

An Examination
of
Puritan History, Faith and Practice
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to shed some much-needed light on the faith and practice of the Puritans, a people who, largely due to various historical inaccuracies and ignorance, not only have been greatly misunderstood but held in derision by many. These God-fearing, hard-working men are often unfairly characterized as prudish, narrow-minded, miserable, and unbending legalists. A purely factual history of these godly men, however, reveals them to be something of far more positive than negative significance in the formation of America as a country as well as in the development of her deep religious roots.

To this end, this paper begins with a general historical overview of Puritan history. The historical record is invaluable, not only as a means of establishing the necessary objective lens through which one may properly view and evaluate Puritanism, but in establishing the proper context for their beliefs and behaviors.

Secondly, under the heading of “Sources of Puritan Persecution,” the writer addresses many of the external hostilities that not only the Puritans themselves routinely faced but those holding to similar beliefs today often face as well. Although the age of Puritanism has long since passed, many of the same allegations made against them in their own day are repeated as convenient ways of discrediting those who would today seek to emulate their behavior and incorporate their godly worldview.

Thirdly, this paper attempts to set the record straight concerning the aforementioned allegations against the Puritans by consulting many experts in the field of Puritan and early American history. As previously noted, only a reliable reading of the historical record can reveal the true character of the Puritans and cast them in the proper light.

In the fourth place, the writer conducts an in-depth examination of the origins of and influences on Puritan spirituality. What did they believe about many of the key doctrines presented in Scripture? Who were their greatest influences in terms of the development of their orthodoxy and orthopraxy? An understanding of such things is indispensable not only in casting the Puritans in the proper historical light but also in showing that their faith and practice was scriptural as opposed to radical.

Finally, this paper will seek to answer the question of whether or not the Puritans can teach us anything today. There seems to be a prevailing opinion among many in this postmodern generation that only that which is new is useful as many consider the old paths of theological thought and practice as archaic and ineffectual in the modern world. The writer will attempt to disprove this erroneous notion by taking a closer look at the commonalities that exist between their world and the world of the twenty-first century. As Solomon once declared, there is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9).

A General History of Puritanism

Providing an exact date for the beginning of Puritanism is not easy. The difficulty of this task is compounded significantly when one considers the sheer number of works that have been made available over the years, each one varying considerably on the issue of Puritan beginnings. Hall (1965), for example, points out that the term “Puritan” was not used until 1567. Collinson (2008) supports this assertion, writing:

In the year 1567, the Londoner John Stow, a man of conservative religious opinions, referred to “many congregations of the Anabaptysts in London, who cawlyd themselves Puritans or Unspottyd Lambs of the Lord.” Thomas Harding, in one of his books against Bishop Jewel, printed at Louvain a year later, seems to have picked up news of these

people. After a Cook's tour of Europe, a gazetteer of heretics all claiming to be the best thing since sliced bread, he concludes: 'Now last of al crepeth me forth one Browne at London with his vnspotted Congregation, otherwise called Puritanes. As we come laste, say they, so we are purest, and cleanest of al others'. (p. 20)

Knappen (1939), on the other hand, asserted that Puritanism actually began much earlier, in 1524, with the ministry of William Tyndale. Lloyd-Jones (1987) agreed with this assessment, arguing:

It is clear that two of the great characteristics of Puritanism began to show themselves in Tyndale. He had a burning desire that the common people would be able to read the Scriptures. But there were great obstacles in his way; and it is the way in which he met and overcame the obstacles that show that Tyndale was a Puritan. He issued a translation of the Bible without the endorsement and sanction of the bishops. That was the first shot fired by Puritanism...Another action on his part which was again most characteristic of the Puritans was that he left this country without royal assent...and went to Germany, and there, helped by Luther and others, he completed his great work.

It was this attitude, Lloyd-Jones (1987) argues, that set the stage for others, leading them to take even bolder steps towards reform in the established church. While Dr. Lloyd-Jones is no doubt deserving of the highest esteem, this writer would be inclined to disagree with him on a purely semantical basis. Lloyd-Jones' impeccable logic notwithstanding, to refer to Tyndale as a Puritan is a bit anachronistic given that the Puritans were reacting, not necessarily to the issues they had with the teaching and practices within the Roman Catholic Church but with those within Henry VIII's newly formed Anglican Church. Thus, while Tyndale may have indeed been a "proto-Puritan" figure, he simply was not a Puritan according to the most widely accepted definition of

the term. The consensus among most church historians today is that Puritanism began approximately 25 years after Tyndale began his ministry.

Bremer (2012) provides one of the best explanations concerning the difficulty of identifying Puritan origins, writing:

Part of the difficulty comes from the fact that for most of the movement's history there was no institutional identity that defined Puritanism. Whereas other religious movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – Lutheranism, Catholicism, Calvinism, and others – were or became institutionalized, producing official statements of faith and formal membership in churches, Puritanism never achieved that type of clear identity. It was a movement defined in part by the self-identification of men and women who referred to themselves as “godly” or “professors,” and partly by their enemies, who scorned them as “precisians,” “puritans,” and “hypocrites.” (p. 3)

John Knox: The Father of Puritanism?

In the minds of many, Scottish preacher and theologian John Knox is considered the founding father of Puritanism. According to Lloyd-Jones (1987):

Most people think of John Knox solely in terms of Scotland, and feel therefore that it is for the Scots people only to commemorate him and his work. The answer to that can be put in this way. All who have visited Geneva, and have seen the famous plaque or memorial to the great Reformers will have noticed that John Knox is included among them. He is in that august company with Calvin and Farel; and that should be sufficient to make us realize not only that John Knox did great and marvelous things in Scotland, but also the international character of his work. (p. 260)

Noted historian Thomas Carlyle (2013) wrote of Knox: “He was the chief priest and founder of the faith that became Scotland’s, New England’s and Oliver Cromwell’s – that is of Puritanism” (p. 166).

John Knox’s story is both fascinating and enlightening. Born in Haddington, Scotland, about 17 miles outside of Edinburgh. Educated at St. Andrews, Knox’s initial exposure to religion was to Roman Catholicism. While the exact date of his conversion is not known, many historians believe that he came to know the Lord sometime around 1543, presumably under the preaching of Thomas Guillaume.

According to Wilson (2000), in 1546, following an assassination attempt on Pastor George Wishart (believed to be the most influential man in Knox’s life), Knox was appointed to serve as Wishart’s bodyguard. This duty would be short-lived as, not long after, authorities arrested Wishart for the capital crime of having taught his students to read the Bible in its original language. Shortly after his arrest, Wishart was tried, found guilty, and subsequently both hanged and burned at the stake. This event was not only tragic for Knox but also meant that, having served as Wishart’s bodyguard, he, too, was a wanted man. For protection, Knox found refuge in St. Andrews, which was under the control of his co-conspirators, the Castilians. While in residence there, he instructed many of the young men in the castle (as well as from the nearby village) in the things of the Lord.

According to Wilson (2000), the preacher of the group of men occupying the castle, John Rough, was so impressed with Knox’s teaching skills that he asked him to begin preaching to the men. Knox initially refused, arguing that “he would not run where God had not called him. By this, he meant that he would do nothing without a lawful calling” (p. 28). Soon thereafter, a

council was convened for the sole purpose of proving Knox with that lawful calling. John Rough then took it upon himself to preach a sermon in which he argued that:

A congregation – and a congregation consisted of any which passed the number of two or three – had authority over a man in whom they perceived the gifts of God. And when they called such a one, it was dangerous to refuse to hear the voice of those who desired to be instructed. (p. 28)

Having made his case, Rough then made direct application of his sermon to John Knox, extending to him the following public call to the ministry:

Brother, ye shall not be offended, albeit that I speak unto you that which I have in charge, even from all those that are here present, which is this: In the name of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ, and in the name of these that presently calls (sic) you by my mouth, I charge you, that ye refuse not this holy vocation, but that as ye tender the glory of God, the increase of Christ His kingdom, the edification of your brethren, and the comfort of me, whom ye understand well enough to be oppressed by the multitude of labours, that ye take upon you the public office and charge of preaching, even as ye look to avoid God's heavy displeasure, and desire that He shall multiply His graces with you. (p. 29)

Although Knox was not initially pleased with what seemed to be a “forced call” into the ministry, it was not long before he was preaching with reckless abandon throughout Scotland. His main emphasis, Wilson (2000) notes, was on proving, “that the Roman church was to be considered as the synagogue of Satan. He pulled no punches” (p. 30).

Given his previous involvement in activities that had greatly upset the Roman church (e.g., his prior association with Wishart and his living with the murderers of Cardinal Beaton), his preaching ministry merely served to add insult to injury. When the French captured St.

Andrews, Knox was also captured and forced to work as a slave on a French galley for nearly two years. As Lloyd-Jones (1987) writes:

This was a most exhausting experience in which he suffered, not only the rigours of such a life, but intense cruelty also. This undoubtedly left its mark on the whole of his life, because it undermined his health; and he had a constant struggle against ill health. (p. 261)

Warren Lewis (1957), brother of C. S. Lewis, described rowing in the galley as one of the most unimaginable horrors ever known to man:

From below came the constant clank of chains, the crack of whips on bare flesh, screams of pain, and savage growls. At each oar all five men must rise as one at each stroke, push the eighteen-foot oar forward, dip it into the water, and pull with all their force, dropping into a sitting position at the end of each stroke. "One would not think," says a Huguenot convict, "that it was possible to keep it up for half an hour, and yet I have rowed full out for twenty-four hours without pausing for a single moment." On these occasions the rowers were fed on biscuits soaked in wine, thrust into their mouths by the Comites as they rowed. Those who died, or even who fainted at their posts, were cut adrift from the bench and flung overboard without further ceremony. (p. 219)

Eventually, Knox was freed and returned to Scotland. When his situation there became too difficult, he settled in England where church authorities appointed him as minister of the church in Berwick-on-Tweed. He remained at this post until 1551. Knox also served as one of the Court chaplains and preachers during the reign of Edward VI. This position not only placed him in a unique position at the epicenter of affairs of the state but also afforded him the opportunity to preach on several occasions to Edward VI and his court. This period of relative

ease, however, was suddenly disrupted when the king died at the age of sixteen and “Bloody Mary” assumed the throne.

With the coronation of Roman Catholic devotee, Mary, Knox and many others among the Protestants were forced to flee for their lives. Knox eventually ended up in Geneva where, for a brief period, he studied under John Calvin. Calvin described Knox as a “brother...laboring energetically for the faith.” Knox was so impressed with Calvin’s Geneva that, according to Spielvogel (2014), he would later write:

It is the most perfect school of Christ that was ever on earth since the days of the apostles. In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so seriously reformed, I have not yet seen in any place besides. (p. 387)

Knox’s studies with Calvin were soon interrupted, however, as he accepted a call to help pastor a church of English refugees in Frankfurt, Germany. Contrary to what both Knox and Calvin had hoped, things did not go well in Frankfurt, so Knox returned to Geneva where he served as pastor of an English church from 1556-1559.

In April 1559, following the death of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth’s assumption to the throne a year earlier, Knox was able to return to Scotland. In 1560, as a result of Knox’s incredible influence, the Scottish Parliament passed laws prohibiting any further celebration of the mass as well as nullifying the Pope’s power in Scotland. According to Dickinson (1949):

The years from 1560 onwards saw worship simplified, evangelism, care of the poor and more education, so the ordinary people could read the Bible. Instead of the outward forms of Roman Catholicism, public worship was now based around reading, preaching and singing from God’s word. (p. 1)

John Knox continued preaching in Scotland until his death in 1572. According to Galli and Olsen (2000), one man standing over Knox's open grave is reported to have said, "Here lies a man who neither flattered nor feared any flesh" (p. 171).

So, in what sense can John Knox be considered the founding father of Puritanism? In the first place, it is simply undeniable that Knox's close association with John Calvin, including Calvin's invaluable tutelage, led to the introduction of Calvinistic theology in both Scotland and England. With this Calvinism, Knox was able to steer the church in England away from the Roman Catholic idea that placed the Church, its traditions, and its own interpretations of Scripture as primary by teaching them the supreme authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. In addition to introducing this new understanding of Scripture, Knox believed very strongly in what he termed a "root and branch" reformation, which indicates that he was not content with merely reforming the doctrine of the church but saw the need to reform the practice of the church as well. Lloyd-Jones (1987) observed:

To the Puritan, reformation not only means a modification or a slight improvement; it means a "new formation" of the church – not a mere modification of what has already been – governed by the New Testament and its teaching. This was a historic guiding principle. (p. 268)

As Galli and Olsen (2000) further remark, "John Knox was indeed a man of many paradoxes, a Hebrew Jeremiah set down on Scottish soil. In a relentless campaign of fiery oratory, he sought to destroy what he felt was idolatry and to purify Scotland's religion" (p. 169). Knox's influence in Scotland had an undeniably dramatic effect on changing religion in England, empowering other faithful men to seek the same success. It is for this reason that many consider John Knox to be the founding father of Puritanism.

The Anglican Church

A word about the formation of the Anglican Church is not only relevant to a meaningful discussion of Puritanism but foundational. For all intents and purposes, when it was established, the Anglican Church was not so much intended to be a unique institution as it was the reaction of England's King Henry VIII to particular Roman Catholic doctrines with which he disagreed.

Henry, who ruled England from 1509 to 1547, was, by all accounts, a very colorful character. As Cairns (1996) notes:

He was a handsome, generous, strong, cultured prince, who knew theology, was a good musician, and could speak Latin, French, and Spanish, as well as English. He enjoyed the chase, archery, and tennis, sports that helped to make him more popular with the English people than his parsimonious father Henry VII had been. (p. 322)

Henry's father, desiring to relate his line to the most important families in Europe, arranged each of his children's marriages exclusively to his benefit. His daughter Margaret, for example, married James of Scotland. His son Arthur married Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon. Not long after this union, Arthur died. Not wanting to lose Catherine's considerable dowry, in 1503, Henry VII persuaded Pope Julius II to grant a special dispensation allowing Arthur's younger brother, Henry, to take Catherine as his wife. Henry and Catherine had one child, a daughter named Mary, who would later rule as Mary Tudor.

Following his father's death in 1509, the younger Henry succeeded his father as king. To perpetuate his lineage, He needed a son who could rule England during what were rather turbulent times (e.g., the seemingly never-ending battles with France and Scotland). When it became clear that Catherine would not be able to provide him with a suitable heir, he began to look elsewhere for a wife who could, in fact, give him a son. In 1518, Henry began an affair with

Elizabeth (Bessie) Blount, who, one year later, gave birth to Henry Fitzroy. As Henry VIII's illegitimate son, however, he could not inherit the crown. Instead, he was made Duke of Richmond.

In 1521, Henry VIII received the title of "Defender of the Faith" from Pope Leo X for his opposition to Martin Luther and the Reformation that Luther had begun in Germany. Four years later, Henry began an affair with Mary Boleyn, the sister of Anne Boleyn, the lady in waiting to Catherine of Aragon. One year later, Mary gave birth to Henry's second son. He, too, is not recognized as a legitimate heir to the throne. It was at this same time that Anne Boleyn won the young king's heart and yet another affair commenced. From approximately 1526 to 1529, Henry worked feverishly to secure a divorce from his wife, Catherine, so he would be free to marry Anne. Creating this union, however, proved to be a near-impossible task. Henry ordered his adviser Cardinal Wolsey to negotiate with Pope Clement VII for a divorce from Catherine. According to Cairns (1996), however:

Clement VII was unable to grant this request because in 1527 he was under the control of Catherine's nephew, the powerful Charles V, the ruler of Spain and the emperor of Germany. Henry accused Wolsey of high treason when he failed to get the divorce, but Wolsey died before Henry could execute him. (p. 322)

When it became clear that Henry would get nowhere with the Pope, he decided to take matters into his own hands by convincing the English clergy that it would be in their best interest to persuade Parliament to grant him the divorce he sought. He did this by setting himself up as head of the church in England and persuading Parliament that any future communications from Rome in the form of papal decrees, bulls, encyclicals, etc. must be approved by himself prior to their

adoption or enactment. In 1533, Parliament granted Henry a divorce from Catherine and he married a pregnant Anne Boleyn that same year.

1534 ushered in the most significant step in the separation of the church in England from Rome: the *Act of Supremacy*. This act declared that the king was the only supreme head of the Church of England thereby solidifying the English church's break with Rome. Further reforms in the church soon followed. For example, in 1536, Parliament ordered the closing of all monasteries with less than two hundred pounds annual income. In the final tally, 376 monasteries were closed, and the crown confiscated their property.

It was also in 1536 that Henry made the decision to rid himself of Anne Boleyn because of her inability to produce the male heir that he still desperately wanted. This desperation led to Henry's falling in love with Jane Seymour, who would become his third wife. Before this could happen, however, Henry would be required to secure a divorce. Given the difficulty he had experienced in his divorce from Catherine, it was determined that perhaps there was another way to rid himself of Anne.

On May 2, 1536, Henry ordered Anne's arrest on charges of adultery, incest, and high treason against the king. Whether any of these things actually happened remains a mystery. Nevertheless, on May 17, 1536, following an unusually speedy trial, Anne was beheaded. Only thirteen days later, Henry VIII and Jane Seymour were married. On October 12, 1537, Henry was finally given a son, Edward VI, but it cost him dearly, as only twelve days later, Jane Seymour died following complications from childbirth.

It is important at this point to note that, in terms of reformation, while Henry had indeed broken the ecclesiastical ties between the church in England and Rome, nothing had changed in terms of doctrine. In 1539, Parliament passed the Six Articles, which reaffirmed the doctrines of

transubstantiation, celibacy, and confession with the priest as mediator. As Cairns notes, “In theology the Church of England remained true to Rome” (p. 323).

Henry’s son, King Edward VI, initiated the Protestant phase of Reformation in England. Since he was only nine at the beginning of his reign, the Duke of Somerset (Edward’s mother’s brother) was appointed as regent. Somerset was very influential in that it was his Protestant sympathies that led to the young king’s institution of various changes in the area of doctrine. It was under Somerset’s tutelage, for example, that the boy king ordered all worship services to be conducted in the native tongue rather than in Latin. 1549 saw the passage of an *Act of Uniformity*, which ushered in the use of Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer*. Church authorities would replace this book in 1552 with an even more Protestant edition that reflected the church’s adoption and application of Calvinistic doctrine.

Shortly after the publication and dissemination of the newly revised *Book of Common Prayer*, Cranmer, with the help of various theologians, including John Knox, began to draw up a new creed for the Church of England. The resulting creed was originally known as *The Forty-two Articles* and would later be reduced in number and renamed *The Thirty-nine Articles*. The Anglican Church adopted this document in 1553 as their primary doctrinal statement.

Following this period of Reformation in England were the Counter-Reformation antics of Edward’s successor to the throne, Queen Mary (daughter of Henry VIII by Catherine of Aragon). According to Cairns (1996), Mary, a staunch Roman Catholic, with the help of Cardinal Reginald Pole, “forced Parliament to restore religious practices in England to what they were at the death of her father in 1547 and to repudiate the changes that had been made under Edward” (p. 325). Approximately 800 English clergymen refused to accept Mary’s sweeping changes and, as a result, lost their churches. Many, but not all of them fled to places like Geneva, Switzerland

and Frankfurt, Germany to avoid the intense persecution that Mary initiated against all who stood in opposition to her changes. In the end, more than 275 Anglican faithful would be martyred for their beliefs. Following her atrocities, Mary would forever be known by many as “Bloody Mary.”

Thankfully, Mary’s reign lasted only five years (1553-1558). She was succeeded by Queen Elizabeth I, a Protestant. It was under Elizabeth’s reign that authorities reduced the aforementioned *Forty-two Articles* by three to the *Thirty-nine Articles* and reinstated them, along with the *Book of Common Prayer*, as the church’s official theological documents. These changes, of course, resulted in considerable tension with the Pope (Pius V) who quickly issued a papal bull, not only excommunicating the Protestant Elizabeth but freeing her subjects from her rule. Elizabeth responded in kind with an act of her own in which she declared that she would not be deterred. Her defiance led to the Anglo-Spanish War in 1588 where Philip of Spain sought to recover England for the Roman Catholic Church. Having gathered his Spanish Armada, he set sail for England in hopes of winning a decisive victory for the papacy. His hopes, however, were quickly dashed. As recounted by the professorial staff at History.com (2015):

Just after midnight on July 29, the English sent eight burning ships into the crowded harbor at Calais. The panicked Spanish ships were forced to cut their anchors and sail out to sea to avoid catching fire. The disorganized fleet, completely out of formation, was attacked by the English off Gravelines at dawn. In a decisive battle, the superior English guns won the day, and the devastated Armada was forced to retreat north to Scotland.

