royalist supporters of Charles I.

During the civil war, Parliament directed

the Puritans to convene the Westminster Assembly in 1643, in order to formally restructure the Church of England. 121 theologians were gathered across the land to work on producing a confession of faith. In 1644, the Directory of Public Worship and the Form of Church Government was completed. The Westminster Confession of Faith was completed in 1647, with the accompanying shorter and larger catechism completed in 1647 and 1648 respectively.

Parliament won the war. William Laud was executed in 1645, and in 1649, King Charles I was tried and found guilty of high treason, and was executed. In 1649, the monarchy was abolished and England was declared to be a Commonwealth. Charles' forces were finally defeated in 1651. In 1653, in order to prevent any political conflicts, Oliver Cromwell dissolved parliament and was made Lord Protector of the united Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

PURITANISM UNDER THE RESTORED MONARCHY

After Cromwell's death, his son Richard succeeded him. But Richard did not receive the same support from the army as his father. Soon he lost the support of the army and the people. This allowed Charles II to return to England in 1660 to rule as King under a restored monarchy. Parliament was reconvened but now it was under the control of the king. In 1662, Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity which required churches and ministers to subscribe to the Book of Common Prayer. Puritan ministers were also forced to repudiate their own denominational identity. Any minister who was not ordained under the Church of England was considered invalid and was not allowed to preach or to administer the sacrament. They were required to be

reordained under the Church of England. As a result, more than 2,000 ministers who refused to submit to the Act were expelled from the Church of England in what is known as the Great Ejection of 1662. This marks the point where efforts to reform the Church of England internally formally came to an end. The act came into force on the anniversary of the St Bartholomew Day Massacre. This sent a very pointed message to the Puritans. Puritans were no longer allowed to preach and to lecture in universities.

Amongst those who were expelled from the Church of England were Richard Baxter, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin and John Bunyan. These “nonconformists” who continued to hold meetings and preach without a license from the Church were soon arrested and imprisoned. Amongst those who were arrested was John Bunyan.

In 1672, Charles II issued a Royal Declaration of Indulgence which extended religious liberty to both Roman Catholics and Protestant nonconformists in England. Under this declaration, thousands of nonconformists, including John Bunyan, were released from prison.

In 1685, when James II, a devout Catholic took the throne, he wanted to issue another Declaration of Indulgence, this time granting religious liberty not only to various Protestant denominations, but also to Catholics. This resulted in great instability within England. Those who initially supported James II soon turned on him and the turmoil led to the Glorious Revolution, which led to the ousting of James II.

After the ousting of James II, William III, also known as William of Orange, took the throne (1689-1702). Shortly after the

Glorious Revolution, Parliament had implemented the Toleration Act in 1688. William III gave his royal assent to the Act in 1689. This Act permitted nonconformists to have the freedom of worship and the license to preach but this Act applied only to Protestant nonconformists and not to Roman Catholics, nontrinitarians and atheists. Protestants who have separated from the Church of England, such as Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, were allowed to worship freely without persecution. Despite these new provisions, the light and influence of the Puritans was fading in England. But the influence of the Puritans was growing in New England, which is also known to us today as America.

PURITANISM IN THE NEW WORLD

In 1620, a group of Puritans that is today known as the Pilgrims set sail from England to the New World in the *Mayflower*, an English ship. Because of the increasing persecution against the Puritans in the village of Scrooby, small groups of Puritans had been leaving England for the Netherlands since 1608. By 1620, they decided to cross the Atlantic for the New World. They settled in New Plymouth, which was one of the earliest successful colonies to be founded by the English in North America.

The “Great Migration” of the 1630s saw about 20,000 settlers who were mostly Puritans come to the New World from England. This was when the Massachusetts Bay Colony was established. In 1636, Harvard University was established. Roger Williams would form the first Baptist Church in America.

The Puritans are responsible for bringing the Reformation to North America. They were the ones who brought Calvinistic,

evangelical theology and established it on American soil.

In 1670, Solomon Stoddard became the pastor of the Church in Northampton. He was the grandfather of Jonathan Edwards, who is also sometimes regarded as the last Puritan.

THE LEGACY OF PURITANISM

When did Puritanism end? There are different viewpoints as to when Puritanism ended. Some would suggest that it ended with the restoration of the monarchy when King Charles II returned from exile in 1660. Others say that Puritanism ended with the Act of Toleration in 1688. Yet others say that Puritanism continued in the American Colonies up till the election of John F. Kennedy as the American President in 1961. And there are those who think that we are still in the Puritan era. Regardless

of when one thinks Puritanism ended, we cannot deny that their influence and legacy still remain with us today. This is seen especially in their writings and sermons which are still being published and read. The Westminster Standards are also a legacy given to us by the Puritans. The Puritans have also left behind a testimony of Biblical conviction for us. The Puritans were God fearing men of conviction and sought to live their lives in absolute obedience to the Word of God; and they did so during a time of spiritual apathy and persecution. They were first and foremost men of the Bible. Their preaching and teaching were based on the Word; their lives were directed by the Word. The Word of God ruled and governed every part of their lives. The Puritans were God fearing men who lived Christ centred lives. May we learn also learn what it means to live out the Word of God in our lives.

THE PURITANS AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

As the direct spiritual descendants of the Reformation, and more specifically Reformers such as John Calvin and John Knox, the Puritans can be said to be distinctly reformed in their theology. Many of the first generation of Puritans had spent time in Geneva with both Calvin and Knox in the 1550s. When they returned to England in 1559, they brought back the teachings of John Calvin. By 1600, many of Calvin's works had been translated and published in England, including fifteen editions of his *Institutes* – a work which became standard reading for theological students training to be ministers at Oxford and Cambridge.

As we examine the theology of the Puritans, it must be acknowledged that as a group, they did not always agree on all points of doctrine. They were a diverse mix that did not officially organise themselves as a denomination with a single doctrinal statement. They were categorised as Puritans because of their response against the Church of England, and as such, they did not have a homogenous set of beliefs that they held to. Nonetheless, they were by and large Reformed and Calvinistic in their theology. As such, they “saw the Bible as regulative on every subject on which it spoke... emphasizing the sovereignty of

God, human inadequacy, dependence solely on God's grace, and the necessity of directing all life toward the end of glorifying God”.¹

Perhaps the best single representation of the doctrine of the Puritans would be the Westminster Standards – a set of documents drawn up by more than a hundred ministers in 1648, the vast majority of whom were Puritans. Together, they espoused the system of doctrine commonly known as the “Reformed Faith”, and this is what we as Bible-Presbyterians adhere to in our constitution.

Yet there is much more to their theology and understanding of God's Word than can be elucidated in just a single set of doctrinal standards, as comprehensive as they may be. Many of the Puritans were extremely prolific writers, with works spanning multiple thick volumes, some writing more than what many of us would read in a lifetime. They were deep thinkers who plumbed the depths of the knowledge of God through the study of His Word. They sought to understand doctrine in an experiential way, seeking to apply these great truths into their everyday lives. As one author writes, the Puritans were “men who thought theologically, profoundly, and prayerfully. To read their work, be it

¹ Stanford W. Reid, ed., *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 244–245.

on the Trinity of the person of Christ or the holiness of the Christian, is to enter a different and more rarified atmosphere than that to which most of us have become accustomed".²

This article will not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of all of their theology, but will instead focus on just some specific topics of interest. These would be topics that are seldom addressed in relation to the Puritans, but yet are pertinent to our interests:

DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE

Central to all their doctrines was the Puritans' regard for the Word of God. The very reason why they sought further reform within the Church of England was because they saw a disconnect between what the Word of God taught and what was being practiced in the Anglican church.

Their high view of, strong affinity for, and deep familiarity with the Word of God is well-documented. Authors have variously commented:

Puritans had a profound knowledge of the Scriptures...the Puritans were walking Bibles. Reading their works, one must be impressed by the vast array of Scripture passages they invoke as proof texts, examples, or illustrations...they achieved mastery of the contents of Scripture. Not only so, they treasured the Bible above all the writings of mere men.³

The Puritans were united in their dependence upon the Bible as their supreme source of spiritual sustenance and guide for the reformation of life. They based this commitment on their belief that the Bible was the inspired Word of God... Puritans further reasoned that biblical authority was absolute because of the infallibility of Scripture.⁴

For the Puritan, the Bible was the most valuable treasure and surest foundation for faith and life that this world affords. In the written Word of God they found the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, revealed as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Puritanism was all about reforming all of life according to the supremely authoritative standard of the Bible in and through Jesus Christ.⁵

In 1604, it was a Puritan, John Reynolds, that petitioned for a new translation to be authorized under King James I. The Puritans not only originated the idea of a new translation, they also played a prominent role in its actual production, for it is said that up to half of the committee of fifty-four translators were Puritan scholars.⁶

Seeing that the Scriptures had such a central position in their life and doctrine, it was only natural that they would have utmost faith in the promises that God's Word had concerning its own divine origin and present perfection.

² Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), xii.

³ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 976.

⁴ Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason, *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 26.

⁵ Joel R. Beeke and Michael Reeves, *Following God Fully: An Introduction to the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 14.

⁶ JKopic and Gleason, *The Devoted Life*, 26–27.

