

# HEROES OF THE CHURCH: The English Puritans

## I. Should We Like the Puritans?

### A. Contemporary impressions?

*“Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”* (Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, x)

*“No group of people has been more unjustly maligned in the twentieth century than the Puritans. As a result, we approach the Puritans with an enormous baggage of culturally engrained prejudice.”* (Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 2)

## II. The Rise of Puritanism: Europe at the Time of the Reformation (16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries)

### A. Pockets of reform arose throughout Holland, Switzerland, Germany, and France.

### B. However, the struggle between old and new started earlier (~13<sup>th</sup> century), and lasted longer, in Scotland and England. Contrary to the European continent, church reform in England began politically and filtered down to the people over time, rather than vice versa.

1. Henry VIII (1509-47) officially has England sever ties with Roman Catholic Church in 1534. Declares himself to be “the only supreme Head in earth of the Church of England.”
2. This set in motion a slow movement in Britain toward Reformed Protestantism; however, many in England were in essence Roman Catholic without the Pope (called ‘Anglo-Catholic’)
  - a) Henry VIII (1509-47) – more or less Anglo-Catholic (not much formal change)
  - b) Edward VI (1547-53) – good Reformed Protestant (moderate reformed favored)
  - c) Mary I (1553-58) – ‘Bloody Mary’, strident Roman Catholic (massive Protestant persecution!); unwittingly helped the cause of the Reformers!

*“And now I come to the great thing that so troubleth my conscience, more than any other thing that I said or did in my life: and that is my setting abroad of writings contrary to the truth...And forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished: for if I may come to the fire, it shall be first burned.”*

– Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, just before his death by Queen Mary

### d) Elizabeth I (1558-1603) - Protestant for political reasons, but still not enough reform...

- a. Attempted a “middle way” between moderate and thoroughgoing reform. Combined Reformed doctrine, liturgical Catholic forms of worship, and Episcopal church government.
- b. Many remained who were not satisfied with Elizabeth’s efforts at compromise, and were intent on further “purifying” the English church. Hence, they are called Puritans!
- c. All Puritan requests were rejected by Elizabeth. In 1562, non-conforming clergy were expelled. Ten years later the first presbytery is held in Wandsworth, England.
- e) James I (1603-25) – Claimed power over the church; intentionally provoked Puritans
- f) Charles I (1625-49) – Anglo-Catholic who hated Puritans. Forced English and Scottish churches to conform, which helped lead to English Civil War.

**III. Puritan Myth-Busters (taken from *Worldly Saints*, Leland Ryken)**

A. "The Puritans were money-grubbing workaholics."

1. Work was a moral virtue, but cautioned dangers of wealth.

Verdict = Generally untrue.

*"If we look externally "there is a difference betwixt washing of dishes and preaching of the word of God; but as touching to please God, none at all." - William Tyndale*

B. "The Puritans were opposed to sports and recreation."

Verdict = Largely untrue.

*"Enjoy them as liberties, with thankfulness to God that allows us these liberties to refresh ourselves." - R. Sibbes*

C. "The Puritans were overly strict."

Verdict = Often true.

*"I serve a precise God" - Richard Rogers*

D. "The Puritans repressed normal human feelings in the name of religion."

Verdict = Not so.

*"The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of my flesh from my bones." - John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, in prison*

**IV. Puritan Values**

A. Living a radically God-centered life

B. The practicality of theology – *"Theology is the science of living blessedly forever."* -William Perkins

C. Work as a gift from God, for His glory and the public good

D. The family as a small church, with parents following Christ in evangelism and ministry

E. Zeal for individual and corporate worship, especially preaching

*"I preach, as never sure to preach again, And as a dying man to dying men." - Richard Baxter*

*"In the Word preached the saints hear Christ's voice; in the sacrament they have his kiss." -Thomas Watson*

**V. Puritan Samples**A. "A Bruised Reed" by Richard Sibbes ("The Heavenly Dr. Sibbes") - *"...a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice."* (Isa 42:3)

*"In pursuing his calling, Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, in which more is meant than spoken, for he will not only not break nor quench, but he will cherish those with whom he so deals..."*

B. "The Reformed Pastor" by Richard Baxter (*on the tragedy of a minister not taking heed over his own soul while preaching to others*)

*"Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and heartily entertain that Savior Christ whom you offer to them..."*

C. "Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers" by John Owen

*"[M]y heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life ... are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God, that so the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things."*