The English navy pursued the Spanish as far as Scotland and then turned back for want of supplies. Battered by storms and suffering from a dire lack of supplies, the Armada sailed on a hard journey back to Spain around Scotland and Ireland. Some of the damaged ships

foundered in the sea while others were driven onto the coast of Ireland and wrecked. By the time the last of the surviving fleet reached Spain in October, half of the original Armada was lost and some 15,000 men had perished. Queen Elizabeth's decisive defeat of the Invincible Armada made England a world-class power and introduced effective long-range weapons into naval warfare for the first time, ending the era of boarding and close-quarter fighting. (p. 1)

While Elizabeth deserves considerable credit for returning England back to Protestant ideals, any rest she might have envisioned following her victory in the struggle with Rome was prevented by another, more persistent foe. This time, however, the unrest came from within the Anglican Church itself in the form of Puritanism.

As covered in the foregoing General History of the Puritans, Puritanism actually sprang from the desire that many within the Anglican Church had expressed for even further reform than they had realized during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Granted, the establishment of a new church after breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church was certainly a considerable step in the right direction (regardless of Henry VIII's selfish and sinful motives), however, as noted previously, it soon became quite apparent that the Anglican Church was little more than a copy of the Roman Catholic church, having retained a great deal of its erroneous doctrine and unscriptural ceremonialism. Those labeled as "Puritans" simply desired further reformation within the Anglican Church, favoring Knox's Presbyterian model or the Congregational model over the Roman Catholic model upon which the church had been fashioned. As Lloyd-Jones (1987) observed, "That, surely, is the essential and most characteristic note of Puritanism – the feeling that the Reformation had not gone far enough" (p. 242). As Cairns (1996) writes, "The Puritans contended that too many 'rags of popery' were still in the

Anglican Church; and they wanted to “purify” the Anglican Church in accordance with the Bible, which they accepted as the infallible rule of faith and life” (p. 328). Among the things rejected by the Puritans were the continued use of liturgy, the popish vestments that were still worn by the clergy, the observance of saints’ days, clerical absolution of sin, the sign of the Cross, the recognition of godparents, etc.

How successful were the Puritans at promoting further, sustained reformation within the Anglican Church? Unfortunately, they enjoyed very little success. Although the teachings and influence of Puritanism continued to expand and their numbers began to multiply quite rapidly, in 1593, Elizabeth, no doubt troubled at the very real threat posed by the Puritans against Anglicanism, issued her unambiguously named *Act Against Puritans*. According to Cairns (1996), “This act gave the authorities the right to imprison the Puritans for failure to attend the Anglican Church” (p. 328). This act was but the beginning of an extended period of persecution, much of which the writer considers under a different heading in this paper.

The reign of the staunchly Anglican Elizabeth ended in 1603. Her cousin, James, succeeded her on the throne. During the reign of King James (1603-1625), who was quite amenable to Calvinism, the Puritans enjoyed a relatively peaceful period in which the Anglican Church saw many Reformation gains. Following James’ death in 1625, however, things took a decidedly unfavorable turn with the coronation of Charles I. As Bremer (2000) notes, “Indeed, it seemed that King Charles I was dismantling what advances [the Puritans’] fathers and grandfathers had made” (p. 5).

This lack of success at further reform led many of the Puritans to consider setting sail for the New World, an idea which quickly gained traction and soon thereafter led to what is known

as “The Great Migration” (1629-1640). According to Vaughan (1972), by 1640 it is believed that there were as many as 40,000 Puritans in America (p. 63).

At this point, a further word of clarification must be offered to correct what is often easily misunderstood concerning Puritan identity. Simply stated, contrary to popular belief, the Pilgrims and the Puritans did not comprise the same group of early American religious freedom-seekers. The Puritans sought reform within the Anglican Church while the Pilgrims advocated complete separation. As Hodgson (2006) expressed concerning celebrated Pilgrim William Brewster:

The dominant intellectual fashion in Cambridge, ever since the ideas of the Reformation first arrived in England from Europe, was Protestantism, and in particular the more radical ideas of those who became the English Separatists. We know from the books in Brewster’s library later in life, as well as from what we know of his declared opinions, how deeply he was influenced by Protestant ideas. At the heart of them was the conviction that the Protestant Reformation had not been carried far enough, that the Elizabethan Settlement was a cowardly political compromise, and that the church must go further in the direction of reform if it was to be purged of the corruptions and distortions introduced by the medieval period, with its papacy and its bishops, its ceremonial and vestments, its hierarchy and its worldly wealth. (pp. 25-26)

While it is indeed true that the Pilgrims and Puritans shared many common beliefs and goals, the Pilgrims deemed complete separation from the Anglican Church the only opportunity for the true church to return to her scriptural moorings.

With beliefs firmly rooted in the theology of the Protestant Reformation, both Pilgrim and Puritan alike saw the “New World” as a place where those escaping the religious tyranny of

an increasingly oppressive Anglican theocracy could establish a country in which their God could be worshiped without fear of persecution and in accordance with His inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word.

With this fresh beginning in the New World, the Puritans also saw a wonderful opportunity to make a tremendous impact on those who would follow. As early Puritan settler and Governor John Winthrop (1630) famously wrote while aboard the *Arbella* awaiting passage into the New World:

We must knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities... We shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all the people are upon us so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout all the world. (p. 1)

Although Winthrop's optimism is certainly admirable, unfortunately, persecution of the Puritans continued even in the new world for which he had developed such high hopes and aspirations.

The Puritans and the Anglican Magisterium

Before discussing the persecution endured by the Puritans in greater detail, it is helpful, from a historical point of view, to understand what is known as the "magisterium" and how it related to Puritan belief and practice. Normally, the magisterium refers to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church and the authority they possess to establish official (and indisputable) church doctrine and tradition. Given that the Anglican Church was originally little more than an offshoot of the Roman church, the tendency toward maintaining the church's magisterial authority continued among many in the Anglican hierarchy.

This continuing dedication to magisterial practice meant that, in the social order of things, the Anglican Church (and her head, the monarch of England) served as the lone authority in what was undeniably a church-state system. For example, many Anglican bishops were full voting members of the House of Lords in Parliament, Parish Wardens were authorized to impose punishments on private individuals in the form of fines, fees, etc. for failing to appear for worship in the Anglican Church, and the king reserved the power to relieve priests and bishops of their duties whenever expedient.

This understanding is critical in establishing the necessary context for any investigation into Puritan belief and practice because, while the Puritans remained dedicated to the Anglican Church (i.e., they weren't separatists like their pilgrim counterparts), their desire to purify the church did include a desire for the separation of church and state. The Puritans did not, however, believe that the state was to remain wholly secular. As Morgan (1967) noted:

Church and State had both been created by God to enforce His will on earth. These institutions had different roles to play and were given different tools and methods to do their jobs, but both had a divine task. Puritans still believed State should enforce compliance with the one true religion (Puritanism). (p. 127)

It must be understood that, while this was indeed the prevailing sentiment among most of the Puritans early on following the establishment of the first American colonies, it was a belief based largely on the utopian ideals that were envisioned concerning the New World. As reality began to set in, many began to sense the futility of a church-state system because, in the end, it looked very much like the system they had left behind.

Puritan John Cotton, like many, had come to the conclusion that the two institutions (church and state) should be separate but equal, both seeking to promote the good of men and

God's glory. According to Hall (2011), "He believed that both religious power in state hands and civil power in church hands were wrong" (p. 124).

One of the most vocal proponents of a complete separation of church and state was Roger Williams. Williams was among the approximately 1,000 men, women, and children who, under the spiritual leadership of John Winthrop, formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630.

Having declined an offer to serve as a minister in the Boston church on the grounds that it was not committed to the proper worship of God, Williams quickly found himself at odds with the leaders of the colony. As Barry (2012) writes:

Williams did not differ with them on any point of theology. They shared the same faith, all worshipping the God of Calvin, seeing God in every facet of life and seeing man's purpose as advancing the kingdom of God. But the colony's leaders, both lay and clergy, firmly believed that the state must prevent error in religion. They believed that the success of the Massachusetts plantation depended upon it. Williams believed that preventing error in religion was impossible, for it required people to interpret God's law, and people would inevitably err. He therefore concluded that government must remove itself from anything that touched upon human beings' relationship with God. A society built on the principles Massachusetts espoused would lead at best to hypocrisy, because forced worship, he wrote, "stincks in God's nostrils." At worst, such a society would lead to a foul corruption—not of the state, which was already corrupt, but of the church. (p. 1)

Williams eventually accepted an offer to minister at the church in Salem, Massachusetts and was able to attract many who were of like-mind, which upset the Bostonian leadership considerably.

According to Barry (2012), "In October 1635, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony banished him, ordering him to leave the colony within six weeks. If he returned, he

risked execution” (p. 1). Given that winter was setting in, Williams’ banishment was initially postponed until Spring, but Williams found himself unable to stop preaching. Constituting a violation of the agreement to postpone his banishment, the authorities sent soldiers to arrest him and put him on the next ship to England.

If not for the intervention of John Winthrop, who considered the punishment of Williams excessive, things would have indeed gone according to plan. Winthrop warned Williams of the plan to arrest him, and he fled the Boston area, never to return. He ended up settling in an area that he would call Providence, which would later become the capital of the state of Rhode Island. As Barry (2012) notes, according to Williams:

The government [of this new settlement] was to be utterly mundane in the most literal sense, in that it dealt solely with the world. Unlike all other English settlements, this one neither set up a church nor required church attendance. Indeed, later it would decree that a simple “solemn profession [had] as full force as an oath” in court. All this was revolutionary. (p. 1)

In Williams’ opinion, the state would do little more than corrupt the church, much as was evidenced by the expansion and power of the Roman Catholic Church in England. In other words, a church-state system did not guarantee adherence to purely biblical principles but, most often, accommodated gross error in the name of expediency and pragmatism. It was for this reason that Williams advocated complete freedom of religion as opposed to a state-sanctioned or state-ordered religion. Williams eventually published these revolutionary ideas in what many refer to as his masterpiece entitled *The Bloody Tenent, of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, Discussed, in a Conference Between Truth and Peace*. As Barry (2012) observes, “The 400-page book... led Williams to divorce the material world from the spiritual world, and to draw

conclusions about politics that led him to formulate a strikingly modern, democratic theory of the state” (p. 1).

As Barry (2012) also reports, according to Vernon Parrington, a leading historian in the early 20th century, Williams’ theory of the Commonwealth “must be reckoned the richest contribution of Puritanism to American thought” (p. 1). Over time, Williams’ ideas began to be accepted among many of the Puritans who themselves began to see the necessity of separating the pure church from the invariably corrupt state. This sentiment would eventually prevail and approximately 150 years later come to full fruition with the passage of Thomas Jefferson’s (1786) Bill for Religious Freedom. This bill reads, in part:

...no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever...nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities. (p. 1)

Sources of Puritan Persecution

Having conducted a general overview of their history, in order to gain a more accurate understanding of Puritanism, it is necessary to “zoom in” or look with more specificity at the subject of Puritan persecution in both England and the New World. Toward that end, the writer offers the following cursory overview of the subject.

Puritan. Even today, far removed from the historical era bearing their name, the moniker alone will invariably evoke one of three responses from the typical individual: At one end of the spectrum, in the minds of many, the Puritans are worthy of perpetual respect and admiration. For others, thoughts of the Puritans will forever remain in the realm of uninformed neutrality. For

those on the opposite end of the spectrum, the term “Puritan” is met with immediate derogation, scorn, and ridicule. This phenomenon is especially noteworthy given the Puritans’ verifiable legacy as, generally speaking, men of unwavering godliness and inimitable character. And yet, as Swanson (2012) noted concerning the negativities surrounding the Puritans, “most Americans have bought into this caricature.” Whether one agrees with Swanson’s assessment implying that “most” people indeed view the Puritans as a detestable lot, in this writer’s opinion, his estimation may not actually be far from the truth.

Upon cursory historical overview, it is simply undeniable that many have long held the Puritans in derision. In fact, as J. I. Packer observes in the Foreword to Ryken (1986), the name “Puritan” was “mud from the start” (p. ix). A phrase “Coined in the early 1560s,” Packer continues, “it was always a satirical smear word implying peevishness, censoriousness, conceit, and a measure of hypocrisy, over and above its basic implication of religiously motivated discontent with what was seen as Elizabeth’s Laodicean and compromising Church of England.” (p. ix). According to Daniels (1995):

For over four centuries “puritan” has been a synonym for the dour, the joyless, the repressed. Few historical concepts have proven so strong: from the literati of Elizabethan England through the critics of the Moral Majority in the 1980s, the image of the Puritan as a killjoy has endured. (p. 3)

Price (2015) has similarly captured the virulent anti-Puritan sentiment characteristic in many quarters:

Historians of generations past and journalists and government school ma’ams today, tend to dismiss the seventeenth century American Puritans as somber cranks and kill-joys who, thankfully, evolved into practical and realistic Unitarian Yankees (“people who

believe in one God, at most”). Dressed in black, the Puddlelum snoops peered in their neighbors’ windows to ensure compliance with the rigid and ridiculous ethical pruderies of the Calvinist theology imposed on them by their inquisitional, witchcraft-obsessed ministers. (p. 1)

According to Wakefield (1957), from the beginning, there has been a prevailing sentiment that “Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy” (p. 10).

Even many of today’s dictionaries reveal that, at least in some degree, this same negative sentiment concerning the Puritans yet persists. Identified as a pejorative, the synonyms listed for the word “puritanical,” for example, include “blue-nosed,” “nice-nelly,” “prudish,” and “straitlaced.” Words said to be related to this word are “priggish” and “stuffy,” arguably pejoratives as well in their own right.¹

Queen Elizabeth and Institutional Persecution

Since their inception, the Puritans always had their fair share of detractors with which to deal in their native England. It was not long, however, before what initially appeared to be the individual sentiments of some evolved into a full-scale institutional attempt at silencing them. As previously noted, in 1593, Elizabeth I ordered the publication of the unambiguously named *Act Against Puritans*. This act stipulated that all Puritan assemblies and activities be outlawed. Further, the act mandated that everyone in the realm was to attend the services of the Anglican Church or face imprisonment until they were willing to submit to the Queen’s orders. According to Gee and Henry (1896) any such submission was to be made in writing in the following format:

I, _____, do humbly confess and acknowledge, that I have grievously offended God in condemning her majesty's godly and lawful government and authority, by absenting myself from church, and from hearing divine service, contrary to the godly laws and

¹ Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/puritanical>

statutes of this realm, and in using and frequenting disordered and unlawful conventicles and assemblies, under pretence and colour of exercise of religion: and I am heartily sorry for the same, and do acknowledge and testify in my conscience that no other person has or ought to have any power or authority over her majesty: and I do promise and protest, without any dissimulation, or any colour or means of any dispensation, that from henceforth I will from time to time obey and perform her majesty's laws and statutes, in repairing to the church and hearing divine service, and do my uttermost endeavour to maintain and defend the same. (pp. 495-496)

In the end, the overzealous enforcement of this act resulted, not only in the martyrdom of many Puritans but the hanging of a few Separatists (i.e., Pilgrims) as well.

King James I: Friend or Foe?

Following the death of Elizabeth in 1603, James I (then known as James IV of Scotland) assumed the throne. As McMahon (2015) observes, unlike the staunchly Anglican Queen Elizabeth, King James was an avowed Calvinist and “The Puritans hoped that this Calvinistic King, who liked episcopacy, would set up a Presbyterian government in the Anglican Church” (p. 1). As Cairns (1996) further notes, “To emphasize their hope, they presented [James] with the Millenary Petition, signed by nearly a thousand Puritan ministers, upon his arrival in 1603 and asked that the Anglican Church be completely ‘purified’ in liturgy and polity” (p. 331).

Intrigued by the Puritans’ requests, the king convened the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 to discuss this and other related issues. Things, however, did not go as well as the Puritans had initially hoped. When confronted with the idea of further reforms in the Anglican Church, James reportedly became angry, saying, as Cairns (1996) observes, that he would “harry them from the kingdom” if they refused to conform. He also argued that Presbyterianism “agreeth as

well with monarchy as God and the devil” (p. 332). Although the Puritans walked away from the meeting disappointed by the King’s obvious displeasure over their suggestions, the 1611 King James Version of the Bible was a notable byproduct of this conference as he set 54 of England’s most learned divines to the task of providing him with a new English translation of the Scriptures.

Although Calvinistic in his theology, King James was also known for being unquestionably self-absorbed. He often displayed this self-interest by his unique brand of orthodoxy. In short, as McMahon (2015) shares, “The Calvinists disagreed vigorously in the way he went about his ‘Christianity.’” (p. 2). One of the more interesting examples of the king’s eccentric view of the Christian life is evidenced by a particular declaration issued in 1618 known as his “Declaration of Sports.” This declaration, read in all of the churches, was intended “to encourage healthy fun and games on Sundays.” What necessitated this declaration was the king’s visit to Lancashire, where he happened to stop on his return to England from Scotland. According to Baker (1634), when he arrived at Lancashire, he “found that his subjects were debarred from lawful recreations upon Sundays after evening prayers ended, and upon Holy-days” (p. 640). As he considered this, King James concluded that, “if these times were taken from them, the meaner sort who labour hard all the week should have no recreations at all to refresh their spirits” (p. 640). As noted by Baker (1684), a portion of this declaration aimed directly at the Puritans reads as follows:

Whereas we did justly in our progress through Lancashire rebuke some Puritans and precise people, and took order that the like unlawful carriage should not be used by any of them hereafter, in the prohibiting and unlawful punishing of our good people for using their lawful recreations and honest exercises upon Sundays, and other Holy-days, after

the afternoon sermon or service, we now find that two sorts of people wherewith that country is much infected, we mean Papists and Puritans, have maliciously traduced and calumniated those our just and honourable proceedings: and therefore, lest our reputation might upon the one side (though innocently) have some aspersion laid upon it, and that upon the other part our good people in that country be misled by the mistaking and misinterpretation of our meaning, we have therefore thought good hereby to clear and make our pleasure to be manifested to all our good people in those parts. (p. 641).

Far from being mere idle words intended to placate those injured by the strict rules implemented by the Puritans, the king tasked the Anglican Bishop of the Lancashire Diocese with enforcing this declaration “with all the Puritans and Precisians within the same, either constraining them to conform themselves or to leave the country” (p. 641). Needless to say, this was a direct blow to the Puritans’ belief in the solemnity and sacredness of the Lord’s Day and marked yet another example of the external persecution they often faced.

King James struggled intensely in his attempts to suppress the growing movement among the Puritans and their ongoing rebellion against the Anglican Church. Despite his best efforts, however, by the 1620s, the majority of the Members of Parliament were Puritans.

Charles I: Persecution Intensifies

Following the death of King James I in 1624, Charles I ascended the throne and married a Roman Catholic princess named Henrietta Maria in 1625. This situation simply added fuel to the fire of the growing institutional anti-Puritan sentiment as Charles viewed the Puritans as a direct threat to his rule. His determination to rid the nation of this Puritan plague resulted in what is, to date in England’s history, one of the boldest steps ever taken. In 1626 and 1627, Charles temporarily dissolved Parliament and in 1629, he abolished the body altogether.

Charles' unprecedented move, made under the provision of Royal Prerogative, led to his declaration of Personal Rule in which he established himself as the sole authority over England, Scotland, and Ireland. The period between 1629 and 1640 would later be known as the "Eleven Years' Tyranny," as the king ruled with an iron fist, increasing fines and taxes on the populace in order to fund his government.

In 1628, William Laud was made archbishop of London and began to oversee the ongoing institutional persecution of the Puritans in Charles I's England, a period of persecution which would end up lasting more than a decade. During these persecutions, it was on Laud's orders that the likes of William Prynne, Henry Burton, and John Bastwick were mutilated for publishing Puritan attacks on the Laudian church. According to Lee (1892), the men were tortured and then branded with the initials "S. L." which stood for "Sign of Laud." According to Rushworth (1706), this wasn't the worst of their torture:

Mr. Burton spake much while in the pillory to the people. The executioner cut off his ears deep and close, in a cruel manner, with much effusion of blood, an artery being cut, as there was likewise of Dr. Bastwick. Then Mr. Prynne's cheeks were seared with an iron made exceeding hot which done, the executioner cut off one of his ears and a piece of his cheek with it; then hacking the other ear almost off, he left it hanging and went down; but being called up again he cut it quite off. (p. 293)

Needless to say, Laud was considered by Puritan clergy and laity alike to be a formidable and dangerous opponent. These charges were corroborated by his subsequent imprisonment and execution for espousing Arminianism, opposing Calvinistic doctrine, and holding to certain Roman Catholic doctrines (p. 185). Thomson (1853) adds that Laud was "naturally arrogant," possessed a "domineering spirit," and was "narrow-minded, rough of temper, impatient of

contradiction, and arbitrary” (p. 1).