In his book, *Has the Bible been kept pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the providential preservation of Scripture*, Garnet Milne provides a detailed and meticulous study of the Reformed understanding of the preservation of Scripture. With extensive references leaving no stone unturned, Milne examined the writings of Calvin and other reformers, as well as the Puritans that formed the Westminster assembly. He proved that the consistent majority view of the Puritans was one that affirmed the perfect providential preservation of Scripture through the ages, whereby they “believed that they possessed the complete Word of God dictated by the Holy Spirit in its textual purity”.⁷

The writings of Puritan John Owen in particular, made a very strong and convincing case for the perfect preservation of Scripture. He wrote:

That as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were immediately and entirely given out by God himself, his mind being in them represented unto us without the least interveniency of such mediums and ways as were capable of giving change or alteration to *the least iota or syllable*; so, by his good and merciful providential dispensation, in his love to his word and church, his whole word, as first given out by him, *is preserved unto us entire in the original languages*; where, shining in its own beauty and lustre (as also in all translations, so far as they faithfully represent the originals), it manifests and evidences unto the consciences of men, without other foreign help or assistance,

its divine original and authority.⁸

He saw this doctrine of preservation as the very necessary corollary of the doctrine of inspiration:

But what, I pray, will it advantage us that God did so once deliver his word, if we are not assured also that that word so delivered hath been, by his special care and providence, *preserved entire and uncorrupt* unto us, or that it doth not evidence and manifest itself to be his word, being so preserved? (Isa 59:21, Matt 5:18, 1 Pet 1:25, 1 Cor 11:23, Matt 28:20).⁹

The Puritans never for a moment doubted that the Word of God that they held in their hands was indeed the perfect and complete Scriptures that God had delivered unto the saints. They shunned any practice of textual criticism, and saw any attempt to edit the words of Scripture as “the vanity, curiosity, pride and naughtiness of the heart of man”¹⁰.

Sadly, self-proclaimed reformed Christians today have entirely distanced themselves from such a position on the Word of God. They are blindly accepting of textual criticism and modern versions of the Bible, not realising that in so doing they have ignored Scripture’s teachings on the doctrine of preservation and forgotten the godly heritage of the Puritans.

BIBLICAL SEPARATION

The very origin and identity of the Puritans is rooted in Biblical separation. They were branded as non-conformists because they

⁷ Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Providential Preservation of Scripture* (Independently published, 2017), 302.

⁸ Cited in Jeffrey Khoo, “John Owen on the Perfect Bible,” *The Burning Bush* 10, no. 2 (July 2004): 74–85.

⁹ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 79.

wanted to adhere to Biblical standards and refused to conform to the teachings and practices of the Church of England. Many chose to leave the established church and became Independents or fled to other countries (some of whom would eventually become the American Puritans). Others who stayed were arrested and imprisoned, or forcibly removed from their pulpits because they continued to faithfully preach the Word of God.

While their history is well-known, little today is written about the Puritan's understanding of Biblical separation. It is an aspect of their ecclesiology that is not spoken of, for it seems like the reformed writers in the present want to dissociate themselves from Puritan's separatist past.¹¹

Yet we know that the Puritans practiced separation not out of any prideful or schismatic spirit, but because they saw a clear mandate from the Word of God. They were convicted that to remain silent and remain within a church that was not entirely obedient to Scripture would not be right in the sight of God.

Turning again to the writings of John Owen, we see a clear Biblical understanding of the reasons why one should or should not separate from a church. In his day, Owen was accused of schism because he was an Independent that had separated from the Church of England. He set out to vindicate his position by writing an extensive treatise simply entitled "Of Schism".¹² In

this work, Owen very carefully examined the various passages of the Bible that deal with the sin of schism and its associated vocabularies. In particular he looked at the situation in the church in Corinth, examining the context of the problems in the church and Paul's writings to them, he clearly demonstrated that schism refers to "causeless differences and contentions amongst the members of a particular church, contrary to that [exercise] of love, prudence, and forbearance, which are required of them to be exercised amongst themselves, and towards one another."¹³

But when it comes to problems of apostasy found in churches, he taught that there are other passages that must be considered. Citing verses such as 2 Timothy 3:5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Rev 2:14, 18:4, Owen understood that there are clear commands given in Scripture for believers to separate from apostate churches, and must not be understood as sinful schisms. He explained that "believers are duty bound to gather themselves together in churches where the gospel is preached and godly discipline applied. When a local church of whatever denominational stamp refuses to reform itself according to the Word of God, it is the duty of believers to separate from it."¹⁴ He further elaborated:

I am most certain that a separation from some churches, true or pretended so to be, *is commanded in the Scriptures*; so that the withdrawing from or relinquishment of any church or

¹¹ Even the editor of Owen's works, writing in 1852, added his own opinion in the preface to Owen's writings on schisms: "Much of all this discussion may now be superseded and out of date by the prevalence of sounder views and a spirit more benign and charitable among evangelical churches." "John Owen: Of Schism - Christian Classics Ethereal Library," accessed September 19, 2022, <https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/schism/schism.i.ii.html>.

¹² "John Owen: Of Schism - Christian Classics Ethereal Library,"

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Guy Davies, "Exiled Preacher: John Owen and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Schism," *Exiled Preacher*, October 17, 2016, accessed October 11, 2022, <http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.com/2016/10/john-owen-and-d-martyn-lloyd-jones-on.html>.

society whatever, upon the plea of its corruption, be it true or false, with a mind and resolution to serve God in the due observation of church institutions, according to that light which men have received, is nowhere called schism, nor condemned as a thing of that nature, but is a matter that must be tried out, whether it be good or evil, by virtue of such general rules and directions as are given us in the Scriptures for our orderly and blameless walking with God in all his ways.¹⁵

Both the practice and teachings of Biblical separation is certainly part of the Puritans' understanding of God's instructions to believers, and should be considered as part of reformed theology. It is unfortunate that many reformed Christians today who laud and celebrate the Puritans fail to see the errors of the denominations and organisations that they are a part of. They fail to learn from the Puritans who separated from the Church of England, for they themselves remain in churches and denominations that the Puritans would most certainly have separated from in their time.

ESCHATOLOGY

The Puritans were consistent theologians who sought to understand the plain teachings of the Word of God. This is evident in the hermeneutic principles that they applied to their study of eschatology. While reformed theologians today are almost entirely amillennial in their understanding of the future return of Christ, this was not so during the time of

the Puritans. While there was a diversity of views, there is in some sense a greater consistency in their hermeneutics, for many of them understood a literal fulfilment of God's promises to the Jews.

In 1643, Joseph Mede (1586-1638) published a work entitled "The Key of Revelation". In it, he interpreted applied a literal hermeneutic that viewed the millennium of Revelation 20 as being wholly futuristic. In so doing, he is described to have "embraced some tendencies toward what would later be called premillennialism", with some even referring to him as "the possible father of premillennialism".¹⁶ In time to come, this book "enjoyed the almost universal praise of contemporaries in England and on the continent and deeply influenced the development of eschatological thought in seventeenth-century England"¹⁷.

One of the key themes of this book, which was a thought shared by many Puritans in that day, was the expected conversion of the Jews. There was not only Mede, but also a consistent stream of thought that advocated such a position through prominent theologians such as William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, and Thomas Goodwin. In fact, Iain Murray notes that "from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans".¹⁸ The scriptural proof that the Puritans would often cite as evidence for it would be passages such as Romans 11:25-26 along with texts like Matthew 23:38-39 and 2 Corinthians 3:15-16.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 777.

¹⁷ Ibid., 778.

¹⁸ Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 43.

¹⁹ For a lengthy discussion on this, along with an analysis of various Puritan's exposition of Romans 11, see Ibid., 60-76.

This theme became foundational for Puritan eschatology, though the Puritans themselves treated it in a variety of ways. Iain Murray summarizes four different views among the Puritans: (1) a majority view into the mid-seventeenth century that the conversion of the Jews would transpire ‘close to the end of the world’; (2) a minority view that believed that the future conversion of Israel would result in a glorious time of spiritual prosperity in the church but ‘opposed the idea of a millennium to be introduced by Christ’s appearing and a resurrection of saints’; (3) a smaller and short-lived minority view that advocated a **general conversion of the nations, followed by ‘a pre-millennial appearing of Christ, when Israel would be converted and Christ’s kingdom established in the earth for at least a thousand years before the day of judgment;** (4) only a few who, like the Reformers, rejected a future conversion of the Jews and denied any king of a coming ‘golden age’.²⁰

With regard to the third view, “the millenarians expected that the return of the Jews to the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, **and to the land promised to Abraham by God,** would usher in the millennium, or at least, be one of the first things accomplished in the millennium... these men looked for the appearance of Christ to resurrect the martyrs and inaugurate the reign of the saints on earth”²¹.

With regard to the fulfilment of the land promise, there were also streams of influence that advocated such an interpretation. While Andrew Crome notes that it was initially taught by ‘radicals’ such as Roger Edwards, Ralph Durden and Francis Kett, “the idea of a restoration of the Jews to Palestine began to become more mainstream over the early seventeenth century... by the middle of the seventeenth century, a concept of Jewish restoration to Palestine was therefore an established part of eschatology in both England and New England”.²² He observed such thoughts in the writings of Englishmen like Thomas Brightman, John Owen and Jeremiah Burroughs, and also amongst New England theologians like John Cotton, Peter Bulkeley and Increase Mather.²³

While not in the majority, this was a view that is similar to the position of the Bible-Presbyterian church today. Of course, it was not entirely the same in all points of interpretation. Nonetheless it demonstrates the fact that Covenant Theology can be entirely consistent with the understanding of the future conversion of the Jews, the restoration of their land, and literal 1,000-year reign of Christ.

