

THE PURITAN MOVEMENT

Church History, Lesson #23

Introduction:

- The three primary influences in North American, evangelical Christianity have been:
 - Puritanism
 - Pietism
 - Reformation
- **Puritans were...** a group of English Reformed Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who sought to "purify" the Church of England from its "Catholic" practices, maintaining that the Church of England was only partially reformed.¹
- Puritanism as a movement was founded primarily by ministers who had been exiled under Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary), and then returned when Elizabeth took the throne in 1558.
 - These Puritans especially objected to being tied to the Common Book of Prayer for their liturgy, ostentatious clerical dress, "high church" formality, pomp and circumstance, and some then objected to the church hierarchy within the Church of England.
- Eventually politicians of puritan persuasions came to power in parliament, and this eventually led to the First English Civil War (1642 – 1646) and the period of the Protectorate.
- However, just after the restoration of the monarchy, first under Charles II and then under William and Mary, the Act of Uniformity forced over 2,000 ministers out of the Church of England. They became "nonconformists" or "dissenters". And they paid a heavy price for their convictions.
- The Act of Uniformity (1662) and the legislation surrounding it included:
 - The Act of Corporation (1661) required that municipal officers take Anglican communion. This excluded all nonconformists from public office.
 - The Act of Uniformity (1662) required the use of the Book of Common Prayer for all religious services in England.
 - The Conventicle Act (1664) forbid any gathering for worship by more than 5 people unless it was authorized by the Church of England.
 - The Five Mile Act (1665) forbid nonconformist ministers from coming within 5 miles of incorporated towns or within 5 miles of their former parishes. This limited them to urban areas where they could be observed.
- J.I. Packer says that this suffering made the Puritans spiritual giants. It made them dig their "spiritual wells" deeper.

Puritan Ideals:

- RELIGION:
 - Once puritans were ejected from the Church of England, they wanted to form independent dissenting churches that were PURE! This meant obedience to God in every detail of life and submission to God within the church to the greatest degree possible.
 - They were serious about the Scriptures.
 - They were serious about salvation. (They were Calvinists.)
 - They were serious about church.

¹ Julie Spraggon (2003). "Puritan Iconoclasm During the English Civil War". p. 98. Boydell Press

- **FAMILY:**
 - The puritans considered the family to be a “little church”. Husbands and fathers were to “shepherd their flock” in the Lord. This included family Bible reading and prayer. Wives and mothers trained their children and had remarkable authority and responsibility over family affairs and businesses.
 - Puritans are often thought of as sexual killjoys, but one puritan village in western Massachusetts banished a man and made him live in exile in the wilderness because he wouldn’t fulfill his marital duty to his wife.²
- **EDUCATION:** Puritans in New England required that towns hire a school master to teach the children. The leaders of the Massachusetts colony were well educated men who had attended Oxford and Cambridge and who eventually started Harvard.
- **REFORMATION & REVIVAL:** New England Puritans wanted to build the New Jerusalem in the New World or “a city set on a hill”. They wanted a complete and full reformation. They saw “revival” as “reforming lives according to God’s Word”.

John Owen (1616 – 1683) – Theologian

- Owen was a puritan by upbringing.
- Restrictions against puritans and independents drove him from college at Oxford in 1637. He then became a private chaplain and tutor to families of nobility.
- His first publication was a defense of Calvinism, *Display of Arminianism* (1642).
- He married Mary Rooke in 1644. They had 11 children, 10 of whom died in infancy and the only one who lived to adulthood died of consumption shortly after her marriage.
- Owen preached regularly before Parliament. He served as a sort of chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and the army.
- Owen served as a pastor, the vice Chancellor of Oxford, and various other positions.
- Even during the Restoration, Owen was well respected by the nobility and even the king. However, he refused preferment by the Church of England unless his fellow nonconformists were given freedom to preach their conscience.
- And yet, King Charles II respected him so much that he gave 1,000 guineas to relieve the financial stress of these nonconformist ministers that had lost their parishes because of the stricter laws. And he had some influence on the release of John Bunyan.

Richard Baxter (1615 – 1691) – Pastor

- After some minor positions, Baxter became the minister of Kidderminster. He pastored there for 19 years. He reformed many of the church practices. He united the Independent, Presbyterian, and Episcopal ministers of the surrounding region into an association.
- He wrote about his work as a pastor and leader in Kidderminster and the reforms accomplished there in *The Reformed Pastor*.
- During the Civil War and the Protectorate, Baxter served as a chaplain to a regiment in the army and served the cause of the Parliament and people in a variety of ways.
- During the Restoration, he was constantly thwarted and persecuted.
 - He was imprisoned once for keeping a “conventicle”.
 - When licenses to preach were issued by the king, but then revoked, the meeting house that he had built for preaching was closed to him after having preached there only once.

² Coffin, Charles (1987), *The Story of Liberty: So You Will Comprehend What Liberty Has Cost, and What It Is Worth*, Maranatha Publications, ISBN 093855820X

- In 1680 he was taken from his home and later released, but his books and belongings were seized.
- In 1684 he was taken before the courts three different times, and even though he was barely able to stand, he was required to enter into a bond of £400 for his good behavior.
- In 1685 he was brought before the courts and accused of libeling the church in his Paraphrase of the New Testament. He was fined 500 marks, and was to be imprisoned until the money was paid. He languished in prison for 18 months at nearly 70 years of age. Finally the government remitted the fines and released him in a hope to gain his influence.
- The years after his release in 1687 were his most peaceful and his most productive writing years, and his books included a tribute to his wife after her death called *Breviate of the Life of Mrs. Margaret Baxter*. This reveals the tenderness of puritan marriage.

John Bunyan (1628-1688) – Author

- Joined the Parliamentary Army at the age of 16 and served for 3 years.
- Returned to the village of Elstow, near Bedford, and took up the trade of tinker which he learned from his father.
- Bunyan married within two years of being released from the army. He and his wife had 4 children. Mary, the oldest was blind.
- Bunyan was converted by listening to the spiritual conversation of several women that he overheard while he was on his tinker's round in Bedford. He was so impressed by their conversation that he joined their church, which was the beginnings of the "Bedford Meeting" or the "Bedford Free Church". The church soon called upon him to preach and encouraged him to preach around the surrounding countryside.
- In 1658 Bunyan's first wife died and he was left with 4 small children, one of them blind. He remarried a year later. His second wife was named Elizabeth and was 18 at the time of the marriage.
- In 1660, John Bunyan was arrested for preaching and when he was tried in January of 1661 he was sentenced to 3 months in jail for not attending Anglican church services and unlawfully preaching to unauthorized gatherings. However, to be released after 3 months he had to promise to no longer preach. Consequently, his sentence kept being extended until he served a total of 12 years. His wife and children were extremely poor during this time. He was occasionally released based on the mood of the jailer, he even gathered with his church and preached. In fact, his first child by his second marriage was born at this time.
It was even during this time that the Bedford Meeting elected him as their pastor.
- While imprisoned, Bunyan wrote Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners and began writing Pilgrim's Progress.
- Bunyan was set free in May of 1672 and he immediately obtained a license to preach and spent most of the rest of his years writing and preaching. However, he was imprisoned a second time for 6 months in 1676-1677. This was probably for not attending Anglican worship.

The Puritans' Influence:

The Puritan movement directly influences us because of the New England colonies being so directly tied to the English Puritans.

This influence comes to us through authors and leaders like:

From previous generations:

- Jonathan Edwards
- Charles Spurgeon
- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

And living leaders and authors like:

- J.I. Packer
- John MacArthur, John Piper
- Mark Dever