In 1637, Charles angered his Scottish subjects when he attempted to force the Anglican form of worship on what was a predominantly Presbyterian population. As Robinson (1906) observed, “Riots escalated to general unrest; forcing Charles to recall Parliament in 1640 to acquire the funds necessary to quell the Scottish uprising. This so-called ‘Short Parliament’ refused Charles’ financial demands and disbanded after only one month” (p. 1).

Charles again called Parliament into session in 1640 due to continuing civil unrest. One year later, the Irish revolted against English rule and ushered in a civil war that pitted the forces of Charles against those of Parliament. This war lasted for the next six years until Oliver Cromwell’s Parliamentary forces finally defeated Charles’ army at the Battle of Preston in August 1648. For his involvement in executing war against his own citizenry within the realm, Charles was charged with high treason. Refusing to enter a plea, the court passed down a guilty verdict and a sentence of death which, according to Robinson (1906), read: “That the king, for the crimes contained in the charge, should be carried back to the place from whence he came, and thence to the place of execution, where his head should be severed from his body.” Two days later, Charles was beheaded at Whitehall, London.

Following Laud’s execution in 1645 and Charles I’s execution in 1649 for treason, the Puritans enjoyed a brief respite from the most intense persecution during the reign of Oliver Cromwell (1653-1658) and Richard Cromwell (1658-1659). This brief period of peace, however, lasted only fifteen years at which time the monarchy was restored under Charles II. The reader will note that England was without a monarch between the execution of Charles I and the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. From 1653, Oliver and his son Richard Cromwell

served, not as kings, but as Lords Protector of the realm. This period is known historically as the “Protectorate.”

Charles II: Here We Go Again

In May 1659, Oliver Cromwell’s son, Richard found that he was unable to manage either Parliament or the Army and was forced to resign. This resignation effectively ended the Protectorate and, for the next year or so, various groups vied for control of England. Weary of the military rule that had characterized their country for more than six years, the people began calling for a restoration of Parliament and eventually the coronation of Charles II as king. Charles, who had been in exile in France since the outbreak of civil war, assured Parliament that he would submit to any decision they might make concerning his assumption of the throne vacated by his father. In May 1660, believing Charles to be trustworthy, Parliament invited him to return to claim his father’s throne.

Little did the people know that, instead of submitting to Parliament as promised, Charles II had other plans. As Gattis (2012) observes, “When Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, he brought with him an Anglican episcopal hierarchy thirsting for revenge. They quickly established themselves in the royal court and grabbed hold of the levers of power” (p. 1).

As Gattis (2012) further notes:

The king wanted peace and toleration, but the bishops were in no mood for compromise. For much of 1661 they pretended to make concessions to the Puritans, but only until they were comfortable enough in their palaces and in Parliament to deal the Puritans a fatal blow. (p. 1)

This “fatal blow” came in the form of something that, for all intents and purposes, had caused the English Civil War in the first place: a call for uniformity in religion.

According to Gattis (2012):

The Act of Uniformity in 1662 required all ministers not merely to use the set forms of prayer – which may have allowed them some leeway in practice – but to swear an oath they could not in good conscience swear. They had to give ‘unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed’ in the new Book of Common Prayer.

This, lamented Richard Baxter, was ‘a weight more grievous than a thousand ceremonies, added to the old conformity, with grievous penalty.’ (p. 1)

Adding insult to injury, all ministers, lecturers, and even teachers in the schools were required to declare themselves to be in total support of this new act and to promise never to attempt to change anything concerning church or state. What is more, Gattis (2012) adds, “those who had taken the ‘Solemn League and Covenant’ oath – that they would work hard to reform the church according to the Bible – had to renounce that oath” (p. 1) admitting that they should never have taken it in the first place.

The Act of Uniformity was formally implemented on August 24, 1662, which was St. Bartholomew’s Day. As Gattis (2012) writes, this was a significant day, “because it was the day that tithes and rents were due, in arrears, to the clergy. So if any clergy did not conform, they did not get paid and were unceremoniously thrown out of their vicarages, often into poverty” (p. 1). Historically, this particular day is remembered as the “Great Ejection” as a total of more than 1,800 ministers (approximately 20 percent of the entire clergy of England) were forced to leave the church. Furthermore, they were prohibited from preaching and teaching as well as from meeting, even in small groups, in their homes. The law in this regard was often enforced with considerable force as the displaced ministers were frequently spied on, hauled into court on trumped up charges, and even sent to the plantations of Virginia as indentured servants.

It is certainly worth noting that perhaps the most prominent among those persecuted for their faith during the earliest stages of this resurgence of persecution was John Bunyan of *Pilgrim's Progress* fame. Arrested for preaching without a license in 1660, Bunyan was subsequently imprisoned for twelve years. According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), when offered his freedom contingent on his no longer preaching in defiance of the king's orders, he replied, "If I am freed today, I will preach tomorrow" (p. 105). Adding to the grief of his unjust confinement, Bunyan was also separated from his wife and four small children, including his eldest, a blind daughter.

In 1670, Charles II signed a treaty with French King Louis XIV in which he agreed to convert to Catholicism as well as to support France in her war against the Dutch. This agreement, initially accepted by Parliament on financial grounds, was soon rejected after the revelation that the Catholics were plotting to assassinate the king. Having nullified the agreement with France, Charles dissolved Parliament in 1679 and ruled alone for the rest of his life. It was not until on his death bed that Charles made good on his promise to convert to Roman Catholicism, much to the chagrin of many of his subjects. He died in Whitehall, London, the same location as his father (though certainly not under the same circumstances) on February 6, 1685.

The Puritan presence in England had been effectively snuffed out, and most of their numbers had long since made the arduous journey across the Atlantic to what they had hoped would be a Puritan utopia. Little did they suspect that they would face many of the same challenges they had endured in the motherland.

The New World: The End of Persecution?

One might be inclined to believe that the Puritans' flight to the New World brought an end to their persecution. Unfortunately, little changed at all. As Swanson (2012) indicates,

although there were thousands of Puritans in America by 1640, Puritan pastors were routinely kicked out of Virginia because they were not Anglican.

In Swanson's (2012) estimation, although the Puritan era proper has long since ended, Puritans are still, in a way, being persecuted today. This persecution, he insists, is ongoing because the humanists of the 19th century took over the church which, in turn, led to the takeover of our educational institutions. For example, the Puritans are not read in our schools today, he maintains, "because of the God-hating humanists. They hate the sovereignty of God and favor man's free will." Whether the reader completely agrees with this sentiment is immaterial. What is patently clear is the fact that believers are, in Swanson's (2012) words, living in a time when "anarchy is preferred over narrowness in terms of Christian liberty" and "pluralism is welcome, regardless of one's religion" (unless, of course, one's religion happens to be Christianity).

The systemic cause of the persecution suffered not only by the Puritans themselves but by all who hold similar values is perhaps best summed up by Christ's own verdict on the matter in John 3:19-21:

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

As honorable as their beliefs may have been and as dedicated as they remained to all things scriptural, the Puritans were clearly not perfect (a fact to which the Puritans themselves would have no doubt readily attested). As is shown in what follows, their penchant for overzealousness and reckless enthusiasm sometimes resulted in severely (and tragically) clouded

judgment which, in turn, brought on a great deal of the persecution to which they were often subjected.

The Salem Witch Trials

Among the most tumultuous periods of Puritan history was a notorious series of unfortunate events that were clearly not representative of the Puritans' finest hour: the Salem witch trials. Although not all Puritans were involved either in the hysteria that was generated by the alleged witch-related goings on, they nevertheless have left an indelible black mark on Puritan history. To understand this particular period in New England's Puritan history, it is necessary to look at the development of witchcraft in general among those who traveled to the New World from England.

New England witchcraft was rooted in the villages and towns of England and was actually more pervasive than one might be inclined to think. In fact, in the old world, witchcraft was so common that, according to Karlsen (1998), "belief in the existence and danger of witches was so widespread, at all levels of society, that disbelief was itself suspect" (p. 3).

Approximately ninety percent of those engaged in witchcraft were women. The remaining ten percent of men and children, however, were generally thought to have become witches due to their close association with the women accused of witchcraft. As Karlsen (1988) relates:

Husbands and daughters of witches were the most likely suspects, especially daughters and most especially after they became mature women themselves. Although much less often, sons and granddaughters were also accused, as were women and men who were associated with, defended, or questioned the proceedings against individual witches. (p.

3)

Generally speaking, to be labeled a witch in New England, one had to be suspected of possessing super-human powers. The most common accusation made against those accused of being witches was their ability to perform maleficium.² While the nature of maleficium performed by witches varied, it was believed that each witch specialized in certain kinds of harm to others (e.g., causing illness or death, fits, sudden inflictions of pain, etc.). In some cases, disasters that would today be attributed to natural causes, such as storms, fire, crop damage, etc. were said to be the result of witchcraft.

Even though witchcraft was an English export from the very beginning of migration to the New World, it was quite some time before anyone was ever formally accused of its practice. Between 1620 and 1646, Karlsen (1988) writes:

...the young colonies adopted their own legal codes, which included witchcraft among the crimes punishable by death. No one, however, was prosecuted under these laws – or under the English witchcraft statutes in force in the colonies – until 1647. Considering the prevalence of witchcraft beliefs and the frequency of witch trials in England during the early seventeenth century, it is at first surprising that no women were formally accused of witchcraft in New England during the first twenty-six years of settlement. (p. 1)

This absence of prosecution over such an extended period of time is probably attributable to the fact that, while in their infancy and early development, most of the colonies had not yet matured to the point where they were able to deal with such things effectively.

By the late 1640s, following the successful establishment and maturation of many of New England's original colonies, a new emphasis on witchcraft began to emerge. Beginning in the spring of 1692, a wave of hysteria swept through Salem, Massachusetts as the result of the

² Maleficium is defined as an evil deed, misdeed, wickedness, or other crime involving one's causing hurt, harm, or injury to another by supernatural means (Source: www.latinlexicon.org/definition.php?p1=1009672&p2=m).

testimony of a group of young girls who, claiming to be demon-possessed themselves, accused several women of being engaged in witchcraft. By September 1692, having been sentenced by Puritan magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hawthorne, a total of nineteen women had been hanged at nearby Gallows Hill while approximately 150 other men, women, and children awaited a similar fate.

While there have been many helpful volumes written about the Salem witch trials, one of the most enlightening is a ten-page pamphlet written by Reverend Deodat Lawson between March 19 and April 5, 1692. This pamphlet was entitled, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft, at Salem Village: Which Happened from the Nineteenth of March, to the Fifth of April, 1692*. Lawson (1692) served as a local minister in Salem Village from 1684 to 1688 and returned to the village in 1692 to record eighteen days of court proceedings, the Honorable Jonathan Corwin and John Hawthorne presiding. In the forward to this work, the publisher, Benjamin Harris, summarizes its contents as follows:

The ensuing narrative being a collection of some remarkables, in an affair now upon the stage, made by a credible eyewitness, is not offered unto the reader, only as a taste of more that may follow in God's time. If the prayers of good people may obtain this favor of God, that the mysterious assaults from hell now made upon so many of our friends may be thoroughly detected and defeated, we suppose the curious will be entertained with as rare an history as perhaps any age has had; whereof this narrative is but a forerunner.

(p. 2)

What follows are the concise accounts of those who allegedly had been "afflicted" and those who were said to be "bewitched." Those alleged to have been bewitched began to display

an aversion to all things scriptural, many of them screaming in horror at the suggestion that they read the Bible. Still others would speak out as the minister preached, accusing him of introducing strange doctrines and promoting lies. Those who made claims of being afflicted by the workings of the bewitched gave testimony indicating that they had on occasion been haunted by the “shape” of the bewitched. Others claimed that they had suffered physical injury at the hands of the bewitched. In one instance involving a particular woman thought to be a witch, Lawson (1692) recorded:

It was observed several times, that if she did but bite her under lip in time of examination, the persons afflicted were bitten on their arms and wrists and produced the marks before the magistrates, ministers and others. And being watched for that, if she did but pinch her fingers, or grasp one hand hard in another, they were pinched and produced the marks before the magistrates and spectators. After that, it was observed, that if she did but lean her breast against the seat in the meeting house, they were afflicted. (p. 5)

Another common accusation made against some of the women thought to be bewitched included their routine affiliation with the “Black Man,” a mysterious apparition who was said to tempt and incite the women to various Satanic activities. On one occasion, Lawson (1692) relates the following concerning one of the women: “She related that the great Black Man came to her and told her, if she would be ruled by him, she should have whatsoever she desired and go to a Golden City” (p. 7).

On yet another occasion, it was reported that, following the declaration of a public fast that was to be conducted on behalf of the afflicted, the “witches” had a “Sacrament” that same day during which they all ate “red bread” and drank “red drink” (allegedly signifying their eating human flesh and drinking human blood). When tempted with partaking of these offerings, one of

the women testified to replying, “I will not eat, I will not drink, it is blood. This is not the Bread of Life, that is not the Water of Life; Christ gives the Bread of Life; I will have none of it!” (p. 8).

Not surprisingly, the longer the trials continued, the more the accusations of witchcraft increased. It would not be long, however, until many began to suspect that they had been deceived by what turned out to be little more than reckless hearsay and malicious gossip. If not for the intercession of Increase Mather (then president of Harvard College) and his son, Cotton, the trials would likely have continued. According to Schanzer (2011), the Mathers successfully argued that the standards of evidence for alleged witchcraft should be equal to those for any other crime commenting that, “It would be better that ten suspected witches may escape than one innocent person be condemned” (p. 107) demonstrating that the Puritans, while as prone to sin as the rest of us, were able to temper themselves according to Scripture.

As public sentiment concerning the trials began to reflect more and more opposition, the trials became less frequent and, by early 1693, all who had been brought up on charges of witchcraft were pardoned and released. Although this sad series of events only lasted a brief while, considerable damage had been done to the reputation of the Puritans, creating a dark stain on an otherwise spotless reputation, a stain which, unfortunately, remains a defining characteristic in the minds of many to this day.

As a sad footnote to this entire episode, in 1710, William Good appeared before the committee responsible for compensating those whose loved ones had been imprisoned and executed after having been suspected of witchcraft. Good’s wife, Sarah, was one of these hapless victims. In the court document in which Good made his case, the reader is introduced to the real horror of what had transpired during this time:

To The Honourable Committee: The humble representation of Will.m Good of the damage sustained by him in the year 1692 by reason of the sufferings of his family upon the account of supposed witchcraft. 1. My wife Sarah Good was in prison about four months and then executed. 2. a sucking child dyed in prison before the mother's execution. 3. a child of 4 or 5 years old was in prison 7 or 8 months and being chain'd in the dungeon was so hardly used and terrifyed that she hath ever since been very changeable haveing little or no reason to govern herself. And I leave it unto the Honourable Court to judge what damage I have sustained by such a destruction of my poor family. And so rest. Your Honours humble servant William Good, Salem. Sept. 13, 1710. (p. 1)

The court's decision in William Good's case is, to this writer at least, almost as egregious as what befell Mrs. Good as the former was awarded the sum of thirty-five dollars. This briefly-worded decision read simply:

Good, William. Husband of Sarah Good, who was one of the first victims of the witchcraft delusion at Salem, being executed July 19, 1692. A highly interesting document, extremely pathetic in its contents, being the petition of the husband of the unfortunate woman to a committee for money in the reimbursement for the "damage sustained by him in the year 1692 by reason of the sufferings of his family upon the account of supposed witchcraft. \$35.00³. (p. 2)

The Puritans in Literature

Notwithstanding the obvious justification that many found for persecuting the Puritans for their involvement in the Salem witch trials, opinions abound concerning why the Puritans

³ Given an average weekly wage of one dollar, this calculates to approximately nine months' pay (Source: <https://www.lewrockwell.com/1970/01/murray-n-rothbard/real-money-in-early-america/>)

continue to be cast in such an incredibly negative light even today. Swanson (2012) attributes at least some of the negative sentiment surrounding the Puritans to certain literary influences whose works, for better or for worse, live on in perpetuity. One of the most influential of these figures was the celebrated 19th-century author, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Ironically, although of Puritan descent himself, in his classic work, *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne is believed by some to have routinely cast the Puritans in somewhat of a dim light. According to Hall (2011), Hawthorne's views are attributed to "the 'grim rigidity' he imputes to the men and women wearing 'sad-colored garments' who gather outside the Boston prison to observe, self-satisfied, the punishment of Hester Prynne..." (p. 85). These sentiments, the author contends, "embody an ethics of righteousness devoid of human sympathy or, as Hawthorne would have it, 'heart'" (p. 85). Agreeing with this assessment, Daniels (1995) notes:

Probably more than any other piece of literature, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* cemented the image of the joyless Puritan into the American mind. Not content to practice mere self-denial, Hawthorne's Puritans opposed happiness, leisure, and recreation anywhere they found them. (p. 4)

One of Hawthorne's most disparaging comments concerning the Puritans is found in another of his successful works, a short story from his *Twice-Told Tales* entitled *The Maypole of Merry Mount*. In a story otherwise filled with merriment and mirth, Hawthorne (2007) seems unable to resist the urge to take a swipe at his Puritan antecedents:

Unfortunately, there were men in the new world of a sterner faith than those Maypole worshippers. Not far from Merry Mount was a settlement of Puritans, most dismal wretches, who said their prayers before daylight, and then wrought in the forest or the cornfield till evening made it prayer time again. Their weapons were always at hand to

shoot down the straggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians. Their festivals were fast days, and their chief pastime the singing of psalms. Woe to the youth of maiden who did but dream of a dance! The selectman nodded to the constable; and there sat the light-heeled reprobate in the stocks; or if he danced, it was round the whipping-post, which might be termed the Puritan Maypole. (p. 24)

Interestingly, however, further research reveals that not everyone shared the opinion that Hawthorne's view of the Puritans was a negative one. According to Mills (1948):

The critics have made much of [Hawthorne's] Puritan subject matter and his sympathetic treatment of Puritan themes. Some have come close to identifying Hawthorne with Puritanism, as though he were a spiritual contemporary of Cotton Mather born out of his time. (p. 78)

Mills (1948) further observed that early 20th century American journalist and literary critic W.C. Brownell "saw in Hawthorne a genuine son of the Puritans and called *The Scarlet Letter* 'the Puritan Faust'" (p. 78). Similarly, he writes, Herbert Schneider (early twentieth century professor emeritus of religion and philosophy at Columbia University) "sees Hawthorne as reviving the best in Puritanism," having recovered "the spirit of piety, humility, and tragedy in the face of the inscrutable ways of God" (p. 78). Ryken (1986) also adds some important insight here on the importance of properly categorizing Hawthorne's work, not as actual history, but as satirical fiction:

Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Scarlet Letter" is not a historically accurate picture of the Puritans. In the preface of the novel, Hawthorne describes discovering the scarlet

letter that Hester wears in the story as punishment for her adultery while working in a Salem custom house. Hawthorne's account is purely fictional; he never ran across such a letter in real life. Furthermore, Hawthorne (who wrote two centuries after the original Puritans) used the Puritans in his story for satiric purposes, and it is a convention of satire to exaggerate the negative features of the thing being attacked. It is a great tragedy that the only picture many people have of the Puritans comes from works of literary satire that make no pretense of being sources of accurate history. (p. 189)

The annals of church history are replete with example after example of those who were persecuted, including many who would die a martyr's death for simply desiring to live a godly life in Christ Jesus. Among these, many were Puritans. In 1581, for example, Richard Hooker, a newly ordained Anglican priest, published his anti-Puritan book, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which constituted a direct attack on many of the Puritan notions governing their worship. In Section eighteen of this work, Hooker (1593) expresses his aversion to the Puritans' petition to Queen Elizabeth for redress concerning what they felt was a very necessary reformation of the Anglican Church. In their petition, Hooker (1593) notes, the Puritans insisted, among other things:

...that all irregular baptisms by deacons or midwives should be "sharplie punished," that communicants should be examined by elders, "that the statute against wafer cakes may more prevaile then an Injunction," that kneeling on reception of the sacrament should be abolished. But the most important demand was that, in true conformity with the Calvinian system, "Excommunication be restored to his old former force," and "that papists or other, neither constrainedly nor customably, communicate in the misteries of salvation."

In a vigorous apostrophe, parliament is exhorted to imitate the example of the Scottish and French churches and thoroughly to root out popery. (p. 459)

In his warning against the successful adoption of these Puritan ideals, Hooker (1593) opined that “Experience has shown that such an attempt always demands the sacrifice of personal liberty” (p. 459).