Sadly, the Puritans’ views on eschatology are largely ignored by the reformed church today. Joel Beeke, who is a huge admirer of the Puritans and widely regarded as one of the leading experts on Puritan theology today, sadly disparages the Puritans with regard to their interpretation of future events, commenting that “the Puritans

²⁰ Murray, *A Puritan Hope*, 52–53, cited in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 778.

²¹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 779.

²² Andrew Crome, ed., *Prophecy and Eschatology in the Transatlantic World, 1550-1800* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 129.

²³ *Ibid.*, 130–131. See also William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism* (Oregon: Lampion Press, 2015), 13-46, for a detailed look at the writings of many Puritan writers who held such views concerning both the future conversion and return to the land of the Jews.

did not excel in eschatology. Reformed theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have provided the church with a more exegetically sustainable account of how to understand, for example, the book of Revelation.”²⁴

This is unfortunate, for the Puritans in their time demonstrated the importance of a consistent hermeneutic that sought to understand all of the Bible literally. When applied to eschatology, it led some of them to anticipate the literal fulfilment of God’s promises to the Jews, and also of the future millennial reign of Christ, a view which in our opinion is the most biblical consistent view of the end times.

CONCLUSION

There is much that can be learnt from the Puritans with regard to their theology. It is of comfort to us in the present to know that many godly and devout theologians in the past held to the same Biblical convictions as we do in the present. Like them in their day, we may feel that we are in the minority amid the onslaught of compromise and apostasy of our time. Yet our strength is not in numbers, but in our faithful God. Just as they held to their convictions in their time, despite threat of persecution, imprisonment and even death, so should we in the present. Our only concern ought to be as Moses called out to Israel: “who is on the LORD'S side?” (Exo 32:26)

²⁴ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 6.

THE PURITANS AND THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, having been divinely inspired and preserved by God, are the only all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. The Word of God alone is that which can, of its own authority, bind the conscience of men.

God has given to man His Word, but it is now the responsibility of man to study and seek to understand it. While the Bible is an open book, and any born again believer guided and aided by the Holy Spirit alone can read and understand Scripture, God has also appointed teachers and the Church to be instruments for the instruction of God's people in God's Holy Word. It is in this way that the Westminster Standards serves as a useful collection of documents that aids us in the understanding of God's Word.

The authority of any confessions of faith is a limited one. It is limited because it is subordinate to the Bible. The Bible is the only supreme, infallible and authoritative rule of faith and practice. The authority of any confessions of faith lies in their faithfulness and truthfulness to the Bible. The Bible is Inspired and Preserved by God; a good confession of faith is an exposition of God's Word. The conscience of the believer is bound to Scriptures alone.

Confessions and documents such as the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms are therefore not to be regarded as the rule of faith and practice but writings or tools that are useful in helping us to understand the Word of God better. Because of this limited authority, confessions may be subjected to revision and correction.

The documents of the Westminster Standards are the fruits of the Puritan Movement which was growing during the 17th century.

BACKGROUND OF THE ASSEMBLY

When King Charles I (1625 to 1649) succeeded James I in 1625, he brought about various changes which resulted in various conflicts with the Puritans. Whatever tension existed during the reign of James I became even worse with Charles I. Charles I ruled England without the parliament and he appointed William Laud to be the Archbishop of Canterbury who opposed the Puritans and was also Arminian in theology.

In 1633, King Charles I arrived at St Giles' Cathedral, Scotland, to hold his Scottish coronation service. He used Anglican rites for his coronation and in

the years following, sought to introduce an Anglican-style of worship in Scotland. He then commissioned a drawing up of a prayer book which was to be used in Scotland. On Sunday 23 July, 1637, when James Hannay, Dean of Edinburgh, started to read from this newly published prayer book, a street-seller or market-woman, Jenny Geddes, threw her stool at the minister's head. This act stirred the rest of the congregation who started throwing Bibles, stools, sticks and stones at the Dean. This soon led to more serious rioting in the streets and in other cities.

A National Covenant was signed in February 1638 which opposed any attempt to introduce changes to churches in Scotland without the approval of the Parliament of Scotland and the General Assembly of the Church. In November that same year, the system of bishops and archbishops were formally expelled from the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland then established a full presbyterian system of governance. King Charles reacted by launching the Bishops' Wars in 1639. This marked the beginning of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

Meanwhile in England, on 20 February 1640, Parliament was summoned by Charles I. He had convened Parliament for the purpose of obtaining money through taxes to finance his military campaign with Scotland in the Bishops' Wars. However, parliament was more concerned with debating the issues of the corruption of the Crown rather than on the funding for the war. Petitions were raised calling for the debate on the authority of the Crown. Charles I responded to these petitions by dissolving Parliament three weeks after it was convened. This whole fiasco led to this Parliament being called the "Short Parliament."

On 3 November 1640, having suffered defeat by the Scottish, and pressed by the need for money to fund his war against Scotland, Charles I again called for Parliament to be convened. He needed Parliament to approve his financial bill for the war. However, this time parliament was made up of a large opposition party, led by the Puritan, John Pym. Most of the Parliamentarians were Puritans. Parliament immediately stipulated that Parliament can only be dissolved with the vote of the Members of Parliament, to prevent any premature dissolution of Parliament. As a result, Parliament sat from 1640 to 1648, earning it the name "Long Parliament."

On 11 December 1640, the Root and Branch Petition was presented to the Long Parliament. This petition called on Parliament to abolish the episcopacy from "the roots and in all its branches." The debates held by the House of Commons indicated the support of parliament for these Church reforms. However, these changes were rejected by the House of Lords as they were greatly influenced by bishops in the Church of England. The Commons then replied by introducing the Bishops Exclusion Bill in early 1641. This bill would prohibit any bishop from sitting in the House of Lords. The bill was passed by Parliament in February 1642. At the same time, in December 1641, the English Parliament had presented a list of grievances to King Charles I which had been passed by the House of Commons earlier in November. This was the Grand Remonstrance which was adopted by Parliament. The Grand Remonstrance gave Parliament control over the appointment of ministers, and it also proposed various reforms in the Church. The situation in Westminster got increasingly tense and in January 1642, Charles I fled London together with those

who were loyal to him. These unrests soon led to the outbreak of the First English Civil War in August 1642 between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists.

THE GATHERING OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

The Grand Remonstrance of 1641 presented a proposal for “a general Synod of the most grave, pious, learned and judicious divines of this island, assisted by some from foreign parts professing the same religion with us, to consider all things necessary for the peace and good government of the Church.”¹

A list of the names of qualified ministers of the Gospel was soon compiled and presented the Parliament. This bill calling for the assembly together with the recommended names was passed on 12 June 1643. Parliament’s first assignment to the Westminster divines was to work on doctrine. They were initially supposed to revise the Thirty-Nine articles but as they adjusted the first 15 articles, Parliament decided that they needed a new document.

Despite various attempts by royalists to block to Assembly, on 1 July 1643, the Westminster Assembly was called to meet.

The first meeting of the Westminster Assembly was held in Westminster Abbey, London, on the 1st of July, 1643. The Assembly consisted of 151 members. There were 30 lay observers (10 Lords, 20 Commons) and 121 Westminster Divines. The name “Divines” were given to the pastors and theologians who participated in the Westminster Assembly. They were so named because they were student of and held degrees in “Divinity.” The Divines were spiritual men and who were also the

most qualified men in the country. Some of the men who were present included Thomas Goodwin, George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford.

With regard to the stand on church government, the Assembly was made up of Presbyterians, Independents, Episcopalians and a few Erastians². In terms of doctrine, all were Calvinistic. There were no Arminians, Pelagians, or Antinomians among them.

THE WORK OF THE ASSEMBLY

What is interesting is that the minutes of the sessions of the Westminster Assembly were recorded. These minutes details the proceedings and discussion of the Assembly. A three-volume edition of these minutes was first published in 1874 by the Church of Scotland. In 2012, Oxford University Press published a five-volume edition of *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly (1643-52)*. This set of minutes and papers includes a biographical sketch of the Westminster Divines, and it describes the process through which the divines would formulate the statements of faith.

During the Assembly, many days were spent in worship, prayer and fasting. Parliament would join in the worship with the Divines. Many hours were spent discussing and debating doctrines. The work was challenging but meaningful. The discussions were based on the Bible where the Divines would often expound the Word of God from the English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

By way of illustration, an account was reported of one of meetings when they were deliberating on the answer to the

¹ John Murray, *The Calling of the Westminster Assembly*

² Erastians believed that the state is to rule over the Church even in ecclesiastical matters.

question, “What is God?” “Each man felt the unapproachable sublimity of the divine idea suggested by these words; but who could venture to give it expression in human language? All shrunk from the too-sacred task in awestruck, reverential fear. At length it was resolved, as an expression of the committee’s deep humility, that the youngest member should make the attempt. He modestly declined, then reluctantly consented; but begged that the brethren would first unite with him in prayer for divine enlightenment. Then in slow and solemn accents he thus began his prayer: – “O God, thou art a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” When he ceased, the first sentence of his prayer was immediately written by one of the brethren, read, and adopted, as the most perfect answer that could be conceived, – as, indeed, in a very sacred sense, God’s own answer, given to prayer and in prayer, descriptive of himself. Who, then, was the youngest member of the committee? When we compare the birth-dates of the respective members of the committee, we find that George Gillespie was the youngest by more than a dozen years. We may, therefore, safely conclude that George Gillespie was the man who was thus spiritually guided to frame almost unconsciously this marvellous answer.”³ Though this example we see the prayerful attitude of the Divines in deliberating these doctrinal matters.