In 1590, even William Shakespeare got in on the act, openly ridiculing the Puritans in his characterizations of Falstaff, Malvolio, Flavius, and others. Writing about Falstaff in particular, Bremer and Webster (2006) relate:

Odd as it may seem, Shakespeare’s Sir John Falstaff of the *Henry IV* plays is in part a version of the grotesque Puritan. Falstaff’s original name was Sir John Oldcastle, a historical proto-puritan and martyr. Under pressure from Oldcastle’s descendants, Shakespeare changed the name. Falstaff himself is a satirist, but he is also the butt of satire. Like the stage Puritans of the Marprelate controversy, Falstaff is repeatedly shown up as a hypocrite despite his pious language. His speeches are full of rhetoric Shakespeare’s audiences would have associated with Puritanism. (p. 515)

Concerning the character Malvolio, Caballeros (2011) offers some helpful insight:

In Shakespeare’s comic play *Twelfth Night*, the character of Malvolio is written as a reflection of the Puritan society in Elizabethan England, whose egotism and hypocrisy entice the other characters in the play to utterly humiliate him. The cruel approach to Malvolio’s downfall reflects the aversion some felt towards the Puritan religious sect because of their rigid moral standards, hypocrisy, and egotism, and their controversial influence on Elizabethan England. (p. 1)

Many seem to think that Shakespeare caricatured Malvolio in this way in reaction to the Puritan's aversion to the theater. This presumption is not altogether unwarranted as the Puritans were solely responsible for the demolition in 1644 of the Globe Theater (which was built primarily as a venue for the performance of Shakespeare's plays). In 1642, persuaded by Puritan influence (led by the formidable Oliver Cromwell), the English Parliament issued an ordinance that led to the discontinuation of all stage plays in theaters. Alchin (2015) provides a helpful historical observation on this tumultuous period:

The Puritans deplored the Globe Theatre. The Globe theatre and its plays were a new idea, a new form of entertainment for Londoners. The Globe theatre attracted huge crowds – up to 3,000 people. The theatres were also used for bear baiting, gambling, and for immoral purposes. It appealed to young people and many apprentices were said to have been lured to the theatres instead of working. The crowds attracted thieves, gamblers, pick-pockets, beggars, prostitutes and all kinds of rogues. Many Londoners were strict Protestants – Puritans, in fact, who abhorred the theatres and many of the people they attracted. Objections by the Puritans to the theatres escalated and were supported by other Londoners. Respectable citizens were concerned about the rise in crime and the bawdy nature of some of the plays, fighting, drinking, not to mention the risk of so many people and the spread of the Bubonic Plague. (p. 1)

As a result of the tremendous outcry of anti-theater sentiment (which had begun with the Puritans), in 1648 Parliament ordered the demolition of all theaters and playhouses. As Alchin (2015) further notes, “All actors were to be seized and whipped, and anyone caught attending a play was to be fined five shillings” (p. 1). Londoners would not rebuild The Globe Theater until 1997.

The Puritans' anti-theater sentiment not only led to their being criticized at the time leading up to and during the destruction of England's theaters, it will forever be remembered as one of the most enduring examples of their tendency towards excess. Unfortunately, once made a matter of historical record, such things are not soon forgotten, especially by those looking for a reason to cast them in a dim light.

Setting the Record Straight

As Swanson (2012) points out, one of the most unsettling things inherent among those who are entrusted with the noble task of constructing the historical record is that "the winner always gets to write the history." Nowhere is this contention more obvious than in the revisionist history that has developed concerning the Puritans. So, what is the real story? What do the Puritans look like sans the filter of bias that has clouded so much of their rich history and tradition? A brief word on their true history is certainly warranted here to set the record straight.

Before commencing with the task at hand, it must carefully be noted that one of the inherent dangers of writing in such a way as to cast the Puritans in their proper historical light is that one can actually overstate his case or overcompensate in an attempt to clear the Puritans' name. In doing so, he can unwittingly paint a picture of the Puritans as the perfect Christian specimens. This tendency can certainly be avoided when one considers that the Puritans, like all believers both then and now, did, in fact, have considerable faults.

What follows is written with the full acknowledgment that, while the Puritans indeed had many faults, putting such things in their proper context allows one to at least view them with a modicum of necessary objectivity. Viewing Puritan belief and practice through a twenty-first century lens is simply not feasible given the vast differences between the societal norms of their

day and today. One must consider the Puritans in the context in which they lived and ministered if a fair assessment of them is to be gained.

The Puritans and Christmas

One of the faults most often pointed out about the Puritans was their alleged aversion to the celebration of Christmas. So, were the Puritans guilty of such “Scrooge-esque” beliefs? Not exactly, but they did eschew anything about the season that did not promote the expression of purely Christian sentiments. Governor William Bradford did in fact forbid New Englanders from celebrating Christmas as they had become accustomed to on the basis of both its ties with the Church of Rome as well as the tendency that many had to engage in worldly activities during its celebration. In England, Christmas was celebrated, not as an opportunity for solemn reflection on the incarnation of Christ but as a purely secular holiday. According to one English observer, as reflected in Ryken (1986), what the Puritans reacted so viscerally to was the mixing of the sacred with the secular:

Then march this heathen company towards the church and church-yard, their pipers piping, drummers thundering...and in this sort they go into the church (though the minister be at prayer or preaching), dancing and swinging their handkerchiefs over their heads...with such a confused noise that no man can hear his own voice. Then the foolish people, they look, they stare, they laugh, they...mount upon forms and pews to see these goodly pageants. (p. 188)

According to Durston (2014) the late sixteenth-century Puritan Philip Stubbes observed that the Christmas season in sixteenth century England routinely saw a dramatic escalation in both crime and debauchery. He complained that:

More mischief is at that time committed than in all the year besides, what masking and mumming, whereby robbery whoredom, murder and what not is committed? What dicing and carding, what eating and drinking, what banqueting and feasting is then used, more than in all the year besides, to the great dishonour of God and impoverishing of the realm.

(p. 1)

This particular sentiment was fairly widespread in Puritan England and even resulted in Christmas being banned from 1644 (following Parliament's passage of an act forbidding its observance and labeling it a "heathen holiday") until 1660.

Once again, however, in a sincere effort to set the record straight, one must note that the Puritans were not as much anti-Christmas (i.e., against the solemn observance of the Lord's incarnation) as they were in disagreement with the unbiblical revelry and sacrilege that so often accompanied its celebration. Many Christians today are similarly disturbed by what they see as the over-commercialization and over-secularization of Christmas. The Puritans were no different in their insistence that, if one observed Christmas at all, the emphasis should be on Christ exclusively, consisting of nothing more than a quiet, solemn reflection of His birth.

Speaking of modern aversions to Christmas, there are many Reformed Christians who share many of the Puritan's sentiments about the holiday. Twentieth-century author A. W. Pink, for example, had this to say about the day:

Some will argue for the "keeping of Christmas" on the ground of "giving the kiddies a good time." But why do this under the cloak of honoring the Savior's birth? Why is it necessary to drag in His holy name in connection with what takes place at that season of carnal jollification? Is this taking the little one with you OUT of Egypt (Ex. 10:9-10) a type of the world, or is it not plainly a mingling with the present day Egyptians in their

"pleasures of sin for a season?" (Heb. 11:25) Scripture says, "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*" (Prov. 22:6). Scripture does command God's people to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), but where does it stipulate that it is our duty to give the little one a "good time?" Do we ever give the children "a good time" when we engage in anything upon which we cannot fittingly ask THE LORD'S blessing? (p. 1)

Pink goes on to add:

Our final word is to the pastors. To you the Word of the Lord is, "*Be THOU AN EXAMPLE of believers in word, in deportment, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*" (1 Tim. 4:12). Is it not true that the most corrupt "churches" you know of, where almost every fundamental of the faith is denied, will have their "Christmas celebrations?" Will you imitate them? Are you consistent to protest against unscriptural methods of "raising money," and then to sanction unscriptural "Christmas services?" Seek grace to firmly but lovingly set God's truth on this subject before your people, and announce that you can have no part in following Pagan, Romish, and worldly customs. (p. 1)

According to Schwertley (1996):

Christmas was not celebrated by the apostolic church. It was not celebrated during the first few centuries of the church. As late as A.D. 245, Origen repudiated the idea of keeping the birthday of Christ, "as if he were a king Pharaoh." By the middle of the fourth century, many churches in the Latin west were celebrating Christmas. During the fifth century, Christmas became an official Catholic holy day. In A.D. 534, Christmas was recognized as an official holy day by the Roman state... God does not want His church to take pagan days, and those pagan and popish rites and paraphernalia that go

with them and adapt them to Christian use. He simply commands us to abolish them altogether from the face of the earth forever. You may not be offended by the Yule log, the Christmas tree, the mistletoe, the holly berries and the selection of a pagan day to celebrate Christ's birth, but God is offended. God commands us to get rid of the monuments and paraphernalia of paganism. (p. 25)

These examples show that an aversion to Christmas is not something unique to the Puritans but is shared by many even today.

The Puritans as Iconoclasts

Another fault frequently ascribed to the Puritans is that they were iconoclastic and would go into churches and remove their artwork or apply whitewash over the murals. While there is, in fact, some truth in this particular allegation, it must be understood that this was a fairly common practice among the Anglicans as well. In fact, in 1559, as Neal (1843) notes, Queen Elizabeth published an injunction stipulating that Anglicans shall:

...take away, utterly extinguish and destroy, all shrines, coverings of shrines, all tables, candlesticks, trindals and rolls of wax, pictures, paintings and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition; so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glass windows or elsewhere within their churches or houses. (p. 80)

It is also reported that both Anglican and Puritan armies used churches as barracks and horse stables, but again it must be understood that many of the things Puritans are excoriated for were simply common practices within the Church they sought to reform. This common denominator certainly does not excuse the behavior, but it does nonetheless cast it in the appropriate historical light.

Spraggon (2003) sheds further light on the issue of Puritan iconoclasm, writing, “the first phase of [Puritan] iconoclasm in 1641-1643 encompassed not only images but communion rails, painted glass and rich furnishings, which were lumped together as ‘innovations’ which threatened to bring the English church into line with Rome” (p. 30). Among these items was the church organ. Because organs were used in Roman Catholic churches, the Puritans often ripped them out of Protestant churches and smashed them to bits. Greven (1977) records an eyewitness account of this from an anonymous source in Exeter during the war:

They brake down the organs, and taking two or three hundred pipes with them in a most scornful and contemptuous manner, went up and down the streets piping with them; and meeting with some of the choristers of the church, whose surplices they had stolen before, and employed them to base servile offices, scoffingly told them, “Boys, we have spoiled your trade, you must go and sing hot pudding pies.” (p. 70)

While it is simply not possible to provide any real defense of the Puritans’ behavior in this regard, it must be remembered that it was their pursuit of holiness in all things and their zeal for ecclesiastical purity that led them to make some of the incredibly poor decisions that we see in their history. Again, this consideration in no way excuses their behavior but it is nonetheless helpful in placing it in the proper context.

The Puritans and Sports and Recreation

Another of the popular and enduring misconceptions concerning the Puritans is that they opposed all forms of sports and recreation. This misunderstanding probably stems, in part at least, to their disagreement with James I concerning his aforementioned 1618 *Declaration of Sports*. While the Puritans were not nearly as vehemently opposed to recreation as many have portrayed them to be, they did, as Ryken (1986) indicates, hold to a rather unique utilitarian

theory of recreation: “Instead of valuing recreation for its own sake, or as celebration, or as an enlargement of one’s human spirit, the Puritans tended to look upon play as something that made work possible” (p. 190). In other words, recreation was viewed, not as an opportunity for rest and relaxation, but as a means of making men more fit for labor. In the Puritan mind, man should be consumed with only two activities: the worship of God and work.

Richard Baxter (1838) created a list of eighteen rules that was to be used to determine whether or not a given recreation was “lawful.” These rules, included in his work entitled “Christian Ethics,” included, for example, the idea that the lawfulness of any recreational activity should first be determined by one’s intent. The recreation “must be to fit you for your service to God; that is, either for your callings, or for his worship, or some work of obedience in which you may please and glorify him” (p. 387). Recreation must also, according to Baxter (1838), be undertaken as a activity secondary to one’s calling and is not to be engaged in “by a man that liveth idly, or in no calling, and hath no ordinary work to make him need them” (p. 387). Another example of Baxter’s (1838) rules for recreation is that he prohibited as unlawful any “sports that are used to the wrong of others: as players, that defame and reproach other men; and hunters and hawkers, what tread down poor men’s corn and hedges” (p. 387). Also prohibited were recreational activities that were considered unclean or obscene as well as those in which the players were engaged in “foolish, needless, unprofitable prating” (p. 387). Recreation that was considered too costly was also on Baxter’s list of unlawful activities. Finally, Baxter (1838) opined:

If you have the choice of diverse recreations before you, you must choose the fittest: and if you choose one that is less fit and profitable, when a fitter might be chosen, it is your sin; though that which you choose were lawful, if you had no other. By all this it is easy

to judge of our common stage plays, gaming, cards, dice, and divers other such kind of sports. If they have but any one of these evil qualifications they are sinful. (p. 387)

One shudders to consider what Baxter would perhaps think of how many Christians spend their leisure time today.

Baxter's sentiments aside, however, a simple glance at the historical record reveals that the Puritans as a whole, in fact, had no such staunch opposition. In fact, as Ryken (1986) contends, the Puritans routinely "enjoyed such varied activities as hunting, fishing, a form of football, bowling, reading, music, swimming, skating, and archery" (p. 3). As mentioned previously, the Puritans did forbid the enjoyment of these things on Sundays, however, theirs was not a uniquely Puritan sentiment. Most of those of the Christian persuasion believed that the Lord's Day was to be reserved for worship and one's extended contemplation of the things of God. In fact, this long-standing belief is something that many in the church today continue uphold, as evidenced by the most popularly held Confessions. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), for example, reads as follows in this regard:

This Sabbath is to be kept holy unto the Lord when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

Even most modern Baptist believers, the majority of whom are in churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Conference (SBC), have in their current confession (The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000) a very similar statement regarding the Lord's Day:

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Puritanism: Old and Intolerant?

Another of the false charges often leveled at Puritanism is the notion that it was a movement reserved exclusively for old, intolerant people who were far too "stuck in their ways" to have actually made a difference in the world. In actuality, nothing could be further from the truth. Quoting C. S. Lewis, for example, Ryken (1986) noted that the early Puritans were "young, fierce, progressive intellectuals, very fashionable and up-to-date" (p. 4). Especially enlightening in this regard is the taunting of the Elizabethan Puritans in 1583 by Anglican Archbishop Whitgift who remarked to them condescendingly, "You are...but boys in comparison of us, who have studied divinity before you were born" (p. 4).

As for their alleged intolerance, while it is true that many Puritans exhibited this attitude toward many with whom they disagreed, this had simply been common practice within organized religion for centuries. As Ryken (1986) contends, "No group in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was prepared to grant full religious and political toleration" (p. 5).

It must be noted, however, that as far as toleration goes, the Puritans were, in fact, among the more tolerant of their day. For example, quintessential Puritan Oliver Cromwell was more than willing to extend to Anglicans and Catholics alike the liberty to hold religious services in their homes. Despite what many assume to have been a virulent anti-Catholic sentiment, there were many Puritans who left open the possibility that some Catholics could be true Christians.

As further proof of Puritan tolerance, according to Ashley (1958), Cromwell even “permitted the Jews to return to England and to have their own synagogue and cemetery in London” (pp. 144-145).

Suffice it to say, while there were no doubt many aged and intolerant Puritans, there were also a good number of them who were young, vibrant, and quite tolerant of those with differing opinions. What none of them could abide, however, was the forced imposition of any religion on any man.

The Puritans and Legalism

In addition to such strong aversions to certain types of recreation being enjoyed on the Lord’s Day, the Puritans had other legalistic tendencies when it came to the strict observance of the Sabbath. For example, according to Earle (1891), in New England:

Two lovers, John Lewis and Sarah Chapman, were accused of and tried for sitting together on the Lord’s Day under an apple tree in Goodman Chapman’s orchard. In Plymouth a man was “sharply whipped” for shooting fowl on Sunday; another was fined for carrying a grist of corn home on the Lord’s Day and the miller who allowed him to take it was also fined. Elizabeth Eddy of the same town was fined, in 1652, “ten shillings for wringing and hanging out clothes. (p. 1)

Earle (1891) also noted that one New England Puritan, Reverend Samuel Peter, implemented certain rules for Sabbath observance that were considered extreme even by Puritan standards. For example, he ordered that “No one shall travel, cook victuals, make beds, sweep house, cut hair, or shave on the Sabbath Day” (p. 1). Another of his ill-reputed laws forbade a woman from kissing her child on the Sabbath or fasting day. On another occasion, Ryken (1986) reports that “someone was publicly reprovved for ‘writing a note about common business on the Lord’s Day,

at least in the evening somewhat too soon” (p. 191). Another gentleman reportedly was fined “for wetting a piece of an old hat to put in his shoe” to protect his foot (p. 191). Needless to say, legalism always produces a great deal of apprehension among those who fall prey to its rigid demands and can even lead to an unhealthy fear that one might not actually be among the redeemed at all. As Ryken (1986) relates, Nathaniel Mather wrote in his diary:

When very young I went astray from God...Of the manifold sins which then I was guilty of, none so sticks upon me as that...I was whittling on the Sabbath Day; and for fear of being seen, I did it behind the door. A great reproach to God! A specimen of that atheism that I brought into the world with me. (p. 192)

The legalism of the Puritans is a prime example of how even the best and most studied of men can create an extra-biblical framework in which to trap himself and others. Sadly, this particular fault is not something limited to the Puritans but extends both backward to the earliest days of the church and persists even today in many otherwise doctrinally sound churches. Christians would do well to answer the quasi-rhetorical question posed by the apostle Paul to the Galatians:

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-3)

Surprisingly, there are even vestiges of this way of thinking in modern American society, as in many cities (especially in the southern states), laws that forbid certain secular activities on Sunday (e.g., working, the selling of alcohol, travel, sporting events, etc.) are still enforceable.

These restrictions are commonly referred to as “blue laws.” Stemming from a principle dating back to the seventeenth century, when many laws of the land were based on Puritan standards of holiness and piety, many still believe that morality can be legislated in such a way as to stimulate greater attention to holy duties such as church attendance, fellowship, and the like. In this writer’s state of residence (Texas), for example, one still cannot purchase liquor on Sunday and most automobile dealerships are closed (under current Texas law, dealerships must remain closed on either Saturday or Sunday; the dealer makes the determination on which day to close, most of whom elect to close on Sunday). In Minnesota, according to Statute 340A.504, the sale of alcohol in liquor stores is prohibited statewide on Sundays. Attempts to defeat this statute, one as recently as early 2015, have been routinely defeated. In Mississippi, not only is the sale of alcohol prohibited on Sundays, most of the state’s counties prohibit the sale of liquor at all times.

Are these “blue laws” and their Puritan-inspired predecessors effective in legislating morality? Is it possible that all man needs to devote himself more consistently to holy duties is a longer, more carefully considered list of do’s and don’ts? Not according to the apostle Paul who reasoned in this way in his letter to the Colossians:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:20-23).

While certainly noble in their intent, even under the most strictly enforced legislation (whether of the “blue” variety or not) Satan is, and has always been, quite successful at keeping

souls from holy duties. How does he do this? By enticing man to be so in love with the present world and all it has to offer in the here and now that he has no interest in cultivating a true love and desire for the things of eternity. As Brooks (2010) lamented in his classic work *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*:

Ah! How many professors in these days have for a time followed hard after God, Christ, and ordinances; until the devil has set before them the world in all it's beauty and finery, which has so bewitched their souls that they have grown to have low thoughts of holy things, and then to be cold in their affections to holy things, and then to slight them, and at last, with the young man in the gospel, to turn their backs upon them...The honors, splendor, and all the glory of this world, are but sweet poisons, which will much endanger us, if they do not eternally destroy us. Ah! The multitude of souls that have glutted on these sweet baits and died forever! (p. 70)

So, what is the solution to this dilemma? Contrary to what many believe concerning their ability to achieve favorability with God through their own efforts, the only solution that will guarantee morality is salvation. What man desperately needs to live a truly godly life is for Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life to replace his heart of stone and give him a new heart; a heart that is inclined to follow the Holy Spirit's lead in obedience and holiness.

The Puritans: Men of Many Words

One of the most common critiques of the Puritans, at least from those who read them a great deal, is that they tended to be excessively verbose. That is, it seems that they rarely knew when they had said enough about something. As Ryken (1986) notes:

Prolixity, the vice of being long-winded or verbose, was one of the Puritans' most salient traits. Many Puritans lacked the type of self-criticism that let them know when enough

had been said. They certainly failed to realize the power of leaving something unstated and only suggested. (p. 193)

According to one observer, “Some of these men feared periods more than they feared the devil! In many Puritans, no assertion, no matter how obvious it was, could be left unproven. In trying to be *exhaustive*, they often ended up being *exhausting*.” This Puritan prolixity may not be a negative thing, per se, if not for the propensity the Puritans often displayed for repeating themselves. As Ryken (1986) states, “The characteristic Puritan style...is to take at least twice as many words as necessary to express a thought” (p. 194). He then provides a fitting example of this redundancy from the writing of Richard Sibbes:

God hath placed us in the world to do him some work. This is God’s working place; he hath houses of work for us; now, our lot here is to do work, to be in some calling, to work for God.