The Assembly took about 5 years and 6 months to complete the Westminster Standards. They held a total of about 1,163 sessions.

The fruit of this Assembly and the years of

hard work is the Westminster Standards which consists of the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Directory of Public Worship and the Form of Church Government.

The Form of Church Government and Directory of Public Worship were the first to be completed towards the end of 1644.

The Westminster Confession of Faith was completed on 3 December 1646. A revision was made later with Scripture proofs of each separated proposition attached on the margin; this was completed on 29 April 1647.

The Shorter Catechism was completed on 5 November 1647 and the Larger Catechism on 14 April 1648.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

1. Theism

Chapters 1-5 covers the particular branch of Theology called Theism, or Theology Proper. The Westminster Confession of Faith begins with the Bible. This is the foundation of the Theology of the Christ. The doctrines of canonicity, inspiration and preservation of the Bible are explained.

The doctrine of God is then explained. The Westminster Confession of Faith explains God’s nature and attributes. The Doctrine of the Trinity is also clearly defined and explained.

Chapter 3 deals with the doctrine of predestination.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the doctrines of Creation and Providence.

³ William M Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, 360-1

2. Anthropology and Christology

Chapters 8-9 present the doctrines of Reformed anthropology with an exposition of the Covenants of God. Two covenants are distinguished. This gives the framework for the study of the Fall of Man.

The study of the Covenants transits to the study of the Christ of the Covenant, explaining Christ's Mediatorial Work and as Prophet, Priest, and King.

Chapter 9 discusses the subject of the Free Will of Men. The doctrine of Total Depravity will be introduced – Man having lost the ability to will any good as a result of the Fall. This will link to the next few chapters, which discuss Soteriology.

3. Soteriology

Chapters 10-20 contains, according to the words of Philip Schaff the Church Historian, “the best confession statement of the evangelical doctrines of justification, adoption, sanctification, saving faith, good works, and assurance of salvation.”

Chapters 19 and 20 answer the antinomians against their wrong understanding of the law and Christian liberty.

4. Ecclesiology

Chapters 21-31 deals with the doctrine of the Church. The Christian Sabbath is taught in chapter 21.

Other aspects of ecclesiology, including marriage and divorce and Christian fellowship, are covered in the rest of these chapters.

Chapters 27-29 addresses the doctrine of the Sacraments. The proper view of the Lord's Supper is also taught.

5. Eschatology

Chapters 32 and 33 cover the doctrine of the last things. An understanding of the state of men after death – what happens to body and soul – is explained. The Confession of Faith closes with an explanation of the Last Judgment.

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISM

The Larger and Shorter Catechism consists of 196 and 107 questions respectively. They were specially designed for the instruction of Christians in the Gospel. The Larger Catechism was used for the instruction of adults and for the training of pastors and church leaders. The Shorter Catechism was used for the instruction of children and youth.

Unique to the Catechisms are the treatment of the Ten Commandments and The Lord's Prayer. This highlights the purpose of the catechism as practical instructive tools.

THE FORM OF PRESBYTERIAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The Westminster Standards also contains additional documents addressing the Form of Church government, and of public worship.

The Form of Church Government consists of 19 sections detailing the Presbyterian form of church government and giving instructions to the ordination of ministers.

These are the topics covered:

1. Of the church
2. The officers of the church
3. Pastors
4. Other church governors (church leaders)
5. Deacons

6. Of local congregations
7. Leaders of particular congregations
8. The ordinances in a particular congregation
9. General assemblies
10. Doctrine of ordination

**DIRECTORY FOR THE
PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD**

The Directory for Public Worship gives instructions to the Worship of God publicly.

The topics covered in this document are:

1. The assembling of the congregation

2. Public reading of the Holy Scriptures
3. Public prayer before the sermon
4. Preaching of the Word
5. Prayer after sermon
6. Baptism
7. Lord's Supper
8. Sanctification of the Lord's Day
9. The Solemnisation of Marriage
10. Visitation of the Sick
11. Burial of the dead
12. Public solemn fasting
13. Days of public thanksgiving
14. Singing of Psalms
15. Days and places of public worship

RICHARD SIBBES

"THE SWEET PROPHET"

1577-1635



INTRODUCTION AND EARLY LIFE

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was one of the earlier Puritans who ministered in the Church of England during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, King James I and King Charles I. He lived before the English Civil War (1642-1651) and has been called a “conforming Puritan” because he conformed to the use of the Book of Common Prayer and he never left the Church of England. He was also known as the “heavenly Doctor Sibbes” because of his Christ-likeness and heavenly mindedness which can be seen both in his personal life and in his preaching. He was also known as the “sweet prophet” because of

the comforting and encouraging sermons which he preached.

Richard Sibbes was born in 1577 in Tostock, Suffolk, England. He was not converted until he was 25, where he was saved under the preaching of Paul Baynes. He came from a middle-class family, where his father worked as a wheelwright (a craftsman who builds or repairs wooden wheels). Though they were not aristocratic, they lived a comfortable life. Growing up, Sibbes always loved books. He was so obsessed with books that it irritated his father who tried to buy wheelwright tools for

him, hoping to get him off his books, albeit unsuccessfully.

At the age of eighteen, Sibbes was admitted to St. John's College in Cambridge, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1599, and a Master of Arts degree in 1602.

HIS MINISTRY

In 1608, Sibbes was ordained to the ministry in the Church of England and was appointed as one of the college preachers at the University of Cambridge in 1609. In 1610, he earned his Bachelor of Divinity degree and in 1611, he began to lecture at the Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge.

His preaching in Cambridge awakened the spiritual lethargy that had started to set in after the Protestant Reformation that was experienced in England. His preaching spoke to so many that they had to build a gallery to accommodate many who started attending the Church. It was through Sibbes' ministry that Thomas Goodwin was persuaded from Arminianism towards Calvinism.

In 1617, Sibbes moved to London, and he was appointed as a preacher for the Society of Gray's Inn, a place where lawyers are trained. In 1626, he returned back to Cambridge, where he became the master of St. Catharine's College. In 1633, he was appointed the charge of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, a role he undertook while also serving as the master of St. Catharine's and as a preacher at Gray's Inn.

Sibbes was recognised as someone who avoided controversies, yet was also courageous in his defence of the Gospel. This is especially seen in his writings against the Roman Catholics, Archbishop Laud, and the Arminians. It was because of his gentle nature, that he did not separate

himself from the Church of England. Even though he remained within the Church of England, he remained close friends with many of the other Puritans who separated from the Church of England.

Sibbes never married and he passed away in 1635. A week before his death, he preached his last sermon on John 14:2 – *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."* Sibbes passed on July 5, 1635.

RICHARD SIBBES AND PREACHING

Richard Sibbes was known for his preaching, which was Christ-centered, heartfelt and personal. Sibbes was a theologian, but his theology was practical and devotional and it was applied to the hearts of God's people. Sibbes' theology is seen in the sermons he preached. To Sibbes, the best kind of theology is "preached theology" which is sermons. Sermons put hands and feet to theology where it could reach God's people. Academic theology is necessary to keep preaching on track. But theology must be preached that it might be applied. The truest theology of the Church is found in sermons. Sibbes' approach to preaching reflected how the Puritans viewed preaching.

The Puritans saw a need to reform the Church and they sought to do so, not through revolution but by preaching the Word of God and this preaching is always accompanied with prayer. The Puritans believed that truth affects the mind and truth comes from the Word of God. Therefore, the Puritans engaged in what is known as plain preaching. The Puritans put their scholarship to work by seeking to make plain the Word of God. They believed that the Holy Spirit will use the Word of God to convict the hearts of the hearers.

The Puritans preached the Word of God, in a way which was relevant to the issues that were contemporary to their time. They were able to do so because they did not see a dichotomy of secular and spiritual life. They did not allow culture to influence their understanding of Scripture, but sought to use Scripture to reform the culture of their time. The Puritans saw the Word of God as always true and they preached this truth even if it risked offending those who were in power. Puritan preaching was always full of applications. The Puritans likened a sermon to food that is placed on the table, which has to be prepared in such a way where it can be easily digested.

The heritage of theology that was left behind by Sibbes can be found in a seven-volume work published by the Banner of Truth Trust.¹ Many of Sibbes' works were sermons which were transcribed and published.

In his sermons, Sibbes affirmed the doctrines of election, reprobation, God's decrees and Christ's atonement. With regard to the doctrine of the atonement, Sibbes held that Christ died for the world but that when Christ was said to redeem the world, it only applies to the elect. Christ died for all whom God gave to Him.² Sibbes did not discuss this as fully as John Owen, but his position was not unlike that of John Owen's.