R. L. Dabney (2010), in typical unrestrained fashion, expressed his opinion of Puritan prolixity as follows:

Prolixity, therefore, is a sin against movement. Every epithet should be retrenched which adds nothing to the true rendering of the thought. This virtue is violated, of course, by all needless repetitions, by all digressions and episodes which lead away from the true path of the discussion, by tedious or superfluous explanation and definition. It is marred also by useless subdivisions, and by every formal appendage to the method of the discourse which is not necessary to make its order clear. This remark will explain to you the excessive dryness which you have doubtless felt in reading the multiplied subdivisions of some of the Puritan divines. It is as though the progress of the mind toward its goal were

arrested at every third step for some useless formality. What can be more wearisome to the eager mind than such a journey? (p. 124)

Not only was such verbosity characteristic of their writing, but it was also frequently characteristic of their praying and preaching as well. As Ryken (1986) reports, at his ordination, Cotton Mather prayed for an hour and fifteen minutes and then preached for an hour and forty-five minutes. In another example, in 1625 members of the House of Commons were forced to endure “seven hours of preaching in a service that continued for a full nine hours” (p. 193).

Defending the Puritans for their verbosity is not that difficult if one considers that, during the time in which they lived, such verbosity and long-windedness were actually quite normal. One wonders if this is not indicative, at least in part, of an ever-decreasing attention span endemic to modern man.

The Puritans and Pious Moralizing

In addition to being verbose, the Puritans had a tendency to engage in what Ryken (1986) refers to as “pious moralizing” (p. 194). As mentioned earlier, one of the more notable strengths of Puritanism was their insistence that they never compartmentalize their lives between the sacred and the secular. In their estimation, either all of life was sacred, or none of life was sacred. In spite of the undeniable nobility of this worldview, many of the Puritans were inclined toward excess when it came to their application of piety to all things. This excess can occasionally be seen in their attempts at romance. According to Terry and Nason (1892), Edward Taylor, for example, did not feel comfortable in expressing his love to his wife without reminding her that his love for her must be “subordinate to God’s glory” (p. 19). As Richardson (1882) notes, John Winthrop, in addressing his wife (Margaret Tyndal), referred to her as “the happy and hopeful supply (next to Jesus Christ) of my greatest losses” (p. 267). One might be inclined to argue that,

while both Taylor and Winthrop no doubt had the godliest of intentions, some things are perhaps better left assumed than spoken. While perhaps true in the twenty-first century, romantic feelings were often expressed much differently in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Given the Puritan's intense focus on conducting themselves only in a manner which served to glorify God to the greatest extent possible, it is doubtful that their wives would have taken any exception to being second to God in their husbands' hearts.

The Puritan's penchant for pious moralizing can sometimes be seen in their interaction with their children as well. When, for example, Cotton Mather's (1911) children would fall ill, he would seize the occasion to remind them of "the analogous distempers of their souls" (p. 104) and then instruct them concerning how Christ could relieve them.

Pious moralizing obviously extended well beyond the occasional expressions concerning one's wife and children. Mather (1911) even made it a point to ensure that every time he went to the toilet he would be in the habit of "shaping in my mind some holy, noble, divine thought" (p. 357). Ryken (1986) also relates that Cotton Mather once attributed a toothache to the sins of his teeth saying, "Have I not sinned with my teeth? How? By sinful, graceless, excessive eating, and by sinful speeches" (p. 200). As Ryken (1986) observed:

At every turn, Puritan preachers and writers show a tendency to moralize about the topic at hand. No matter what human activity they discussed, they believed it their duty to add a reminder that it must be done to the glory of God and that it must be "lawful." Their theology on these occasions was impeccable, but their style leaned in the direction of what today we would call "overkill." (p. 195)

An honest assessment of modern Christianity would reveal that pious moralizing is not something reserved exclusively for the Puritan of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There

are many who routinely engage in “God-speak” as a means of revealing themselves as Christians either to one another or unbelievers. When asked how one is doing, for example, it is not uncommon for the Christian to respond with, “By God’s grace, I am well” or “I am blessed, thank you.” Many public prayers consist of a great deal of what could be termed pious moralizing as well. While the Puritans may have occasionally been guilty of taking such things to the extreme in this regard, singling them out for pious moralizing as if it were a uniquely Puritan fault is simply unfair.

The Puritans and Male Chauvinism

One might be willing simply to write off the Puritan view of male headship as yet another common denominator among the vast majority of men of their day, and indeed it was. What one cannot do, however, is successfully reconcile this view with Scripture itself. Not only were certain of their views wholly unbiblical, but they were also both deeply offensive and embarrassing from a 21st-century mindset. According to Bremer (1995), Puritan Robert Bolton, having described the male’s mental and physical superiority to females added that though “souls have no sexes,” if they did, they would be male (p. 115). Richard Baxter (1825), ever the proponent of lists, listed twenty disadvantages of marriage for ministers in his *Christian Directory*. One of these “disadvantages” concerned “the natural imbecility of the female sex” (p. 15). John Winthrop is said to have suggested an interesting theory on why the wife of the Connecticut Governor at the time had gone insane. As Ryken (1986) observes, apparently, in Winthrop’s opinion, “she read too much and dabbled in intellectual matters where she had no business” (p. 196). Winthrop continued:

For if she had attended her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way...to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds

are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her. (p. 196)

John Knox went so far in his chauvinism as to publish an entire work entitled *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. In this work, as Ryken (1986) shares, Knox expressed his feelings about having a woman occupying the throne of England. He wrote:

To promote a woman to bear rule above any realm is repugnant to nature, contumely to God, a thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, and all equity and justice. (p. 196)

While few Reformed Christians today would argue with the biblical premises concerning male headship in the home and church, it must be pointed out that Scripture nowhere teaches that men are to view women as inferior to themselves. On the contrary, the Bible is replete with examples in which women are given the respect they are due as man's helper and completer.

While the apostle Peter does exhort husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, "showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7), the word "weaker" does not imply inferiority but refers more to the comparative strength of the woman as opposed to the man. As an anonymous wise man once said, "A crystal goblet is of far more value than a plastic cup precisely because the goblet is more delicate." As the Jewish proverb goes, "If thy wife be short of stature, bow thyself, and whisper to her." Husbands are to treat their wives accordingly, Peter writes, "so that [their] prayers may not be hindered." This passage is a vivid reminder of how much God truly cares for women as "a fellow heir of the grace of life."

One of the most oft-misunderstood passages in Scripture concerning the appropriate roles of husbands and wives is Ephesians 5:22-30 where the apostle Paul exhorts:

Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are members of His body. Similarly, in Colossians 3:19, the apostle writes, “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.” Obviously, in spite of the many failures and shortcomings among her members, Christ has continually loved the church, showing grace and mercy toward her members, having atoned for their many remaining faults. The sins of God’s people have never caused Him to be bitter or forsake and abandon them. In the same way, men are exhorted to love their wives.

The type of love spoken of here indicates that it is to be an ongoing action and seems best understood in the New Testament as expressing, not passionate love or emotional love, but a willing, covenant type of love (αγαπω or “agape” love). According to Strong (2007), this kind of love “takes pleasure in, longs for, and highly esteems its object; it is the love of reason” (p. 7). It is also helpful to note that the word “love” in this passage is better translated as “keep on loving,” implying that the love that existed from the start of the marriage is to continue throughout the marriage, never yielding to bitterness. This love is to be a deep affection wherein

the man sees his wife, primarily, as a sister in the Lord and then as the object of a promise made to God. This love views the wife not only as a weaker vessel to be cared for but also as a fellow heir to grace (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7). Simply stated, God's design for the husband and wife relationship is such that a wife's submission must operate within the context of love. Only then can she feel genuinely protected because a man who truly loves his wife would never force her to submit to anything humiliating, degrading, or anything that might violate her conscience. The godly husband loves his wife like Christ loves the church. The biblically astute Puritans undoubtedly understood this concept well.

The Puritans and Partisanship

As Knappen (1939) observed, "the curse of partisanship⁴ was another evil heritage from the early Reformation struggle" (p. 352). Of course, once again, this behavior was not limited exclusively to the Puritans. It is, however, most unbecoming considering the Puritans' insistence that every aspect of one's life should be God-honoring and above reproach. One of the most unsettling examples of Puritan partisanship is demonstrated in their peculiar detestation of things that should have been viewed with relative indifference. In other words, they very often tended to "major on the minors" in a number of areas.

It is not as though the Puritans found the simple rejection of all things not Puritan as sufficient. Quite often they were prone to making outlandish, even offensive, statements about certain matters that could very well have gone unsaid. Their repudiation of the Anglican Prayer Book, as recorded by Ryken (1986), is one such example:

⁴ Partisanship is defined as "prejudice in favor of a particular cause; bias" (Source: www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/partisanship). In the Puritan's case, theirs was an allegiance to all things Puritan.

We must needs say that this book is an imperfect book, culled and picked out of that popish dunghill, the mass book full of all abominations. For some and many of the contents therein be such as are against the word of God. (p. 197)

One can certainly appreciate and understand the Puritans' aversion to the Anglican Prayer Book but, at the same time, one must also ask why they saw such venom and vitriol as worthy of any merit. Perhaps one way of explaining such behavior would be in their understanding of themselves as God's elect nation. Ryken (1986) quotes John Cotton as having said, "the order of the churches and of the commonwealth was so settled...that it brought to mind the New Heaven and New Earth, wherein dwells righteousness" (p. 198).

Once again, lest one be tempted to cast an inordinate amount of aspersion on the Puritans, this is an area in which Christians of all generations could certainly improve. As an unflinching and unapologetic Calvinist of more than 30 years, this writer is willing, in the interest of complete transparency, to admit that doctrinal arrogance and partisanship is something he struggles with on a continual basis. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that this writer is not alone. By way of explanation, it is recommended that the reader avail himself of a very informative article by French (2012) unambiguously entitled, "Are Calvinists Arrogant?" In answering this question, the author writes:

When I first heard the critique, I scoffed. Surely not. After all, who has less reason to boast than a Calvinist? Not only can we take *zero* credit for our faith (can a zombie take credit for someone graciously giving him the antidote?), but the theology is, frankly, not that complex. Let's face it: "God is sovereign" is not a hard concept to grasp. I kept scoffing — until the evidence mounted and mounted. (p. 1)

The author goes on to provide his own opinions in support of this contention. He begins

by pointing out that there are a great number of Calvinists who could be characterized as arrogant: “We could have a reputation for arrogance because, well, we’re arrogant” (p. 1). He then further supports his contention by observing that “Calvinists are a squabbling, disputatious lot” (p. 1). He likens Calvinists to his former denomination (The Church of Christ), concluding:

But we Calvinists certainly give the Church of Christ a run for its money. Where my ancestors used to break off and start their own church, my fellow congregants bring claims in church courts and glare from the pews at preachers they despise. The theological disputes are at least as intense, the language every bit as nasty, but — crucially — that nastiness exists when *we don’t actually believe souls are at stake*. In my Church of Christ upbringing, lost arguments could mean damned souls. Not so for the Reformed, yet we fight on. And on. And on. (p. 1)

The author next points out that while Calvinist theology may indeed sound arrogant to modern ears, there is no need for Calvinists themselves to add their own arrogance into the mix. His solution is both simple and pointed. He writes:

So here’s my message to my fellow Calvinists: let’s proclaim the Gospel, but let’s get over ourselves. After all, how can we possibly be cocky about a simple theology that we couldn’t possibly understand without divine intervention? (p. 1)

The Puritans were partisans, yes, but this is a label that could be placed on virtually every denomination within Christendom in one degree or another. After all, if one did not consider his particular religious affiliation superior to other possible affiliations, would that not substantiate just cause to move from the inferior to the superior? Once again, it is simply unfair and unwarranted to expect the Puritans to act any differently than anyone else concerning the partisanship that is characteristic of the masses.

The Puritans and Children

One of the Puritans' greatest defining characteristics was their recognition that all of life should be lived *coram Deo* or under the direct gaze of God. As noble a sentiment as this surely is, however, the Puritans' often took this idea too far, which resulted in an unhealthy extremism in many respects. As Ryken (1986) notes, one of these extremes is evidenced by their view of children. In the minds of most Puritans, "children are [seen as] fallen creatures who stand in need of God's grace to save them" (p. 200). No one familiar with the Word of God would argue against this premise in principle. Indeed, as we are told in Scripture, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). How the Puritans often expressed this particular conviction is somewhat troublesome, however, in that they could be quite insensitive in doing so. Three separate quotes in this regard are provided to substantiate this point. The first is from Thomas Becon who wrote:

Laugh not with thy son, lest thou have sorrow with him and lest thou gnash thy teeth in the end. Give him no liberty in his youth and wink not at his follies. Bow down his neck while he is young, and beat him on the sides while he is a child. (p. 200)

Similarly, Benjamin Wadsworth wrote, "[Children's] hearts naturally are a mere nest, root, fountain of sin and wickedness; an evil treasure from whence proceed evil things. Their hearts are unspeakably wicked, estranged from God" (p. 200). Finally, as John Robinson (1851) opined:

Surely there is in all children, though not alike, a stubbornness and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must be broken and beaten down. For the beating must provide carefully for two things: first that children's wills and willfulness be restrained and repressed. (p. 200)

As harsh as the previous statements may seem, it is not as though the Puritans harbored any ill will towards children. On the contrary, the Puritans considered warning children against the dangers of sin and its eternal consequences to be one of the greatest displays of parental love. According to Bremer (2012), one of the best examples of the Puritans' love for children is exemplified in the life of Samuel Sewall and his wife, Hannah:

He and Hannah gathered their household daily for religious instruction. Children were to be made aware of their sinfulness and to contemplate the horrors awaiting the reprobate. They were encouraged to consider how their sins separated them from the love of God. Seeing how their transgressions hurt their parents led children to speculation on how they also hurt God, and helped them to develop a sense of conscience that focused on how their behavior affected others. But at the same time, Sewall sought to model God's love through the affection and care he bestowed on his children. (p. 251)

As one might expect given the Puritans' reputation for seriousness in all things, their child-rearing methods could also be quite stringent. Sayles (2015) observed:

Parents and other adults began to "break the child's will" beginning somewhere around the age of one and two years. Also at this time, the child was being weaned from the mother's breast milk. Parents began to establish limits all in the effort to break the child's aggressive and assertive nature. Just before this time period, parents were very eager and nearly forceful to make the child walk. They believed that by the child being on all fours, he was too close to the animal kingdom. Parents were diligent in training the children to walk as soon as possible. (p. 1)

As children moved into their toddler phase, strict lessons commenced in the area of appropriate versus inappropriate behavior and common courtesies. The Puritans believed that

such things were essential in fostering the orderly society in which the children would eventually take their place. To this end, the disciplining of children was a rather high priority as well. Not only was discipline seen as a means of establishing and ensuring good social order, Puritans believed that to discipline was to restrain evil in their children by breaking them of their sinful inclinations. As Baxter (1838) advised:

Train them up in exact obedience to yourselves, and break them of their own wills. To that end, suffer them not carry themselves unreverently or contemptuously towards you; but to keep their distance. For too much familiarity breedeth contempt, and emboldeneth disobedience. (p. 450)

Also, as Robinson (1851) noted:

For beating, and keeping down of this stubbornness parents must provide carefully for two things: first that children's wills and wilfulness be restrained and repressed, and that, in time; lest sooner than they imagine, the tender sprigs grow to that stiffness, that they would rather break than bow. Children should not know, if it could be kept from them, that they have a will in their own, but in their parents' keeping: neither should these words be heard from them, save by way of consent, "I will" or "I will not." (p. 247)

The Puritans also educated their children at a very early age. Although formal education was not available for every child in colonial New England, those who were unable to attend were quite successfully educated by their parents, usually after the early morning work was completed. A Massachusetts law passed in 1642 serves as a prime example of the importance Puritans placed on education in the seventeenth century. According to Frost (1962), this law read, in part:

See that all youth under family government be taught to read perfectly in the English tongue, have knowledge in the capital law, and be taught some orthodox catechism, and that they be brought up to some honest employment, profitable to themselves and to the commonwealth. (p. 51)

Although well-educated both academically and in the social aspects of life and well looked after, the Puritans nevertheless maintained a rather peculiar view of children. Unlike the way many parents view their children today (as the center of the universe; objects to be adored, pampered, etc.) Puritans often viewed children as a mixed blessing. John Robinson (1851), for example, once opined that “Children are a blessing great, but dangerous” (p. 244). At best, children were viewed as a potential blessing but “the proof,” as they say, was “in the pudding.” In other words, as Doriani (1986) explained, “Puritan children were a potential blessing in the eyes of godly brethren, but the final evaluation of their status depended on their spiritual qualities, not their number or their health” (p. 391).

Most Puritan children would have had very little prospect of gaining a formal education following their completion of basic education in the home, necessitating that the majority of them select a trade in which to work for the remainder of their lives. Having selected a trade, one would be required to begin as an apprentice under the tutelage of a master. This arrangement usually led to one’s taking on a trade as early as possible. Morgan (1966) explains the process that would have been commonplace in the seventeenth century:

Since the training for almost every trade was gained through an apprenticeship of seven years of some master of the trade, if a child wished to be free and able to earn his living by the time he became twenty-one, he had to begin his apprenticeship not later than his

fourteenth year. If he began it then, as many children did, he usually remained an apprentice until he reached twenty-one. (p. 67)

Another interesting thing about the Puritan attitude toward children is how carefully they sought to preserve the child yet in the womb. According to Gouge (1622), if a woman carrying a baby was guilty of engaging in activities that led to the miscarriage of the child, she was to be considered guilty of murder:

They who through violence of passion, whether of grief, or anger, or through violent motion of the body, as by dancing, striving, running, galloping on horseback, or the like: or through distemper of the body, by eating things harmful, by eating too much, by too much abstinence, by too much bashfulness in concealing their desires and longings (as we speak) cause any abortion or miscarriage, fall into the offense contrary to the forenamed duty, they would, I think, be more careful of themselves. For if through their default, they themselves or their child miscarry, they make themselves guilty of that miscarriage; if both miscarry, they make themselves guilty of the blood of both; at least in the court of conscience before God. (pp. 246-247)

Finally, although seen as reprobate until proven otherwise by a profession of faith, in true Protestant form, Puritan parents were expected to baptize their children at the earliest opportunity. As Gouge (1622) writes in this regard:

Though Christians are not so strictly tied to a set day, as the Jews were to the eighth day; yet from that strict direction given to the Jews, we may well gather, that it is not meet for Christians to defer the baptizing of their children beyond eight days: for a young child of that age may with more ease, and less danger, be baptized, than circumcised. The most seasonable time I take to be the day whereon God's people use in the place where the

child is born, publicly to assemble together to worship God next after the birth of the child, if at least it fall not out within two or three days after, which is somewhat with the soonest both for mother and child. Whether we respect the honour of God [the riches of whose mercy is lively set forth in the sacrament of baptism] or the good of our child [which in that sacrament receiveth a pledge and seal of that rich mercy of God] baptism is of great consequences and therefore the first season of performing it to be taken. For parents by their diligence and due speed therein, give evidence both of their zeal to God's glory, and also of their earnest desire of the child's spiritual good. (pp. 254-255)

As in most areas, the Puritans' attitudes towards children were not that different from the attitudes of the secularists among whom they lived. They did see children as a tremendous blessing from God but, at the same time, their theology created in them a very firm grasp on their spiritual condition and the need for continual training in the things of the Lord.

The Puritans and Asceticism

The Puritan view of self serves as another example of the extremism which often characterizes them. Sadly, instead of reveling in the goodness of God and rejoicing in the grace bestowed on them at salvation, many of the Puritans, it seems, were far more interested in self-loathing at worst and self-denial at best. In many cases, the detestation of oneself was viewed as an admirable practice promoting godliness. In fact, many firmly believed that God could only be exalted to the extent that man is not only willing to degrade himself but to deny himself the simple pleasures of life in the hope of drawing closer to God. The most extreme form of this behavior is known as asceticism.⁵ Although it would be a gross overstatement to paint the Puritans as full-blown ascetics, they did, from time to time, engage in practices that had

⁵ Asceticism is the practice of strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline (Source: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ascetic)

undeniable ascetic components. Of course, every serious minded Christian has no doubt been guilty of ascetic behavior from time to time as well.

The Puritans were often guilty of resorting to ascetic practices simply as a means of publicly setting themselves apart from both the world and those “lesser” Christians who, instead of working diligently to improve upon their salvation dared, as Weber (2003) notes, to engage in the “devilish” practices of relaxation and recreation. Adding to the Puritan aversion against all forms of idleness was the notion that one could also become content, thus finding rest and relaxation not necessarily in God, but in one’s possessions. As Weber (2003) further suggests:

Puritan asceticism turned much more sharply against the acquisition of earthly goods than it did in Calvin. The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession. It is only because possession involves this danger of relaxation that it is objectionable at all. Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God. Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health is worthy of absolute moral condemnation. (p. 156)

Perhaps a better way to describe the Puritans’ leanings toward ascetic behavior is to see it more as simple *moderation* in all things. The true ascetic considers his behavior as necessary to garnering favor with God. Puritan examples of moderation seldom, if ever, went that far. As Yuille (2008) clarifies:

Because many overlook this, the erroneous notion of Puritan asceticism has arisen. Jesus says to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. Here, two aspects of discipleship are delineated: denying self and following Jesus. If asceticism is a synonym for such discipleship, then the Puritans

are certainly ascetics. However, the term asceticism is often used to describe the purification of the soul from its passions as a necessary means for loving God more perfectly and for attaining to contemplation. This purification of the soul is achieved by external exercises such as abstinence, fasts, and vigils which serve to dull the senses. It is false to suggest that [the Puritans] regard the body as inherently evil. For this reason, the concept of 'Puritan asceticism' lacks substance. (p. 220)

Puritan Reverend and author George Swinnock (1992) provides a bit of necessary clarification concerning this common misunderstanding:

The merciful God is pleased, out of his bounty, not only to allow his creatures what is for necessity, but also what is for delight. Christian, it is more than God requireth of thee to be always pondering and poring on such subjects as make thy heart sad, whereby thou thyself art disadvantaged, banishing that cheerfulness from thee, which is an ornament to Christianity; and others discouraged, supposing that all who walk in heaven's way, must needs be, as thou art, mopish and melancholy. Piety doth regulate, but not extirpate our pleasures. (p. 185)

Baxter (1825) is also enlightening in this regard, writing:

So far as we can make use of a delight in friends, or food, or health, or habitations, or any accommodations of our bodies, to further our delight in God, or to remove those melancholy fears or sorrows, which would hinder this spiritual delight, it is not only lawful, but our duty to use them, with that moderation as tendeth to this end. (p. 141)

While there is some element of truth in the propriety of Christian self-denial (Luke 9:23ff.), it must be noted that Scripture nowhere advocates that believers hate themselves as a means of garnering God's favor. As Paul wrote to the Romans, we are to "present our bodies as

living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God which is [our] reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1), but nowhere is it stated implicitly or explicitly that self-loathing is either warranted or commendable. The occasional failure of the Puritans in this area merely serves to remind the Christian of the extent of human depravity. Even as we desire to honor God in the purest way, we fall miserably short of His glory and desperately need Christ’s grace to redeem us. As Ford (2015) observed:

While it is true that many Puritan ministers counseled people to look towards their works, this was actually a pastoral act to help people see spiritual fruit as *evidence* of salvation. God's work of salvation is shown in fruit displayed throughout one's life. This was based on a strong view of God’s grace. In fact, Puritans were some of the main champions of grace! Richard Sibbes's *A Bruised Reed* is a classic work on God's grace in caring for wounded souls. On grace in justification, the Westminster Confession states that "justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.” (WCF 11.3). While Puritans did implore believers to holiness (what good pastor wouldn't?), their pleas came from a Scriptural mandate founded upon God's grace in salvation to sinners. (p. 1)

The Puritans and Christian Liberty

In order to succeed in their endeavors aimed at creating and cultivating a godly society, the Puritans considered it necessary to maintain a certain posture of rigidity concerning Christian liberty. This rigid stance, however, must be understood in the overall context of society at large during this time. The Puritans were quite narrow on Christian liberty, yes, but what many in the historical revisionist camp conveniently fail to report is that most everyone of this period, in keeping with their premodern presuppositions about such things, was similarly quite narrow. It was not only the Puritans, for example, who believed in an unwavering devotion to and

preaching of God's word. This sentiment was also a priority shared by many within mainline Protestantism, along with such practices as Sabbath keeping, worship, and the fellowship of the saints. It must also be noted that the very declarations, acts, and laws made by the many anti-Puritan monarchs and enforced by the Anglican Church were just as stringent in their seeking to rid the land of Puritanism as the Puritans themselves were in seeking the Church's reform.

While it is true, however, that the Puritans longed to live in such a way as to honor God through strict obedience to His word, this does not mean that they eschewed anything and everything that might be considered enjoyable. In fact, many scholars have proven that just the opposite is true. Daniels (1995) has done much to dispel such erroneous notions in his unambiguously titled, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial America*. Generally speaking, the author argues:

Puritan piety never admired the extreme ascetic. Neither did it embrace a gloomy, otherworldly, and tragic conception of life, which sought to forbid relaxations. Puritans may have been tough-minded in judging sinners, they may have been complacent about the superiority of their own beliefs, but they never argued that virtue had no room for cakes and ale. Pleasure had a useful role in Puritan cosmology; never did Puritans believe that actions were sinful merely because they were enjoyable. (pp. 6-7)

And yet the negative stereotypes persist. As Ryken (1986) observed, Puritanism, we are told today, "damages the human soul, renders it hard and gloomy, and deprives it of sunshine and happiness" (p. 1). As stated previously, what is especially noteworthy about this oft-repeated claim is that, in reality, the lives of the Puritans were much more normal than many of their detractors make it seem. In a world that has progressively and successfully redefined and thus reshaped the minds of the masses along the way, it is no wonder that morality is viewed by many

as little more than stifling legalism; that humility is viewed, not as something to be desired but as a form of unhealthy self-loathing; that opposition to indoctrination is tantamount to approved ignorance, or that a strict adherence to biblical standards somehow constitutes a threat to the safety and stability of humankind. During the time of the Puritans, however, it must be understood that these mores and values were not looked down upon but were quite common, even among those who perhaps did not share the Puritan's views on religious matters.

The Puritan View of Marriage and Sex

Concerning their alleged aversion to all things enjoyable, there is ample evidence to suggest that many today base much of what they believe to be true about the Puritans on little more than myth. Many, for example, teach that the Puritans were against sex when, in fact, they considered sex to be one of God's greatest gifts to be enjoyed within the confines of matrimony. As Ryken (1986) states, "To understand Puritan attitudes toward marriage and sex, we must see them in their historical setting. When we do so, it is obvious that the Puritans were revolutionary in their day" (p. 40). According to the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, sexual love was thought to be evil, regardless of whether its object was one's spouse. Any sexual activity the purpose of which extended from simple procreation to enjoyment was thought to be sinful. It was, in fact, these repressive views that led to the Roman Catholic Church's exaltation of celibacy. Sometimes this view resulted in the taking of rather drastic action. Origen, for example, in the interest of ongoing celibacy and based on his understanding of Matthew 19:12 ("there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"), had himself castrated prior to his ordination.

According to Ryken (1986), there were many days on the Christian calendar on which sex was prohibited. In fact, he writes, church officials "kept multiplying the days on which sex

was prohibited for married people until half the year or more was prohibited, with some writers going so far as to recommend abstinence on five of the seven days of the week” (p. 41).

Chrysostom even suggested that Adam and Eve could not have had sexual relations before the fall. Ryken (1986) adds, “Origen agreed, and he inclined toward the theory that if sin had not entered the world, the human race would have been propagated by some mysterious angelic manner rather than by sexual union” (p. 41). As the reader will no doubt agree, it is amazing the lengths (even unscriptural lengths) to which man is willing to go to support his pet doctrines.

The most effective way to describe the Puritan view of sex and marriage is simply to take the predominant views of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages and turn them around 180 degrees. This historical record quite easily demonstrates this contention. Following the Reformation of the early sixteenth century, a debate ensued between Roman Catholic Thomas More and Puritan (or, if one prefers, “proto-Puritan) William Tyndale. At issue was the question of whether or not clergymen were allowed to be married. Tyndale immediately appealed to Paul’s comment to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:2, “Now a bishop must be the husband of one wife,” and insisted that Paul had not only made an allowance for marriage but that he had commanded it. This assertion, of course, incensed More who responded by saying that Protestants were nothing more than a people who “eat fast and drink fast and lust fast in their lechery.” Undeterred by this scandalous opinion of the Puritans, some began to express views similar to Tyndale’s. William Gouge (1627), for example, wrote that “it is accounted a doctrine of devils to forbid to marry. For it is a doctrine contrary to God’s word” (p. 265). Similarly, as Ryken (1986) notes, Thomas Gataker argued that “The marriage bed (saith the Apostle) is of itself free from filth...But saith the Spirit of Satan speaking by these men or beasts rather: marriage is dishonorable” (p. 42).

Along with the Puritans' anti-establishment religious views on marriage, they naturally held that sex within marriage was indeed a gift from God. Not only that, as Ryken (1986) observes, it was meant to be exuberant:

Gouge said that married couples should engage in sex "with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully." An anonymous Puritan claimed that when two are made one by marriage they "may joyfully give due benevolence one to the other; as two musical instruments rightly fitted do make a most pleasant and sweet harmony in a well tuned consort. (p. 44)

Suffice it to say that the Puritans were simply in no way prudish when it came to marriage and the consummation thereof. In fact, as suggested previously, they were revolutionary in their understanding and introduction of a completely new paradigm into a predominantly Catholic worldview. One must ask then how the Puritans came to be known as prudish concerning these things. The answer may lie in an erroneous understanding of the scriptural boundaries for sexual activity.

Outside of the bonds of matrimony, recreational sex of any kind was punished as a crime against the body, soul, and the church. Early on in their existence as a separate people, each Puritan colony stated its opposition to recreational (premarital or extramarital) sex in the form of laws that were subsequently strictly enforced. These laws were simple: all forms of sexual activity outside of the bonds of marriage or those actions otherwise deemed to be deviant (the writer will spare the reader any details at this point) were strictly prohibited and, in some cases, were punishable by death.

As Daniels (1995) astutely summarizes this issue:

Practiced with moderation, sex within marriage met all the Puritan requirements for appropriate relaxation: it was sanctioned by Scripture; it did not squander undue time or resources; it refreshed the body and spirit; and it was productive. Although theologians did not dwell on the recreational qualities of sexual intercourse, they did regard it as a pleasurable duty wives and husbands owed each other. Failure to perform the marital act was evidence of the failure of the marriage and one of the permissible grounds for divorce. “God was of another mind,” John Cotton wrote, than to believe in “the excellence of virginity.” (p. 125)

The reader will also note that the Puritans were thus very focused on the family as well.

As Swanson (2012) indicates:

The Puritans had a multi-generational vision and passion to see that their children walked in the vision they received from the word of God; they prayed for their children and encouraged fathers to pray fervently for the salvation of future generations. There was a faithfulness to them that is unmatched.

The Puritans and Fashion

Not only do many ridicule the Puritans because of their allegedly prudish views on marriage and sexual activity, there are others who maintain that they were somehow anti-fashion, insisting that only the most drab and unfashionable clothing be worn. While they did, in fact, exhibit a preference for wearing black on the Lord’s Day or at other times when a sense of dignity or formality was required, their normal daily attire was actually quite colorful. As Ryken (1986) explains:

The American Puritan William Brewster wore a blue coat, a violet coat, and a green waistcoat. Anthony Wood described how John Owen looked during his days as vice-

chancellor at Oxford University: “hair powdered, cambric band with large costly band strings, velvet jacket, breeches set round at the knees with ribbons pointed, and Spanish leather boots with cambric tops.” Russet or various shades of orange-brown were the most common color for clothes, but surviving inventories also show many items in red, blue, green, yellow, purple, and so forth. (p. 3)

Similarly, John Winthrop was said to have possessed several dozen scarlet coats purchased and imported from England.

While it is true that many of the Puritans dressed in plain black clothing with no ornamentation, this is primarily descriptive of their work garb. Puritans often used a variety of vegetable dyes to color many of their clothes. As Kelly (2013) noted:

Articles of clothing from dresses to hatbands could be yellow, red, green, blue, or even—in the case of the particularly wealthy—purple. Brightly colored clothing was seen as an expression of social status; the upper class would often dress in deep purples and bright scarlet colors, showing that they could afford to pay for the expensive dyes and fabrics. In the Massachusetts Bay colony, colors were so important that there were laws decreeing who could wear what colors. Those individuals who could boast of an estate worth more than £200 were allowed to wear whatever they wanted, and it wasn’t uncommon for them to have clothing in the high fashion of the day imported from Europe. (p. 1)

The Puritans and Strictness

Perhaps one of the most oft-cited of the charges levied against the Puritans is that they were too strict. As one popular U.S. History website (2014) opines:

Puritan law was extremely strict; men and women were severely punished for a variety of crimes. Even a child could be put to death for cursing his parents. The Puritans believed

they were doing God's work. Hence, there was little room for compromise. Harsh punishment was inflicted on those who were seen as straying from God's work. There were cases when individuals of differing faiths were hanged in Boston Common. (p. 1)

This particular charge, it seems, is not entirely without justification. The Puritans were indeed a very serious-minded and devout people. In fact, it was this charge of strictness which led to the Puritans initially being called "Precisionists." Ryken (1986) relates a revealing snippet of a conversation between English Puritan preacher Richard Rogers and another who told him, "Mr. Rogers, I like you and your company very well, but you are so precise." To this Mr. Rogers reportedly replied, "O Sir, I serve a precise God" (p. 5).

The Puritans and Education

While, as has been shown, some of the charges levied against the Puritans did have some degree of merit, many of them border on the absurd. One such example is in the allegation that the Puritans were an ignorant people who opposed education. As Ryken (1986) correctly notes, however, "No Christian movement in history has been more zealous for education than the Puritans. The adjective 'learned' was one of their most frequently used positive titles for a person" (p. 7). Indeed, such revered institutions as Harvard and Yale Universities owe their very existence to the Puritans. Although one would be hard-pressed to detect any clear Christian sentiment expressed at the current liberal enclave known as Harvard today, there is no doubt that the university was founded on Christian principles. As Ryken (1986) shares, the founders of the university enumerated these principles in the institution's earliest rules:

Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John

17:3, and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. (p. 161)

Needless to say, the Puritans would indeed be shocked by the extent to which education has been secularized today. As Cotton Mather expressed:

Before all, and above all, tis the knowledge of the Christian religion that parents are to teach their children... The knowledge of other things, though it be never so desirable an accomplishment for them, our children may arrive to eternal happiness without it. But the knowledge of the godly doctrine in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ is a million times more necessity for them. (p. 162)

It is not as though the Puritans believed that all education was to be religious. This notion constitutes yet another of the false allegations made against them. In truth, colleges such as Harvard were established as liberal arts institutions, the general consensus among the Puritans being that the most effective minister of the word of God would be one who possessed a wide variety of knowledge on a range of subjects. As Ryken observed, "The Puritan commitment to humanistic knowledge was based on the conviction that God is the ultimate source of all truth. All truth is God's truth" (p. 167). He goes on to quote Richard Sibbes' assertion of the same idea:

Truth comes from God, wheresoever we find it, and it is ours, it is the church's. We must not make an idol of these things, but truth, wheresoever we find it, is the church's; therefore, with a good conscience we may make use of any human author. (p. 167)

In summary and in preparation for the ensuing discussion of Puritan spirituality, suffice it to say that the most common cause of a great deal of the animus exhibited toward the Puritans

would be their penchant for purely binary or “black and white” thinking concerning matters of right and wrong. On such issues, they were simply immovable. As Ryken (1986) states:

For Puritans, the question of right and wrong was more important than any other. They saw life as a continuous struggle between good and evil. The world was claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan. There was no neutral ground. (p. 11)

While the aforementioned factors have undeniably contributed a great deal to much of the negativity surrounding the Puritans, in this writer’s opinion, the systemic cause is fairly simple to identify from a Scriptural standpoint. As the apostle Paul wrote to his young protégé, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Similarly, as the apostle Peter wrote to his readers in 1 Peter 4:12ff:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Puritan Spirituality

One of the most helpful ways to understand the basis for the Puritans’ practical behavior is to seek to gain a proper understanding of the origins of and influences on their spirituality. After all, it is universally understood that how one behaves in a practical sense reveals a great deal about what he believes and why he believes it. How might one thus characterize the origins and influences of Puritan theology? In the first place, one must note that Puritan theology is Reformation theology. As discussed in what follows, this presupposition is not meant to imply that all Puritans shared the same beliefs in every area of doctrine, but the vast majority of them

did, in fact, believe in the biblical doctrines that were clarified and expounded by the Reformers of the Roman Catholic Church.

Calvin's TULIP

While there are many different ways of systematizing Reformed doctrine, none is as handy as what is most often referred to as Calvin's TULIP, an acrostic which serves well to outline what the Bible teaches concerning the five doctrines it represents. The reader will understand that Calvin himself did not devise this particular acrostic; it was something that appeared somewhat mysteriously centuries after his death. According to Taylor (2009), the acrostic has been "pinpointed back to 1913, and the author records hearing it eight years earlier. So it goes back at least to 1905" (p. 1).

As for the five points themselves, these were originally a response to the five-point manifesto (the Remonstrance) of what Packer (1990) refers to as "Belgic semi-Pelagians in the early seventeenth century" (p. 127). According to Packer (1990):

The theology which the Remonstrance contained (known to history as Arminianism) stemmed from two philosophical principles: first, that divine sovereignty is not compatible with human freedom, nor therefore with human responsibility; second, that ability limits obligation...From these principles, the Arminians drew two deductions: first, that since the Bible regards faith as a free and responsible human act, it cannot be caused by God, but is exercised independently of him; second, that since the Bible regards faith as obligatory on the part of all who hear the gospel, ability to believe must be universal. Hence, they maintained, Scripture must be interpreted as teaching the following positions: (1) Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him, nor (2) is he ever so completely

controlled by God that he cannot reject it. (3) God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by his foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe. (4) Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone (there is no such gift); what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe. (5) It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost. Thus, Arminianism made man's salvation depend ultimately on man himself, saving faith being viewed throughout as man's own work and, because his own, not God's in him. (pp. 127-128)

A brief explanation of the five points of Calvinism will serve as a fitting introduction into what the Puritans believed in these key areas of doctrine.

As Barlow (2014) notes, the "T" in Calvinism's TULIP represents the doctrine of "Total Depravity" (p. 1). Very simply, this belief states that, with the fall of Adam and his subsequently plunging the entire human race into sin. As Paul recounts in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Two verses later, Paul states that "...death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come" (Rom. 5:14).

Every person ever born is thus born in a condition of total depravity. As Sproul (1992) helpfully points out, total depravity is not to be viewed as "utter" depravity (pp. 147-149). In other words, while man's depravity extends to every part of his being, he is not as bad as he could be. Given that Adam's sin resulted in every man's being born spiritually dead, his deadness and depravity render him completely unable, in and of himself, to be reconciled to God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) (the formation of which is attributable to 121 Puritan clergymen) defines this important Scriptural doctrine as follows:

Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Three key passages of Scripture are integral in understanding the depth to which Adam's sin plunged the whole of mankind. The first of these passages is Romans 3:10-18. Here, the apostle Paul unambiguously and unreservedly defines the innate condition of every fallen son of Adam:

There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

The second key passage necessary to understanding man's spiritual plight is Ephesians 2:1-2 where Paul reminds his readers of their condition prior to salvation. He writes:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

The third key passage in this regard is Colossians 2:13-14. Here, the apostle Paul informs his readers:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

The clear teaching of these passages is that, as a result of Adam's fall, man has not merely been corrupted; he has not simply been wounded or incapacitated, he is born spiritually dead in sin. This death, which extends to every part of man, renders him totally depraved and utterly unable to do anything about it in and of himself.

Puritan beliefs concerning total depravity are in abundance. Thomas (1975) provides several excellent samples. William Ames, for example, wrote:

Because of the original corruption, the will of man in the state of sin (though free in the actions it performs) is captive and servile in its way of performing them. The will is deprived of the power of willing well and takes the form of willing amiss even when the object of the willing is good. (p. 260)

Ames also noted, "Original sin is a habitual deviation of the whole nature of man, or a turning aside from the law of God" (p. 260). John Owen similarly observed, "The best duties of unbelievers are but white lies" (p. 273).

Even a cursory reading of the Puritans' writing on this subject reveals that they understood very well that every man is born spiritually dead and that, as such, given his total depravity, he lacks the faculties (i.e., the desire, will, or inclination) with which to reconcile himself to God.

According to Barlow (2014) the "U" in Calvinism's TULIP represents the biblical doctrine of "Unconditional Election" (p. 1). According to McMahon (2015), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) as well as the catechisms (larger and shorter) define this doctrine as follows:

God did, by His most wise and holy counsel, of His own, freely and unchangeably ordain some men to heaven and some men to hell by the nature of His good pleasure. In eternity, God has predetermined the course of everything and everyone. He had foreordained the eternal destiny of everyone whether to heaven or to hell for His glory. Men are unconditionally elected by God for His purposes without any prior works (good or evil) by which God would judge them good or evil. The election of men rests solely on the counsel and purposes of God. God has not decreed anything which He foresaw in the future, for that would place His decree upon foreseeing something in the creature. (p. 1)

One of the most helpful passages in Scripture addressing the doctrine of unconditional election is Romans 9:11-13. Speaking of the twin sons born to Rebekah and Isaac, Paul writes:

Though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Fending off any potential argument against this doctrine on the grounds of perceived fairness, Paul continues, pointing out that there is no injustice with God because it is His divine right to have mercy on whom He desires and to harden whom he desires. He continues in verses 19-21:

You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

The answer to this rhetorical question is yes; God does reserve the right to do whatever He wills with that which He has created and for no other reason than He is pleased to do so.