Sibbes' sermons also emphasised the assurance of salvation and the role of the Holy Spirit in sealing the believer. Sibbes had a pastoral heart and sought to encourage Christians. He does this by reminding them of the Spirit's work in granting assurance of faith.

RICHARD SIBBES AND AFFECTIONS

When we are saved, it is not only our mind which is saved and transformed. As our entire person is transformed, our affections are also transformed in Christ. The affections are very important, as affections expresses who we are, and it moves us in how we act. For the Christian, the affections are moved by the love of Christ; it is the love of Christ that will move us to do what we do. That is why Puritans teach that conversion must take place in the heart.

Sibbes never presented conversion as irrational; he recognised that God's grace comes through the understanding being enlightened. He wrote that purpose of regeneration was to re-establish the ideal supremacy of the reason of will. This also means that our emotions are governed by a reason that is enlightened and guided by the Word of God. Predominantly, the affection that God uses in the soul of the believer is love. Once converted, the affection of love becomes the driving force of the affection unto God. When we are converted, there is a holy fire that is ignited in our hearts, and nothing will be able to quench that holy fire of love. If love does not motivate all our work, then all our work is naught.

The Holy Spirit is that which works in our hearts and applies the work of Christ in our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit that flames the fire of love in the believer's heart. This is how a Christian should view our affections.

NOTABLE WORKS

Two of the more notable works of Sibbes are *The Bruised Reed* and *Glorious Freedom*. *The Bruised Reed* is based upon the exposition of Isaiah 42:3 - "*A bruised reed*

¹ *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Banner of Truth Trust; 7 vols., 2001).

² Sibbes volume 5 pages 516-517.

shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.” It is a book written to encourage and comfort Christians who are downcast and fearful. It has served as a balm to the soul of many Christians.

Glorious Freedom was published four years after Sibbes’s death. This book was based upon 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. In this

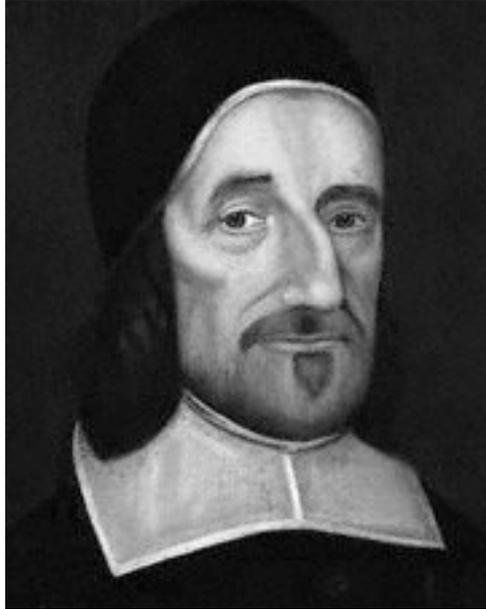
work, Sibbes wrote concerning the liberty which the believer enjoys in Christ. It is an exposition of the believer’s relationship to the law.

There is a general consensus that out of all the works and writings of the puritans, Sibbes’ writings and sermons are amongst the easiest to read. They have a devotional tone and speak to the heart.

RICHARD BAXTER

The Author of “*The Reformed Pastor*”

1615-1691



HIS EARLY LIFE (1615-1637)

Born on the 12th of November, 1615 at Rowton, Shropshire, at the home of his maternal grandfather, Richard Baxter was the only son of Beatrice and Richard Baxter, Sr. After birth, he continued living with his maternal grandparents, while his father freed himself from the entanglement of gambling debts. In February 1626, he was taken home to live with his parents at Eaton Constantine, in the same county.

It was about the time of Baxter’s birth that his father was converted mainly through the reading of Scripture. This then caused him to become anxious for the salvation of

his only son. So as his son grew, he directed his son to read the historical parts of the Scripture, which delighted Baxter though he read it mainly for the facts. However, this was instrumental in Baxter’s spiritual life, leading him to love the Bible which in turn piqued his interest to search deeper into the Scriptures.

In his youth, Baxter observed his father’s life and noticed how his father was never reluctant to attend common prayer or ceremonies, nor did he speak against bishops. On the Lord’s Day, his father would also read the Scriptures and was minded to reprove the drunkards and swearers who

often reviled him by the names of Puritan, Precisian, and Hypocrite. Through these experiences, Baxter's godly upbringing shaped his religious convictions and he "was fully convinced that godly people were the best; and those that despised them, and lived in sin and pleasure, were malignant, unhappy sorts of people."¹

Baxter was never certain when his sincere conversion began, however he testified that around the age of fifteen, God had used the means of various religious books to awaken his soul to a sense of its danger and lead it to the knowledge and enjoyment of Himself. Baxter felt greatly indebted to such books for his conversion, and thus throughout his ministry he recommended and wrote them.

Baxter's early education was greatly neglected for he grew up with a mostly informal education from those who were illiterate and of the dissolute clergy. However, for his relatively brief formal education, he spent a period at the local school before attending Wroxeter Grammar School under John Owen from 1629 to 1632. He was then persuaded by Owen against attending university (which he later regretted) and to instead continue his tuition privately at Ludlow Castle under Richard Wickstead, chaplain to the Council of Wales and the Marches. However, Wickstead neglected his charge and never seriously attempted to instruct Baxter's mind. Therefore, most of Baxter's study was done through his own private reading and he was largely self-taught.

In 1633, Baxter was sent to London to be introduced at court by Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels. But due to his

mother's ill health, he returned home after a month with the resolve to study divinity and this was further cemented after her death. Baxter then started to read theology, and in the following year, he met two famous Nonconformist², Joseph Symonds and Walter Cradock, and was influenced considerably by their piety and fervour.

HIS PASTORAL MINISTRY (1638-1660)

In 1638, Baxter was ordained by John Thornborough, Bishop of Worcester, and commenced his ministry as the schoolmaster of the free grammar school in Dudley. After a short period, he was transferred to Bridgnorth, Shropshire, where he became the assistant minister to Mr Madstard. It was there that he established a reputation for the vigorous discharge of the duties of his office. When it was required of him to take "the *et cetera* oath" in 1640, he rejected the Church of England's form of episcopacy, and was loosely denominated as a Presbyterian.

In April 1641, Baxter was invited to deliver a sermon to the congregation at Kidderminster. He was subsequently elected as the new minister. The town of Kidderminster primarily consisted of handloom workers, most of whom were not pursuing the Christian faith when Baxter arrived. However, God used Baxter's ministry mightily, and placed a strong burden of pastoral counselling in his heart. On top of his regular preaching, through dedicated house-to-house visitations he was able to catechize hundreds of families per year and to disciple them as part of his parish.

Baxter's ministry was so effective that the number of converts became so

¹ Baxter, Richard. Richard Baxter's Autobiography. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998., p. 10

² Nonconformist were members of a Protestant Church which dissents from the established Church of England.

overwhelming that it became practically impossible for him to continue meeting with all his parish individually. Nearly the whole town of about two thousand people were transformed and converted. It was said that during this period, if a visitor was to walk through the streets on a Sunday, they might be able to hear the singing of psalms and rehearsals of the day's sermon echoing from countless homes.³

Baxter's longest pastorate was at Kidderminster where he held the charge for about 17 years. However, this was disrupted by the English Civil War where he became an army chaplain until February 1647. Then during a long and severe illness where death seem likely, Baxter stayed at the home of Lady Rouse of Rouse-Lench and wrote a great part of his famous work, "The Saints' Everlasting Rest" (1650). In this work, Baxter meditates on what Scripture reveals about a Christian's eternal heavenly rest, while helping believers to live an abundant and God-honouring life in anticipation of eternal rest.

Upon his recovery he returned to his charge at Kidderminster, where he also became a prominent political leader, and his sensitive conscience led him into conflict with almost every one of the contending parties in the state and the church.⁴ During this time, Baxter wrote about his general ministerial efforts and the philosophy behind his pastoral ministry in a classic book entitled "The Reformed Pastor" (1656).

HIS WRITING MINISTRY AFTER THE RESTORATION (1660-1691)

In 1661, Baxter settled in London after having helped bring about the Restoration⁵ in 1660. He preached in London until the Act of Uniformity saw that he was removed from the Church of England and that he never entered the pastorate again.

Soon after in 1662, Baxter married one of his converts, Margaret Charlton (1636-1681). Their disparity in age, with Margaret being significantly younger, was somewhat controversial. However, this issue was put to rest as Margaret shared her husband's passion for Christ and the salvation of souls.

Baxter devoted the remaining years of his life to writing, leaving behind a voluminous library of over 150 treaties and countless other unpublished letters and papers. In one of his poems, he had written a memorable saying, "I preach'd, as never sure to preach again, And as a dying man to dying men! O how should preachers men's repenting crave, Who see how near the church is to the grave?"⁶

Baxter was also persecuted greatly after the Restoration, for he fought and held views which were at variance with those officially held by the Church of England - for this, he was imprisoned at least three times and even for a duration of 18 months from 1685. He was also forced to sell two of his extensive libraries.

³ Baxter, Richard. Richard Baxter's Autobiography. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998., p. 10

⁴ https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Baxter,_Richard

⁵ The Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in the kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland took place in 1660 when King Charles II returned from exile in continental Europe.

⁶ Baxter's Poetical Fragments (1st ed.; 1681), p.34, lines 13-16 [<http://archive.org/details/poeticalfragment00bax/page/34/mode/2up?view=theatre>]

It was only until the Glorious Revolution (1688-89) when James II and VII was deposed and William III and Mary II had put in place the Toleration Act that Baxter was granted the freedom to hold on to his nonconformist views. However, this freedom on earth was short lived, as he was called home to his eternal rest on December 8, 1691 at the age of 76.

CONCLUDING NOTES

Richard Baxter was a Puritan minister

who focused greatly on practical Christian living and his writings have been a great blessing to many. He also fought hard for Christian unity, but it is important to know that some of his theological positions were greatly divisive. The key differences which oppose the Reformed traditions are Baxter's views on justification and sanctification as some of his teachings frequently leaned towards Arminianism which can undermine salvation by grace through faith.

JOHN OWENS

“The Prince of the English Divines”
1616-1683



John Owen was regarded as the greatest theologian of England. He was called the “prince of the English divines” and was recognised as one who has been gifted with a brilliant mind. His works helped to crystallise Calvinism. He was a Nonconformist who sided with parliament during the English Civil War (1642-1651).

EARLY LIFE

Owen was of Welsh descent and he was born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire in 1616. He was born into a Puritan family, where his father, Henry Owen also served as a Puritan minister. At the age of twelve, Owen began his studies in Queen’s College, Oxford.

It is said that Owen studied eighteen to twenty hours per day and slept only about four hours a night. Owen earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1632 and a Master of Arts degree in 1635. He was aged sixteen and nineteen years old respectively.

In 1633, William Laud was appointed as the Archbishop of Canterbury by Charles I. He was opposed to the Puritans and began to bring about various religious reforms to enforce the authority of the Church of England. He was a strong proponent of episcopalianism, which teaches that the Church was to be governed by bishops. Laud introduced more ceremonies

into the church services and replaced preaching with liturgy. He also began to enforce uniformity within the Church of England. These reforms were often very ritualistic. Laud also held to Arminianism and strongly opposed Calvinism. Because of these “reforms” the Puritans accused Laud of restoring Catholicism to the Church of England. In retaliation, many of the Puritans were persecuted and were even fined for not attending the worship services of the Church of England. Laud’s reforms were a contributing factor to the First English Civil War. In response, Owen left Oxford in 1637 and served as a private chaplain and tutor somewhere else.

Even though Owen was brought up in a Puritan home and embraced the Gospel in his youth, he struggled constantly with his assurance of salvation. His heart and mind were greatly unsettled with various religious questions. It was in 1642 when he attended a church service at St Mary Aldermanbury, London that he was brought to assurance of faith. A substitute preacher had taken the pulpit that morning and preached from Mark 4:40, “*Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?*” Through this sermon, Owen’s heart found assurance of faith. The identity of the preacher was never known to Owen.

HIS MINISTRY

In 1643, Owen published his work *A Display of Arminianism*, which was both a defence of Calvinism and a refutation of Arminian theology. Soon he was appointed as the pastor of a church in Fordham, Essex. Later in 1646, he became the pastor to the church in Coggeshal. It was during this time when Owen began to change his views concerning Church government. He began to move away from the presbyterian form of church governance and adopted the congregational form instead. By the late 1640s, Owen’s ministry grew to such

an extent that more than a thousand people would come to hear him every week.

The day following the execution of King Charles I, Owen was invited to preach at Parliament. Oliver Cromwell was so moved that he appointed Owen as the chaplain to accompany the English soldiers marching into Ireland and Scotland. On these expeditions, he saw the spiritual need of these countries and witnessed the brutalities of war. He pleaded with Parliament to show mercy to the people of Wales and Ireland, and hoped that their spiritual needs could be met.

In 1650, Owen was appointed as the official preacher of the state. In 1651, he became the dean of Christ Church College, Oxford and was later made vice-chancellor of Oxford University. He would spend eight years in office in Oxford.

During that time Owen also published various works on the perseverance of the saints, the mortification of sin, communion with the Trinity and the authority of Scripture.

In the late 1650s, Owen petitioned against Cromwell’s kingship. Because of that he lost favour with Cromwell and was soon taken away from the various positions he held.

During the 1660s, Owen returned to Stadhamptom where he would continue to preach and write. It was about this time when Charles II took the throne and ruled England under a restored monarchy. Charles II again imposed various laws that enforced uniformity and submission to the Church of England. This resulted in the Great Ejection of 1662. Owen continued preaching despite these newly imposed laws and in 1665 he was indicted for

holding religious assemblies in his home. He managed to escape imprisonment and soon he moved to London where he started a small congregation.

His ministry during the 1670s focused primarily on the publishing of various works, including his commentary on Hebrew and his work on the Holy Spirit. He will also produce major works on justification, sanctification, and the glory of Christ.

HIS THEOLOGY

Owen held on to a very rich, historically well-grounded doctrine of the Trinity. He believed that the doctrine of the Trinity is very important and has practical applications in the lives of the believers. He believes that a fuller understanding of this doctrine will build up the church.

Concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Owen produced one of the fullest works entitled *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer* towards the end of his life (1682). Owen understood the Holy Spirit as a voluntary, divine Agent who must be worshipped and is the Author of grace in believers and of order in the church. Owen believed that the Holy Spirit is a divine, distinct person in the Godhead.

Regarding the Holy Spirit and prayer, Owen quoted Zechariah 12:10 which declares that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace and supplication. This truth ought always to be in the thoughts of Christians.

Owen also described the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of Scriptures. In his work, *Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, Owen explained that the Holy Spirit is active in the miracle of the Incarnation,

in the atoning death and in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Owen saw that one great work which the Spirit will perform in us is the work of regeneration. The unregenerate man is spiritually dead, not merely spiritually diseased. It is out of this state of death that the work of regeneration is accomplished.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon a person, it does not disregard or violate the natural faculties of a person. Instead, the Spirit makes use of a person's natural abilities, together with the appointed outward means of grace – such as preaching – to prepare this elected person for the full work of regeneration.

HIS DEATH AND LEGACY

During his later years, Owen suffered from poor health. Asthma had prevented him from preaching, but he continued writing, producing major works on justification, sanctification, and the glory of Christ. Owen died in 1683 at Ealing.

Having lived through the reign of various kings in England, Owen lived through chaotic times. Yet throughout these times, Owen lived with the fear of God in his heart, not being afraid to stand against the established authority when this authority disobeys the Word of God. Owen has left behind a testimony of courage and conviction. We can also learn from his great burden for the education and instruction of God's people in the Word of God. This burden is seen especially in the writings he has published. These works bear witness to the discipline and diligence of the Puritans in the work of the Gospel. The Puritans have indeed lived lives that are given unto Christ.

JOHN BUNYAN

The Author of “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*”

1628-1688



INTRODUCTION

John Bunyan (1628-1688) was an English Puritan preacher and writer best remembered today as the author of the Christian allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Written in the 17th century, this spiritual allegory has captured the hearts and minds of successive generations of adults and children. Being a Puritan, Bunyan belonged to a group of people who sought to “purify” the Church of England from Roman Catholic practices, especially what they viewed as excesses and materialism. Bunyan’s reformed theology was heavily influenced by the works of Martin Luther and John Calvin, two

great theologians who lived during the Reformation. His theology was grounded in the Reformation doctrines of man’s depraved nature, imputed righteousness, justification, and atonement.

A brief description of the times that John Bunyan lived in is needful for an understanding of his life.

The 17th century was a period of great political and religious turmoil in England, marked by civil war. After the Reformation in England, a religious struggle ensued between two groups of people: on one hand, those who were satisfied with

the existing Church of England and its practices, and on the other, those that sought to reform the Church of England. The latter group advocated the removal of Roman Catholic elements present in the liturgy and polity of the church. Known as Puritans, they did not conform to the doctrines and practices of the established Church of England. Thus, they fought bitterly for a complete reformation of the Church of England, following after the order of Calvin's reformation in Geneva. After seven long years of civil war, from 1642 to 1649, the Puritans under Oliver Cromwell, constituting the parliamentary forces, defeated the royalist forces under King Charles I. King Charles I was executed and his son was sent into exile. Monarchy was therefore removed, and the Puritans established rule over the country, instituting many religious reforms. Cromwell established the Commonwealth of England and ruled England as the Lord Protector. However, his rule was short-lived. Following his death in 1658, the monarchy was restored with the return of King Charles II who had been in exile. Being pro-Roman Catholic, he reversed many of the reforms done by the Puritans. Some Puritans chose to remain in the Anglican church and sought renewal from within. Others set up their own churches, adopting a congregational model of church polity.

It was in this turbulent political and religious period that John Bunyan was born, and lived his life, and ministered.

HIS EARLY LIFE

John Bunyan was born in 1628 in the parish of Elstow, in Bedfordshire, England.

His parents were Thomas Bunyan and Margaret Bentley. His father, Thomas, was an ordinary villager who earned a living as a chapman¹ and also a brazier². John Bunyan described his humble origins: "For my descent then, it was, as is well known by many, of a low and inconsiderable generation; my father's house being of that rank that is meanest, and most despised of all the families in the land."³ Following in his father's footsteps, Bunyan later took up the trade of a tinker, a person who repairs pots that have holes.