Once again, Thomas (1975) is helpful in providing numerous quotes from the Puritans concerning the doctrine of unconditional election. Thomas Goodwin, for example, wrote, “Moreover, as God respects no persons, so He respects no conditions upon which He gives salvation to us” (p. 83). Similarly, Thomas Watson expressed the following:

It is absurd to think that anything in us could have the least influence upon our election. Some say that God did foresee that such persons would believe, and therefore did choose them; so they would make the business of salvation to depend upon something in us. Whereas God does not choose us FOR faith, but TO faith. “He hath chosen us, that we should be holy,” (Ephesians 1:4), not because we would be holy, but that we might be holy.” (p. 83)

Watson also wrote, “Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God’s will. God did not choose us because we were worthy, but by choosing us He makes us worthy” (p. 84).

The “L” in Calvinism’s TULIP acrostic, Barlow (2014) explains, represents the doctrine of “Limited Atonement.” Some prefer to call this controversial doctrine the doctrine of “Particular Redemption” or “Definite Atonement” as they tend to be more descriptive of what Scripture teaches in this regard. Many professing Christians today are uneasy with this doctrine because, in their minds, it somehow limits Christ’s ability to save all sinners. This idea is especially prevalent in the Arminian belief concerning the scope and application of Christ’s atonement.

According to Black (2009), one can best summarize the Arminian position as follows: Christ's redeeming work made it *possible* for everyone who ever lived to be saved, but it did not actually *secure* the salvation of anyone (p. 1). Although Christ died for all men and every man, the Arminian argues, only those who, by an exercise of their free will, believe on Him are saved. In other words, Christ’s death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption, therefore, becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. It is important to note at this point that no serious student of Christian doctrine accuses the Arminian of being a Universalist. In other words, no one argues that Arminians believe that everyone will be saved. That being said, however, it is totally irresponsible to deny that what they do believe is just as erroneous because the Arminian doctrine of the atonement of Christ is predicated upon their belief that man is not dead in sin but has some inherent power, in and of himself, to simply choose eternal life.

As Black (2009) further states, the Arminian teaches that Christ's death merely enabled God to pardon sinners, but He is unable to do so without their express permission. The Arminian must thus contend that Christ did, in fact, die for every man, woman, and child who ever lived because if He died only for the elect, the foundation of their entire presupposition that man is the lone determiner of his own fate is destroyed. To believe that Jesus died only to secure the salvation of the elect leaves the work of salvation completely in the hands of a sovereign God, who saves as He wills.

What does Scripture say concerning this issue? In the interest of fairness, it is important to understand that the Bible does, in fact, contain many passages that seem to speak of the atonement in general or universal terms. Among the most popular of these passages is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 1:29 is another example: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'" In John 4:42, it is written, "They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'" In 1 John 2:2, the apostle writes, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Many other passages appear in Scripture wherein the words "all", "all men", and "all nations" are used to describe the extent of Christ's atoning work as well.

The real question is what do these particular phrases actually mean? Do they really mean that Christ's death was intended to save everyone in the world? No. If Christ came to this earth to atone for the sins of the entire world, as many maintain, He failed. In other words, if Christ died for all and yet some end up in hell, His alleged work of atonement on their behalf was a

failure. This belief would also indicate that the New Testament writers, who repeatedly confirm that there are those who will be saved and those who will not never managed to notice the glaring contradiction in what they were writing. Could this actually be the case? Did Jesus really fail in His mission to save every man, woman, and child who ever lived? Of course not.

Solving this problem is fairly simple. The Jews, believing themselves to be God's chosen people based simply on their ethnic and religious affiliation, considered themselves entitled to God's saving grace and eternal favor. God, on the other hand, began saving Gentiles as well, which led to the understanding that Christ's death applied to all *kinds* of people the world over. This reality helps to explain the "world" and "all" passages as indicating that while Christ did, in fact, die for all men without *distinction*, He did not die for all men without *exception!* Again, if the latter were true, no one would ever go to hell. There is ample support for this position throughout Scripture. In Matthew 1:21, speaking of course of the angel's revelation to Joseph concerning Mary, it is written, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save [not all men, but] *His people* from their sins." In Matthew 20:28, the author writes, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom [not for all, but] for *many*. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus Himself says, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out *for many* for forgiveness of sins." In Hebrews 9:15 the author writes:

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, *those who have been called* may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

In light of these passages, if Arminians are not universalists (that is, they do not believe that everyone will be saved), then how can they say that Jesus died for all? Again, they do so by

maintaining that Christ's death made it *possible* that all men could be saved. In other words, the atonement is not *certainly* applied to God's chosen, it is *potentially* applied to everyone.

At this point, it is critically important to understand that God does not exist in a realm of the potential, possible, or contingent. He exists only and exclusively within the realm of His ironclad, airtight, immutable, and impeccable sovereign will. For God to exist within the realm of the potential or the possible, one would have to argue that there are things that are unknown to Him at present. The proponents of Open Theism, for example, following this illogical presupposition, have actually declared that God cannot know the future because the future hasn't happened yet. If, however, God truly transcends space and time; if He truly is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; if He really is the great "I AM" and not the great "I WILL BE", then what He knows is solely based upon what He has sovereignly declared through the exercise of His will! 17th century theologian and scholar Stephen Charnock (1853), in his classic work, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, correctly notes that God's knowledge is not based on that which He has learned because, if that were the case, He could not be omniscient. Instead, Charnock says: "...whatsoever God hath decreed, is immutable; whatsoever God hath promised, shall be accomplished" (p. 471). In other words, everything that happens is based on God's sovereign decree, not on decisions made by man to which He reacts. Charnock (1853) then quotes Numbers 23:19: "God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" Charnock (1853) continues:

There can be no reason for any change in the will of God. When men change their minds, it must be for want of foresight; because they could not foresee all the rubs and bars which might suddenly offer themselves, hence men often will that which they

afterwards wish they had not willed when they come to understand it clearer, and see that to be injurious to them which they thought to be good for them. But what can be wanting to an infinite understanding? How can any unknown event defeat God's purpose since nothing happens in the world but what He wills to effect. (p. 472)

In summary, what Charnock is saying is that, in the omniscient mind of God, the salvation of His elect was not a mere possibility, but an ironclad certainty because it is based on His sovereign decree and not the will of the creature. The apostle Paul, writing in Romans 8:29-30, could not be clearer:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Contrary to popular belief, God's foreknowledge of man has nothing to do with His looking down the tunnel of time in eternity past and responding to what He saw man do when he chose to believe in Him. Instead, as Cole (2014) writes, foreknowledge (*proginosko*) refers to His having "set His affection upon" His elect from before the foundation of the world for no other reason than for His own good pleasure in carrying out His will (p. 1). So, in one sovereign exercise of His will, God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified all who will ever be saved. This truth very clearly answers the fundamental question concerning the beneficiaries of Christ's sacrificial death. Christ's atoning work did not make it merely *possible* for everyone to be saved; His atoning work made the salvation of the elect certain and unchangeable.

The Arminian, of course, will not agree with this position because, as stated earlier, to do so removes the underpinning of his entire theological position that is based on man's action and not God's. Charles Spurgeon (1858) is very helpful in explaining the classic Arminian position:

We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, "No, certainly not." We ask them the next question—Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer "No." They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say, "No; Christ has died that any man may be saved if"—and then follow certain conditions of salvation. We say, then, we will go back to the old statement—Christ did not die so as beyond a doubt to secure the salvation of anybody, did He? You must say "No;" you are obliged to say so, for you believe that even after a man has been pardoned, he may yet fall from grace, and perish. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as to infallibly secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, "No, my dear sir, it is you that do it." We say Christ so died that He infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved but are saved, must be saved, and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it. (p. 1)

The bottom line, Scripturally speaking, is that Christ died to secure the salvation of those whom the Father had given Him and of those He will lose none. If man really is dead in sin and can make no move whatsoever Godward and if, in order to be saved, he needs for God to have included him among those who were deemed “elect from before the foundation of the world”, based on nothing whatsoever foreseen in him (which includes any alleged exercise of his will), then it is simply illogical to maintain that it is yet possible that there may be those who will be saved apart from these parameters. This stark reality led to the development of what is often presented as an intermediate or half-way position known as “hypothetical universalism” or “Amyraldianism.” This view, popularized in the 17th century by French theologian Moise Amyraut, taught that while Christ’s death is indeed only *efficient* in God’s elect it was nevertheless *sufficient* to save everyone in the world. While there is certainly nothing wrong with wanting to protect and preserve the idea that Christ’s shed blood had the inherent power to save everyone in the world, one must not formulate his doctrine on unscriptural sentimentality.

One must formulate his doctrine on what Scripture alone teaches about the nature and the extent of the atonement. If there is indeed a finite number of individuals who have been deemed God’s elect by His immutable decree, any talk about Christ’s atonement being sufficient to save anyone else is, quite frankly, nonsense. Instead of decreasing the potency of the atonement, this belief is instead an affirmation both of God’s immutable counsel and the security of one’s salvation. For this very reason, Paul said, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” The answer, of course, is no one. Why? Because as Paul also said in Philippians 1:6, “...I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Given all of the Biblical data as it pertains to the salvation of sinners, one can summarize the Biblical position on the scope and efficacy of the atonement as follows: Christ’s

redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured their salvation. His death was a substitutionary death designed to atone for certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith that unites them to Him. As a result of this sovereign work of grace, the gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore guaranteeing their salvation. In addition, Christ's atonement, as an act of sovereign grace, efficiently procures the salvation for a multitude that no one can number, thus refuting the charge that election only accounts for a paltry handful.

John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* is one of the greatest Puritan treatises against the doctrines of Arminianism. According to Wallace (2004), Owen "chose to oppose Arminianism by stressing the doctrine of redemption as an effectual application of grace to the elect" (p. 110). In so doing, the author observes, Owen "employed rather strong statements of limited atonement that became increasingly characteristic of the direction in which Calvinism was moving in the 1640s and 1650s" (p. 110). It must be understood that Owen's work was not so much written as a polemical attack against the Arminians as it was intended to be a constructive representation of the Bible's teaching on the purpose and extent of Christ's atoning work.

While it is true that most of the Puritans held to a belief in the doctrine of limited atonement, there were a few who vehemently rejected it. Foremost among them was John Goodwin, who wrote a treatise of his own entitled *Redemption Redeemed* in which he denied not only the doctrine of limited atonement but predestination and irresistible grace as well.

As Barlow (2014) further notes, the “I” in Calvinism’s TULIP acrostic represents the doctrine of Irresistible Grace (p. 1). McMahon (2015) supplies a helpfully comprehensive definition of this doctrine as follows:

Since grace is undeserved by any person, [the doctrine of] irresistible grace teaches that when the Spirit of God is sent to change a person’s heart, that person cannot resist the change. This is when the Spirit of God applies the work of Christ to the soul. This does not mean that the person is unwilling to be changed because the Spirit of God is “fighting against them,” rather the Spirit changes the heart of stone to beat as a heart of flesh. The change opens the eyes of the spiritually blind to the work of Christ. It is that which the Spirit of God does on his own, previous to any act of man. The Spirit of God will accomplish what He is sent out to do and will not be frustrated in His work of changing the sinner’s heart. (p. 1)

Next to the doctrine of limited atonement, the doctrine of irresistible grace has been met with considerable opposition by many, particularly of the Arminian persuasion. One Arminian pastor reportedly even referred to the Calvinist’s God as a “cosmic rapist”⁶ who drags sinners kicking and screaming to salvation.

These extreme histrionics notwithstanding, while the doctrine does indeed seem to ruffle a lot of Arminian feathers, this reaction need not be so. Throughout Scripture, one is shown the doctrine of irresistible grace (*italics added*). In fact, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied of a time when God would remove man’s innate heart of stone, replacing it with a heart of flesh. God, speaking through the prophet in Ezekiel 36:25-27 says:

⁶ This term seems to have been coined by Hank Hanegraaff as he wrote, “Without choice love is meaningless. God is neither a cosmic rapist who forces His love on people, nor a cosmic puppeteer who forces people to love Him.” (Source: <http://hankhanegraaff.blogspot.com/2008/09/problem-of-evil.html>)

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

There can be little doubt that God is expressing here His intention to perform an irresistible work in His elect.

The New Testament is also full of this particular teaching. In John 6:37, for example, Jesus declares, “All that the Father gives Me *shall come to Me.*” In John 6:44, Jesus says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” In Acts 13:48, Luke tells us about the conversion of the Gentiles, “And when the Gentiles heard [the truth of Paul’s call to minister the gospel to the Gentiles], they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord, and *as many as were ordained to eternal life* believed.” In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a man is born “from above,” he cannot see the kingdom of God. Note that the common denominator in each of these passages is the monergistic act of God in calling and drawing His elect to Himself in salvation.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) defines God’s irresistible grace under the heading “Of Effectual Calling”:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His

almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

According to Thomas (1975) Puritan William Ames offers a view of irresistible grace that represents the general consensus among most of his Puritan brethren writing, “The passive receiving of Christ is the process by which a spiritual principle of grace is generated in the will of man” (p. 131). Ames also wrote, “The inward offer is a kind of spiritual enlightenment, whereby the promises are presented to the hearts of men, as it were, by an inward word” (p. 132).

As Barlow (2014) notes, the “P” in Calvinism’s TULIP acrostic represents the Bible’s teaching known as the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Once again, the reader is directed to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) for a comprehensive definition of this doctrine:

They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof. Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of

Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

Some people prefer to call the doctrine of the *Perseverance* of the Saints the doctrine of God's *Preservation* of the Saints as the former title can be misunderstood as suggesting that the saints of God are able, in and of themselves, to persevere under trial. The latter, on the other hand, indicates that it is only by God's grace (i.e., not through human effort) that anyone who believes is preserved in Him for eternity. Is there anything wrong with this view? Not necessarily, however, McMahon (2015) does make a compelling argument for preferring the former designation over the latter. He writes:

Why do theologians call the doctrine "The Perseverance of the Saints?" Why not, "The Preservation of the Saints by God?" The reason lies in the emphasis that since election is true, and God preserves the Christian, that they must demonstrate this true preservation by their outward conformity to the Word of God. In other words, the fruit of the life demonstrate that they are truly saved and will truly persevere. Dorst says that such a salvation "renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord," not to continue in sin. It is important to note that such works do not save them, or improve on the promises of the salvation they have in Christ. But they do demonstrate that they have been saved. The fruit of a tree does not make the tree good or bad, but demonstrates whether the tree is a good tree or a bad tree. It is fitting to say, then, that the

saints of God must persevere, and in that perseverance is demonstrated the preservation of God. (p. 1)

Although there are many denominations that teach that continuing works are, in fact, necessary to ensure one's salvation, this is not the case at all from a Scriptural standpoint. Scripture clearly reveals that the true believer works, not in order to merit salvation, but as a demonstration of the fact that they have in fact been made new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Indeed, Scripture is clear that works simply cannot merit the favor of God. In Ephesians 2:8-10, for example, the apostle writes:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Likewise, in Romans 3:20, 28, the apostle writes, "...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin...For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." Additionally, Galatians 2:16 reads:

...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Even the most cursory examination of Scripture reveals quite clearly that the works performed by true Christians are simply "fruits" that are generated by the indwelling Spirit of God and are thus indicative of their status as believers. For example, as Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-20:

You will know [genuine believers] by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

In Romans 8:13-14, the apostle Paul writes:

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

In James 2:14, 17, 22, 24, 26, he writes:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ... Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead... You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!... Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?... You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Finally, in Titus 3:3-5, the apostle Paul writes:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

What is the implication here? Only that those who have been redeemed will no longer act in the same way as before. There will be fruit in the life of the true believer that corroborates his claim to having been transformed by God's grace.

It is also important to note that the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints does not refer to the belief espoused by those holding to a "once saved always saved" theology. Although there are some similarities, the "once saved always saved" idea was little more than the erroneous outworking of the popular teaching known as "easy-believism" or "decisional regeneration." In other words, there are many who claim that once a person merely gives intellectual assent to the facts surrounding Christ and verbally acknowledges Him as Savior, he is guaranteed eternal security regardless of how he chooses to live his life from that point onward.

Simpson (2006) is very helpful in describing the theology espoused by a particularly noxious movement afoot within evangelicalism known, ironically, as the "Free Grace" movement. Concerning this movement's view of perseverance, the author reports:

True Christians will not necessarily persevere in the faith. In fact, a true Christian may receive Jesus as Savior, later become intellectually unconvinced of the gospel, denounce Christ and become an atheist; however, because of that one human decision made at one point in time, he is still considered to be saved. For instance, Joseph Dillow, in *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, says, "It is possible for a truly born-again person to fall away from the faith and cease believing." (p. 1)

As has been demonstrated concerning the previous four points on Calvinism's TULIP acrostic, the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints also enjoys considerable scriptural support. For example, in Jeremiah 32:40, God says, "And I will make an everlasting covenant

with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.” 1 Corinthians 1:7-8, “...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6, “...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” As Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:3-5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Finally, in the doxology of Jude 24-25 it is written:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

There can be no doubt that the Puritans believed very strongly in the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. John Flavel, for example, in his *Works*, wrote, “Did Christ finish His work for us? Then there can be no doubt but He will also finish His work in us” (p. 180). What the Puritans most frequently taught about salvation was that if one truly possessed it, he could never lose it. Conversely, they also taught that if one did lose it, he never truly had it. Watson (1958) wrote that hypocrites could indeed fall away from the faith, but not true believers, adding

that “though comets fall, it does not follow that true stars fall” (p. 284). According to Beeke and Jones (2012):

The Puritans used 1 Peter 1:3–5 to support this assertion: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, asserts that true believers, in contrast to nominal Christians, are preserved by the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable omnipotence of God. Watson commented on this passage, “The heavenly inheritance is kept for the saints, and they are kept to the inheritance.” William Greenhill (1598–1671), a member of the Westminster Assembly, asserted, “A man pardoned, and justified by faith in Christ, though he may, and sometimes doth, fall into foul sins, yet they never prevail so far as to reverse pardon, and reduce [him] to a state of non-justification.” Elisha Coles (c. 1608–1688) quoted Proverbs 24:16: “A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” (pp. 127-128)

The Puritan Understanding of Justification

As noted previously, Puritan theology is, simply stated, Reformation theology. As Trueman (2012) indicates, in the second decade of the 16th century, Martin Luther introduced those on the European continent to the doctrine of justification by faith and its crucial component: assurance. Prior to Luther’s introduction of these doctrines, the medieval church understood the assurance of salvation as something to which only those who had attained “super saint” status were entitled. The idea that one could be justified apart from his own works and

have assurance of that salvation literally revolutionized the church at large. As Trueman (2012) observed, “The point is the Reformation reshapes everything. Protestant spirituality today is very distinctive because of the doctrine of justification by faith.”

Before any meaningful examination of the doctrine of justification begins, an accurate definition of the doctrine will prove helpful, especially to the reader who may not be familiar with the concepts presented therein or who may have a faulty definition. Some suggest that the doctrine of justification can be summed up in the quaint little phrase, “Justification is God’s acting toward me just as if I had never sinned.” Thankfully, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) provides a much more thought provoking and accurate (albeit lengthy) definition of this critical doctrine:

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love. Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as He was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their

stead; and both, freely, not for any thing in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit does, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them. God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

As Packer (2015) notes, Luther, the pioneer in terms of returning the church to a proper understanding of the doctrine of justification, predicted that after his death:

...the truth of justification which he had been so instrumental in making known would come under strong attack, and theology would develop in a way tending to submerge it once more in error and incomprehension. We find Puritan writers voicing a similar sense that the doctrine was very vulnerable, and only grace could keep it from being lost. (p. 1)

Packer (2015) then lists the following reasons for believing that this was true.

First of all, the Puritans believed that the doctrine of justification was a mystery, that is, it was a matter of divine revelation to those in whom God's grace dwells. Justification, therefore, is not something that a man can simply figure out using his faculty of reasoning. The recognition of

this fact, of course, is very humbling to the otherwise prideful man, which leads many to reject the notion that it is beyond his natural ability to comprehend. The mystery of the doctrine of justification is, according to Packer (2015), “threatened constantly by human pride” (p. 1).