Bunyan was grateful for the brief period of education he had, of which he wrote, "But yet, notwithstanding the meanness and inconsiderableness of my parents, it pleased God to put it into their hearts, to put me to school, to learn both to read and write; the which I also attained, according to the rate of other poor men's children: though, to my shame, I confess, I did soon lose that I had learned, even almost utterly, and that long before the Lord did work His gracious work of conversion upon my soul."⁴ He is believed to have attended the Bedford Grammar School for a short period of time. Nonetheless, one can surmise that Bunyan was an effective self-learner, given his excellent literary skills as seen in his later writings.

The year 1644 was a tragic year for Bunyan. During an influenza epidemic, both his mother and fourteen-year-old sister died. His distress and pain, however, turned to bitterness and anger when his father remarried. Bunyan decided to leave home and at the age of sixteen he enlisted in Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary army. He served at the Newport Pagnell garrison,

¹ An itinerant pedlar.

² One who made and/or mended kettles and pots.

³ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

near Bedford. After the civil war was won by the Parliamentarians in 1647, Bunyan left the army and returned to his former trade as a tinker.

HIS CONVERSION

During his early life, Bunyan was not a believer and indulged in many ungodly things. At heart, he was an atheist and terribly profane. In 1649, at the age of 21, Bunyan married and moved into a cottage in Elstow village. Bunyan and his wife had four children, one of whom was blind, whom he named Mary. Bunyan's wife was an orphan, whose godly father had passed her two books as an inheritance. These books were *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, written by Arthur Dent, and *The Practice of Piety*, written by Lewis Bagley. The contents of the two books somewhat influenced Bunyan towards a religious life. His wife was a godly influence upon him, and encouraged him to attend the church at Elstow.

On a particular Sunday, Christopher Hall, who was the vicar at Elstow Abbey church, gave a powerful sermon warning against violating the Sabbath day by, for example, working or playing sports. Bunyan was greatly troubled, thinking that Hall had especially preached this sermon to show him his wicked ways. However, that very day, undaunted, he joined his friends for a game of *tip-cat*⁵. In the midst of the game, a thought came to his mind, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?"⁶ As he looked skyward, Bunyan felt as if the Lord Jesus was looking down at him, severely displeased with his actions and threatening punishment for his ungodly practices. He felt that being a grievous sinner, it was too late to seek

forgiveness and that Christ would not pardon his sins. Being in deep despair and spiritual uncertainty, Bunyan continued sinning. One day, while standing outside a neighbour's shop window, cursing and swearing, Bunyan was heard by the store owner. The store owner, who was a notably ungodly person herself, was so shocked and frightened by the way Bunyan spoke that she told him that he was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that she had ever heard in her life. She further added that he would be a bad influence to all the youth in town who came into his company. Bunyan was shocked and deeply ashamed of his actions.

The Lord was at work, slowly convicting Bunyan of his sins. On another occasion, as a tinker, his trade brought him to Bedford. There, he noticed four women at a doorway talking about God. They were discussing about new birth and the work of God in their hearts. The women were convinced about their miserable state by nature. They talked about the joy of salvation through the Lord Jesus and how they abhorred their own righteousness which was unable to save them. Through this experience, Bunyan began not to trust in his own righteousness and pride. Eventually, Bunyan joined the women in worshipping in their church, St. John's Church, an independent church, at the southern end of Bedford. These independent worshippers had been sharing the church premises with a group of Anglicans who had their own pastor. Bunyan got to know the pastor, John Gifford, who ministered to the women. He took Bunyan under his wing and became his spiritual guide. One book that helped Bunyan in his spiritual struggle was Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*. Bunyan said, "I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon

⁵ An old English outdoor game played with sticks.

⁶ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

the Galatians (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the books that ever I had seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”⁷ After many years of deep despair and spiritual uncertainty, Bunyan finally found salvation in the Lord Jesus. In 1653, Bunyan went through the waters of baptism at the River Ouse. For the next few years, the villagers in Elstow, noticing the remarkable change in Bunyan’s life, travelled to Bedford to listen to the sermons of Gifford, Bunyan’s spiritual teacher.

HIS CALL TO MINISTRY

In 1655, John Gifford, the pastor of St. John’s Church, died after pastoring the church for five years. Bunyan mourned the loss of Gifford, his spiritual teacher, who had led him to true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1656, the church of Bedford appointed John Burton to be the pastor of St. John’s Church. At about the same time, Bunyan felt the inward call to ministry and began to preach. Bunyan recognized that the ability to preach was God-given, and entered into preaching with much humility and a deep sense of his unworthiness. In Bunyan’s words, “But I first could not believe that God should speak by me to the heart of any man, still counting myself unworthy; yet those who thus were touched, would love me and have a particular respect for me; and though I did put it from me, that they should be awakened by me, still they would confess it and affirm it before the saints of God: they would also bless God for me (unworthy wretch that I am!) and count me God’s instrument that showed to them the way of salvation.”⁸

In time to come, the church recognised his gift of preaching, and in a formal ceremony with much prayer, appointed Bunyan to the office of public preaching. Within a short

span of time, Bunyan became an itinerant preacher, travelling on horseback to the villages in Bedfordshire and neighbouring counties, preaching in houses, barns, churches and even in the open air. The foundation of Bunyan’s ministry of preaching was the Bible. Everywhere he taught, he emphasized the importance of conviction of sin and obedience to the Word of God. Bunyan says of himself, “Thus I went for the space of two years, crying out against men’s sins, and their fearful state because of them.”⁹ Much to Bunyan’s amazement, God used his ministry of preaching mightily; hundreds flocked to listen to Bunyan speak.

HIS IMPRISONMENT

The period around 1658 proved to be a difficult time for Bunyan. His wife died, leaving him with four children. Following that, in 1660, John Burton, the pastor of St. John’s Church, died of ill health. Charles II had returned from exile after Cromwell’s death. With little warning, the Church of England appointed a new rector who took over St. John’s church. The independent congregation was no longer allowed to use the church premises. They therefore not only lost their pastor but the church as well. They had to make do with worshipping wherever they could, in places like barns or stables. Bunyan, having concern over the welfare of his children, remarried in 1660, this time to an eighteen-year-old woman by the name of Elizabeth. Bunyan had two more children through Elizabeth.

The restoration of the monarchy by Charles II resulted in persecution of the Puritans as England returned to Anglicanism. Under the Act of Uniformity, it became mandatory for the Book of Common Prayer to be used during worship. The

⁸ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 89.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

Puritans, however, refused to conform to the Book of Common Prayer, regarding it as “too Roman Catholic”. Bunyan himself believed that one’s prayer must be from the heart and not prescribed by a book. Many independent churches were closed and all citizens were required to worship in Anglican parish churches. Soon, preaching was limited only to Anglican clergy officially licensed by the state. It became punishable by law to conduct divine service not in accordance with the ritual of the church, or for one not in Episcopal orders to address a congregation. Bunyan lost his freedom to preach, which he enjoyed under Cromwell’s rule.

In November 1660, Bunyan was arrested for preaching privately at a farm at Lower Samsell, a village near Harlington in Bedfordshire. Bunyan was offered release if he promised to stop. But Bunyan refused, and replied, “If I was out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow by the help of God.”¹⁰ For this, he was kept in the Bedford prison for the next twelve years. In 1672, Charles II issued the Declaration of Religious Indulgence which permitted freedom of worship. Under this declaration, Bunyan was released from prison. Since the time of his imprisonment, the independent congregation who were evicted from the St. John’s Church were looking for a new pastor. Bunyan, having just been released from prison, was then appointed as their pastor. Worship services were conducted in a barn at Mill Lane, Bedford, purchased by one of the members of the congregation.

In 1675, following Charles II’s withdrawal of the Declaration of Religious Indulgence, Bunyan was put into prison again, albeit for a brief period of six months.

HIS WRITINGS

John Bunyan was a prolific writer, and the author of more than 60 literary works, ranging from tracts and single page essays to volumes of books, as well as poems. In 1656, he published his first work, *Some Gospel Truths Opened*, to refute the unscriptural beliefs of the Quakers. This was followed by two publications, *A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened* and *Few Sighs from Hell or Groans of a Damned Soul* which he wrote in 1656 and 1658, respectively. Just before his arrest and imprisonment in 1660, he wrote a theological treatise, *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded*, which was an exposition of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

Bunyan’s twelve years of imprisonment provided him with ample opportunity to write. The first book Bunyan wrote in prison was *Profitable Meditations*. This was followed by a number of books including *Christian Behaviour*, *A Discourse Touching Prayer*, *Praying with the Spirit and Understanding too*, and *The Holy City*. In 1666, he wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, a personal testimony of his conversion. In this book, Bunyan described his conviction of sin, his attempt to appease God with his own righteousness, which proved to be futile, his struggles with despair and temptation, and finally his salvation by way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Upon his release from prison in 1672, he began writing the first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. This allegory of the Christian life tells the story of a man’s pilgrimage toward heaven, recounting his unsaved state, his conversion to Christ, and the perils of his journey on to heaven. It took Bunyan six years to complete writing and it was finally published in 1678. This book

¹⁰ John Bunyan, “A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr John Bunyan” in *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. I*, 9. (1991). https://bunyanministries.org/works/vol1/01a_bunyan's_imprison.pdf (accessed September 24, 2022).

proved to be Bunyan's *magnum opus*, with several editions published in his lifetime, even though books were rare and not many people were literate at that time. In over four centuries, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been translated into many languages; hundreds of editions are still in existence, with new editions added every year. Following *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan continued in writing and published a number of books, which include *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*, *Holy War*, and part two of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. His last two books, *The Acceptable Sacrifice*, and *Mr Bunyan's Last Sermon* were published posthumously in 1689.

HIS DEATH AND LEGACY

In 1688, at the age of 60, Bunyan was

caught in a storm while on the way to London. He developed a severe cold and fever and died at the house of a friend on Snow Hill, Holborn. Bunyan was buried in Bunhill, London. The inscription on his tombstone reads, "John Bunyan. Author of Pilgrim's Progress. *Obt.* 31st Augt. 1688. *Aet.* 60."¹¹

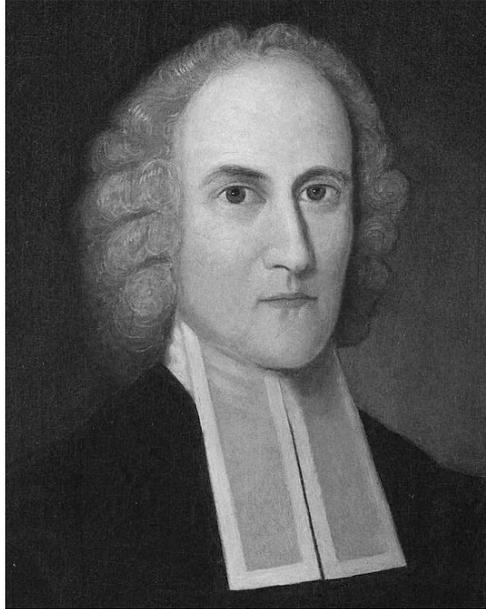
John Bunyan is undoubtedly one of the greatest among reformed Protestant leaders who lived in post-Reformation England. He was a great preacher and accomplished writer who championed the cause of the non-conformist church. Perhaps his greatest legacy lies in his written works, which continue to impact the lives of Christians today, and will continue to do so for generations to come.

¹¹ Bunyan Meeting Free Church, John Bunyan (Great Britain: Jarrod Publishing, 2006), 20.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

“The Last Puritan”

1703-1758



Jonathan Edwards is often regarded as one of America's most important and influential theologians. Not only was Edwards a biblical scholar, he was also a pastor and a missionary. True to the tradition of the Puritans, he lived out his theology and the Word of God in his life. Edwards was born out of a Puritan heritage and this is reflected in him embracing Reformed Theology, his close communion with God, passion for souls, and fiery convictions.

EARLY LIFE

Edwards was born on October 5, 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut. His father, Timothy Edwards and grandfather,

Solomon Stoddard were both pastors. Because of this heritage, Edwards received a strong Christian education from young.

He entered Yale College in 1716 just before he turned thirteen and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1720.

Initially, Edwards struggled with the doctrine of election. However, in 1721, when he was about seventeen years old, he experienced the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and was soundly converted unto Christ. From that point on he came to view God's sovereignty as a delightful doctrine. In his diary, he described how he

came to the conviction of the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty as one that is "exceedingly pleasant, bright and sweet."

MINISTRY

When he was eighteen years old in 1722 he was invited to serve as a "supply" unordained pastor of a presbyterian church in New York. In 1723, he answered the call to serve in a small church in Bolton. In 1724, he returned back to New Haven where he served as a tutor in Yale College.

It was during these years of service when Edwards wrote his *Resolutions*. These resolutions were for Edwards' own personal evaluation and reminders to walk closely with the Lord. In total, he wrote seventy personal resolutions to please God in everything he did. Below are some of them:

1. Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many soever, and how great soever.
2. Resolved, to be continually endeavouring to find out some new contrivance and invention to promote the aforementioned things.
3. Resolved, if ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.
4. Resolved, never to do any manner of

thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.

5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.
6. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
7. Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.

Edwards remained in New Haven until 1727 when he moved to Northampton, Massachusetts to serve as an assistant to his aging grandfather Stoddard. Upon his grandfather's death in 1729, he was appointed as the pastor of the Church.

In 1727, Edwards married Sarah Pierrepont, a childhood friend whom he first met in New Haven. Edwards once wrote on the front page of a Greek grammar book, which he was supposed to be studying, a brief biography of Sarah:

"They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is beloved of that almighty Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on him

— that she expects after a while to be received up where he is, to be raised up out of the world and caught up into heaven; being assured that he loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from him always. There she is to dwell with him, and to be ravished with his love and delight forever. Therefore, if you present all the world before her, with the richest of its treasures, she disregards it and cares not for it, and is unmindful of any pain or affliction. She has a strange sweetness in her mind, and singular purity in her affections; is most just and conscientious in all her actions; and you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this great Being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness and universal benevolence of mind; especially after those seasons in which this great God has manifested himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly; and seems to be always of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.”

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Edwards’ ministry was based upon the preaching of the Word of God. He saw that spiritual lethargy was setting into his congregation and in Christians. He focused on preaching against specific sins of that time. In response to Arminianism, he emphasised on the doctrines of justification of grace through faith and of God’s sovereignty in salvation. This latter doctrine is well expressed and articulated in a sermon entitled *God Glorified in Man’s Dependence* (1731).

In the mid-1730s, a revival swept through Northampton, where hundreds were converted and had their spiritual attitudes changed. In a couple of years, the Great Awakening began. During this time, Edwards met George Whitefield and they would serve together for a season. The Great Awakening was met with resistance from conservative Congregationalist pastors because of the outcries that accompanied it.

In 1741 he preached the famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* in which many people responded to God with great anguish over their sins. They were so convicted that they had a physical reaction such as crying out loud and groaning in agony over their guilt before a holy God. The text of this sermon was taken from Deuteronomy 32:35 – “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.”

The main points to this message are as follows:

1. There is no want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment.
2. They deserve to be cast into hell; so that divine justice never stands in the way, it makes no objection against God’s using his power at any moment to destroy them.
3. They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell.
4. They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell.
5. The devil stands ready to fall upon

them and seize them as his own, at what moment God shall permit him.

6. There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish principles reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into hell fire, if it were not for God's restraints.
7. It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand.
8. Natural men's prudence and care to preserve their own lives, or the care of others to preserve them, do not secure them a moment.
9. All wicked men's pains and contrivance they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men, don't secure them from hell one moment.
10. God has laid himself under no obligation by any promise to keep any natural man out of hell one moment.

This is an excerpt from *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire

every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell. O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator; and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever had done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment. And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open and stands in calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming from the east, west, north and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled

with love to him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day!... Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let everyone fly out of Sodom: "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."

In 1741, Edwards published *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, in defence of these revivals. The work particularly dealt with the criticisms of an "anti-Awakening" group which questioned the validity of such a revival. Edwards saw revivals as the real work of God which no man could engineer or imitate. One must never be too quick to dismiss God's work of revival but instead recognise that God alone is the one who can do so. To further address these concerns in 1742 and 1743, Edwards preached at Northampton a series of sermons which was later published under the title of *Religious Affections* (1746).

In the mid-1740s, he met David Brainerd who influenced Edwards towards missions. This would spark the modern missions movement.

In 1748, there was a crisis in his congregation because of a disagreement over the Lord's Supper. Edwards would not allow non-believers to partake of the communion. He taught that only a baptised person who had lived a blameless life and bore fruits

of salvation was allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. Even though Edwards practiced infant baptism, he also refused to baptise the infants of parents who attended church but had not professed faith in Christ. As a result, in 1750, Edwards was voted out and dismissed from his church in Northampton.

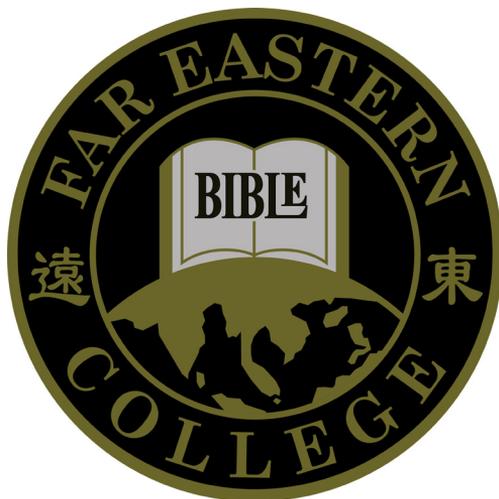
MINISTRY IN STOCKBRIDGE

After the dismissal, Edwards left Northampton and moved to a frontier settlement in Stockbridge. He pastored a small church there and began to reach out to the Housatonic Indians. During these years, Edwards spent much time in uninterrupted study - often spending thirteen hours a day in his study. It was this time when Edwards produced one of his most important works, *An Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions Respecting that Freedom of the Will which is supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency* (1754) or is sometimes simply known as *The Freedom of the Will*.

HIS DEATH AND LEGACY

In 1758, he accepted the call to become the president of the College of New Jersey, which is today known as Princeton University. A few months later, he died from complications arising from smallpox inoculation.

Though Edwards was gifted with and recognised for his brilliant mind, it is really his testimony of diligence, spiritual sensitivity and fervent zeal that stand out. He has left behind not only important works of biblical scholarship and sermons of revival but also an example of godly devotion.



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