The second reason the Puritans considered the doctrine of justification to be vulnerable was that it constitutes a “climactic mystery, like the top rung of a ladder which you reach via the other rungs, or the keystone of an arch supporting, and supported by, the bricks that flank it.” (p. 1) The point made by this observation is that to deny justification is to deny a whole host of other doctrines that one must believe to understand justification sufficiently. As Packer (2015) notes, the point is:

...that to deny justification is to deny these other [doctrines] too; but the contrary point, that to query them is to lose justification also, is no less true. This has happened in our own day; misbelief about biblical authority, God’s wrath, and the atonement, has removed for many all basis for asserting justification in the biblical sense. Thus heretical theology becomes a second threat to the mystery of justification. (p. 1)

The third reason the Puritans considered the doctrine of justification to be vulnerable was that it is a spiritual mystery, which only the enlightened conscience of one under the full weight of conviction for his sin can appreciate. As Packer (2015) relates, John Owen, in the preface to his classic work, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (1677) makes this point:

It is the practical direction of the consciences of men, in their application unto God by Jesus Christ, for deliverance from the curse due unto the apostate state, and peace with Him, with the influence of the way thereof unto universal gospel obedience, that is alone to be designed in the handling of this doctrine. And therefore, unto him that would treat of it in a due manner, it is required that he weigh every thing he asserts in his own mind

and experience, and not dare to propose that unto others which he doth not abide by himself, in the most intimate recesses of his mind, under his nearest approaches unto God, in his surprisals with dangers, in deep afflictions, in his preparations for death, and most humble contemplations of the infinite distance between God and him. Other notions not seasoned with these ingredients are insipid and useless. (p. 1)

Owen and other Puritans believed that the frivolous approach to spirituality and the lack of seriousness concerning the things of God posed a grave danger to one's being able to think rightly about the doctrine of justification.

The fourth cause for concern among the Puritans with regard to the sustainability of this doctrine among believers, Packer (2015) writes, was that "justification is a life-giving mystery, the source of all true peace of conscience, hope, love, joy, holiness, and assurance." Not only did Luther see Satanic hostility (i.e., his stealing the aforementioned peace, hope, love, etc. from believers) as posing a grave threat to the understanding of the doctrine of justification, the Puritans shared his concerns. As Packer (2015) writes, "...they knew that the adversary of God and God's people must wish to suppress a truth so productive of glory to God and good to men" (p. 1).

In the fifth place, Packer (2015) suggests, the Puritans were concerned that the doctrine of justification was vulnerable because it is a "contradicted mystery." In other words, as the author notes, "Justification by works is the natural religion of mankind, and has been since the fall." The Puritans considered the triple threat of Pelagianism, Arminianism, and the counter-Reformation antics of Romanism as a real threat to the continued viability of the biblical doctrine of justification as each one militated strongly against it. Quoting Puritan Robert Traill (1642-1716), Packer (2015) writes:

The principles of Arminianism are the natural dictates of a carnal mind, which is enmity both to the law of God, and to the gospel of Christ; and, next to the dead sea of Popery (into which also this stream runs), have since Pelagius to this day, been the greatest plague of the Church of Christ.” Again: “There is not a minister that dealeth seriously with the souls of men, but he finds an Arminian scheme of justification in every unrenewed heart. (p. 1)

Given the contemporary evangelical landscape, it seems as if the Puritans’ (and Luther’s) fears concerning the vulnerability of the doctrine of justification have come to full fruition. In fact, it seems as though all serious considerations of doctrine have been quenched by a desire to have one’s felt needs met or ears tickled by watered down preaching. That, however, must remain another topic for another day. The net effect of this attitude, however, is relevant to the discussion at hand.

Why exactly is the doctrine of justification so important? Once again, Packer (1984) is quite instructive as he observes:

Martin Luther described the doctrine of justification by faith as *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* – the article of faith that decides whether the church is standing or falling. By this he meant that when this doctrine is understood, believed, and preached, as it was in New Testament times, the church stands in the grace of God and is alive; but where it is neglected, overlaid, or denied, as it was in medieval Catholicism, the church falls from grace and its life drains away, leaving it in a state of darkness and death. The reason why the Reformation happened, and Protestant churches came into being, was that Luther and his fellow Reformers believed completely in this respect that no faithful Christian could with a good conscience continue within her ranks. (p. vii)

Similarly, White (2001) observes:

What happens when the doctrine of justification is ignored or downplayed? Here again the modern disinterest in matters historical rears its head, for history gives clear answer to this question. One need only look to the Roman Catholic system in the year 1517 to see what happens when the gospel itself, as expressed in Paul's clear and unambiguous doctrine of justification by faith, is smothered under layer after layer of tradition and error. People are enslaved to a system of penances and works, and the blessed peace that God promised to the believer is nowhere to be found. (p. 15)

White (2001) then fast-forwards to examine the modern state of the church-at-large, pointing out that:

Nothing has changed over time. Today the very same question of justification must be dealt with. To ignore it is not an option, for even to attempt to do so is in itself a decision against the biblical position. The guiding principles of the Reformation are again under attack, and the de-protestantization of Protestantism continues at a fast pace. Many today are honestly asking the question, "Why should there be a split in the church? Why not go back to Rome?" And many are doing just that, for the "Protestant" denominations in which they find themselves are no longer truly Protestant – that is, they have jettisoned *sola scriptura*, and it is sure that justification by faith will inevitably follow behind. (p. 15)

The writer hopes that all who profess faith in Christ will recognize this sobering reality, compelling each of them to return to a focus on sound doctrine and the primacy of Scripture. Only then will they avoid being duped into believing, as so many have come to believe, that

doctrine is divisive or unimportant. The integrity of the church and the credibility of her members deserves no less.

Not only was Luther's reintroduction of the biblical doctrine of justification a key component in terms of reforming the thinking of Christians with regard to doctrine itself, interestingly, Trueman (2012) continues, the doctrine of justification was also responsible for changes in the very architecture of churches. In Roman Catholic churches, the eye was drawn to the altar while, in Protestant churches, the pulpit occupied the central position, which was reflective of a definite shift toward word-based worship.

This observation does not suggest that the church in the middle ages had no interest in Scripture because they did. The Reformation, however, simply ushered in a new age of Scriptural priority as the Word of God was wrested from the papacy and the magisterium and once again given its rightful place as the priority in worship. Trueman (2012) makes a very interesting observation regarding the effect of this shift:

The Lutheran Reformation was seen as the recovery of the gospel message of justification by faith. This is why Lutheran churches look like Catholic churches. They weren't so concerned with radically changing the church. The other Reformers (Zwingli, Knox, et al.) saw the Reformation as a crusade against idolatry within the church. Luther, however, disagreed.

The Lutherans, it seems, were far less concerned with radically changing the church and more intent on seeing her return to her gospel roots.

The Puritan Understanding of Salvation and Assurance

Given that Puritan theology is Reformation theology, this understanding would naturally include the Puritans' collective view of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). Most of the

Puritans were convinced Calvinists and thus viewed salvation as the work of God's grace alone, through faith alone. In all fairness, however, there were a couple of Puritans of note who were not strictly Calvinistic. The first of these individuals is John Goodwin (1594-1665). According to Packer (2015), "The only [non-Calvinistic] Puritan of ability was John Goodwin. Goodwin was a stormy petrel, and though much noticed, he does not seem to have converted many to his opinions" (p. 1). The second non-Calvinistic Puritan of note was (somewhat surprisingly to many perhaps) Richard Baxter. According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), Baxter "frequently leaned towards Arminian thinking..." and "...developed his own notion of universal redemption, which offended Calvinists, but retained a form of personal election, which offended Arminians. He rejected reprobation [and] was greatly influenced by the Amyraldians and incorporated much of their thinking, including hypothetical universalism..." (p. 66). Of these glaring theological errors, Packer (1990) wrote:

It is sadly fitting that the Richard Baxter Church in Kidderminster today should be Unitarian. What we see in Baxter is an early stage in the decline, not simply of the doctrine of justification among the Puritans, but of the Puritan insight into the nature of Christianity as a whole. (p. 160)

In another place, Packer (2015) observed:

Richard Baxter, perhaps the greatest of all Puritan devotional writers, urged the Arminian doctrine of justification as a part of his Amyraldean⁷ understanding of the gospel, and as a result of a generation's campaigning by him in its interest his position had become influential among the heirs of the Puritans in both England and Scotland by the end of the

⁷ Amyraldianism is a theological system created by Moise Amyrald, which modified traditional Calvinism's teachings on God's Eternal Decrees--removing the decree of reprobation. Amyraldianism is also known as Four-Point Calvinism in that it denies Limited Atonement the teaching that Jesus only bore the sin of the elect (Source: <https://carm.org/dictionary-amyraldianism>).

seventeenth century. In the 1690s it was referred to as “Baxterianism” and (because of the prominence it gave to the “new law” idea) “Neonomianism.” (p. 1)

According to Packer (2015), “Baxterianism took a voluntaristic view of faith as essentially commitment to new obedience, a view which assimilates faith to repentance and makes it both look and feel like a human work determining salvation” (p. 1). Walker (2013) provides a much more thorough description of Baxterianism when he writes:

At the heart of Baxterianism was the teaching that by his death Jesus Christ the Mediator died for all men and merited a new and milder law of grace, the requirements of which were faith, repentance, and sincere obedience. It taught that God now presented the gospel as this new law, replacing the original law under which man was created. Christ, it was alleged, having made a compensation to divine justice and the law of works, effectively removed from the equation the original law that demanded perfect obedience. God will now no longer execute against sinners the punishment due to sin as a result of the breaking of this original law. Instead, the gospel offers amnesty to penitent breakers of the old law. By virtue of Christ’s work, God now accepts penitent sinners on the basis of a new law of grace, with faith, repentance, and sincere obedience of Christ imputed to them by faith. Justification is no longer by faith alone, by trusting in Christ and in God’s promised pardon. Rather, it is conditional: pardoned sinners accepting this new arrangement must now fulfill the easier gospel terms by their own obedience. (p. 1)

While the theological distinctives Baxter espoused are unique among the otherwise staunchly Calvinistic Puritans, there is no denying that the Puritans very much considered works in the Christian life to be very necessary outworkings and evidences of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Few, if any, considered these works to be meritorious in any way (i.e., able to secure

one's salvation), rather, they viewed them primarily as the fruits of God's saving grace.

Nevertheless, some continue to take the Puritans to task, believing them not only to have promoted a works-based salvation but to have advocated that assurance of salvation is a rare commodity enjoyed by only a few believers. For example, writing about Puritan pastor and theologian Thomas Brooks, Protestant Reformed pastor, David Engelsma (2009) made the following rather sweeping observation:

[Assurance], according to Puritan theology, is a grace of salvation about which it is not true, that the one who seeks shall find. All believers seek assurance as a grace "earnestly desired and highly prized," but only a "few," indeed, a "very few," ever find it. And the reason is that this grace of salvation, which rightly is "highly prized" as the "best and greatest mercy," is obtained, not by the free gift of the Spirit of Christ, but by the working and works of the believer. "He that will have [assurance] must work, and sweat, and weep, and wait to obtain it...none can obtain [assurance] but such as labor for it... a man must win [assurance] before he can wear it." *The Puritan doctrine of assurance is a form of salvation by works*. A doctrine of works is necessarily also a doctrine of doubt. (p. 1)

While not thoroughly familiar with Engelsma and his overall position on such things, this writer must humbly take exception to Engelsma's remarks in this instance as they relate specifically to Brooks. While Brooks sometimes blurred the line between works and grace, he did, in fact, espouse a grace-centric salvation.⁸

The charge that the Puritans, as a whole, promoted a works-based salvation that was utterly devoid of any real sense of assurance is simply untenable given even a cursory reading of

⁸ For a more thorough examination of the Puritan doctrine of Justification in the late 17th century, the writer would heartily recommend Packer's (1990) ninth chapter entitled, "The Doctrine of Justification in Development and Decline."

their writings on the subject. Unfortunately, in the opinion of some (and the writer is not suggesting that it is true in Engelsma's particular case), *any* suggestion that saving faith be accompanied by evidence (i.e., works) is viewed as tantamount to a works-based salvation. In fact, if not exegeted carefully, a similar charge could be leveled at Scripture itself. God's Word is replete with examples of instruction concerning the necessity of self-examination as a means of gaining assurance of their salvation. In Peter's second epistle, for example, believers are to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul provides the following exhortation for one's preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper, "...let a man examine himself; and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28). Additionally, in his second letter to them, he writes, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove yourselves; do you not know yourselves how Christ is in you?" (2 Cor. 13:5).

In his letter to the Hebrews, the author goes to great lengths to mark the necessary balance between the believer's possession of assurance (to which he is indeed entitled) and how that assurance manifests itself experimentally. Note in the first place that the author states unequivocally that, as believers, "we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20). On this basis, he argues, believers have every right to "...draw near [to Christ] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). And yet, despite these wonderful realities of the believer's possession of said assurance, there remain certain obligations that are incumbent upon him wherewith he will be able to prove to himself his entitlement to it. In light of this assurance, the author goes on to say (emphases added):

Let us *draw near* with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Let us *hold fast* to the confession of our faith *without wavering*... let us *consider* how to *stir up* one another to love and good works, *not neglecting* to meet together, as is the habit of some, but *encouraging* one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb.10:22-25)

An even more sobering exhortation follows. Why is it important that the believer work to ensure that he is continually manifesting the fruits of his salvation so that he might have full assurance of the same? The apostle explains, "...if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27).

The point of these passages is to indicate that one who merely gives intellectual assent to the propositions of the gospel and exhibits none of the requisite fruit which should corroborate his claims to salvation, has no entitlement to an assurance of something he may not actually possess. To allege that such a scripturally verifiable assertion (which has simply been rehearsed by the Puritans) is, according to Engelsma (2009) tantamount to a "doctrine of [salvation by] works" and therefore a "doctrine of doubt" quite frankly reveals a disconcerting level of contextual misrepresentation as relates to what the majority of Puritans actually believed and taught on such matters.

Consider only two of what are many sufficient proofs from Brooks' own pen that quickly dispel the assertion that he advocated a works-based salvation of any kind. In the first place, in Brooks (2008) states:

A man may be truly holy [that is, he may be saved indeed], and yet not have assurance that he shall be eternally happy...All may be well with him in the court of glory, when he would give a thousand worlds that all were but well in the court of conscience. (p. 40)

As for the second proof of Brooks' thoroughly scriptural view of salvation (i.e. salvation by grace versus works), in his compelling treatment of Hebrews 12:14, entitled "The Necessity, Excellency, Rarity, and Beauty of Holiness," (1980) the author makes the following cogent defense of his beliefs concerning the true nature of salvation:

That thou hast no power to perform any supernatural act, as to believe or love God, or repent, or to change thine own heart, or to sanctify or make thyself holy, must be granted; that by nature thou art dead in trespasses and sins, and hast lost all thy spiritual senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, and feeling, can't be denied, Eph. ii:1. It is certain that thy nature is so corrupted that thou canst not think a good thought, nor speak a good word, nor do a good work; thou art not sick, but dead, God-wards, and Christ-wards, and heaven-wards, and holiness-wards, etc...It was never known since the creation of the world that ever a dead man could make himself alive...An unsanctified person is not half-dead, as the Pelagians, Arminians, and Papists say; but as to spirituals he is stark dead, Col. ii. 13. (pp. 241-242)

According to Thomas (1975), Brooks is also quoted as saying (in direct contradiction to Engelsma's (2009) assertions):

The purpose of God is the sovereign cause of all that good that is in man, and of all that external, internal and eternal good that comes to man. Not works past, for men are chosen from everlasting; not works present, for Jacob was loved and chosen before he was born;

nor works foreseen, for men were all corrupt in Adam. All a believer's present happiness, and all his future happiness springs from the eternal purpose of God. (p. 84)

In addition to the internal evidence within the Puritans' own writings which supports a firm belief in salvation by grace alone, it must be noted that most Reformed theologians also believe that while good works are not necessary for justification (otherwise, they could not have believed in justification by faith alone), they are in fact necessary as evidence thereof. In other words, while good works are by no means required in terms of one's initial salvation (i.e., regeneration and conversion), no man will enter heaven, achieving final salvation, without having persevered in the faith, the evidence of which can be seen through the manifestation of the Spirit's work in him. As James wrote in chapter two of the epistle bearing his name, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:17). As one who has written extensively on the subject of Puritan theology, Reverend Mark Jones (2014) also commented on this issue, noting quite clearly that it is not something limited exclusively to Puritan thought, but it is in fact a belief shared by many in the Reformed camp:

I will say that of all the Reformed theologians I have surveyed on the matter of good works, the vast majority affirmed that they are necessary for final salvation. Francis Turretin was explicit on this question: good works are the means and way that believers possess salvation. Davenant wrote copiously and carefully on this precise question, even disagreeing with Bellarmine's interpretation of the Reformed tradition. William Ames similarly affirmed that good works are necessary to a believer, "by necessity of means without which we cannot attain the end." (p. 1)

Jones (2014) goes on to say about John Owen (*italics added*), "...For Owen, good works are indeed necessary for final salvation. They are *not meritorious*, but they are *necessary*."

Thomas' (1975) tremendous work containing Puritan quotes also provides a wealth of information concerning the predominant belief among the Puritans concerning salvation by grace alone. For example, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) once wrote, "As God respects no persons, so He respects no conditions upon which He gives salvation to us" (p. 83). According to Thomas Watson (1620-1686):

It is absurd to think that anything in us could have the least influence upon our election. Some say that God did foresee that such persons would believe, and therefore did choose them; so they would make the business of salvation to depend upon something in us. Whereas God does not choose us FOR faith, but TO faith. "He hath chosen us, that we should be holy" (Eph. 1:4), not because we would be holy, but that we might be holy. We are elected to boldness, not for it. (p. 83)

As Watson similarly exhorted, "Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God's will. God did not choose us because we were worthy, but by choosing us He makes us worthy" (p. 84).

Concerning the doctrine of assurance and every believer's being able to enjoy it (albeit in varying degrees given particular circumstances), the Puritans are equally clear. In fact, no doubt much to his detractors' chagrin, ironically, it was Thomas Brooks (2008) who penned what is arguably one of the greatest treatises on the subject of the believer's assurance: *Heaven on Earth*.

Puritan pastor and theologian William Bridge (1961) once wrote that a lack of assurance is tantamount to sin:

It is a great evil and a sore affliction, to lack the assurance of God's love and of one's own salvation. As of all blessings those are the greatest where grace and comfort are joined together; so where sin and affliction are twisted together, of all afflictions they are

the most afflictive. And thus it is in the lack of assurance: for as in assurance there is something of grace, and something of comfort or reward; so in the lack of assurance there is somewhat of sin or unbelief, and somewhat of affliction too. The truth is, a man that lacks the assurance of God's love, and of his interest in Christ, is fit neither to receive mercy from God, nor to make return of love and praise to God as he should. (p. 128)

The Regulative Principle of Worship

The Reformation also gave clarity to the regulative principle of worship as presented in the Scriptures. While many feel that this principle owes its origin to John Knox, many see an earlier introduction (or at least a prototype) in a particularly interesting act of defiance. In 1550, John Hooper was appointed to serve as Bishop of Gloucester in England. Prior to this appointment, Hooper had committed himself to considerable study on the European continent under the tutelage of such luminaries as Heinrich Bullinger and Huldrych Zwingli. Having become convinced of the errors within the Roman Catholic Church, when asked to wear the vestments during his consecration, he refused on the grounds that the wearing of such “costumes” was not required from Scripture. He was subsequently jailed but soon thereafter relented and was thus consecrated. Nevertheless, Hooper's insistence that he not be required to do that which was not specifically ordered in Scripture was the precursor to what would later be known as the regulative principle. According to Kyle and Johnson (2009), Scottish reformer John Knox would later summarize the regulative principle saying, “All worshipping, honoring, or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without His own express commandment, is idolatry” (p. 48).

According to Thomas (2010), defined in its simplest terms, “the regulative principle of worship states that the corporate worship of God is to be founded upon specific directions of

Scripture.” (p. 1) The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) provides a much more detailed definition:

...the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture. (21.1).

Although, as evidenced in the aforementioned account of John Hooper’s defiance, there were earlier examples of attempts to adhere to a scriptural form of worship, again, many believe that John Knox is largely responsible for the introduction of the regulative principle and the need for its observation in Protestant churches today. In a public debate with the Papists of his day, Knox declared:

That God’s word damns your ceremonies, it is evident; for the plain and straight commandment of God is, “Not that thing which appears good in thy eyes, shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God has commanded thee, that do thou: add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it.” Now unless that ye are able to prove that God has commanded your ceremonies, this his former commandment will damn both you and them. (p. 91)

Understanding worship in this way led to the Scottish church’s casting out all remnants of idolatry that had been placed there during her previous Roman Catholic experience. Knox (1988) would later write a more nuanced explanation of the regulative principle, contending:

The matter is not of so small importance, as some suppose. The question is, whether God or man ought to be obeyed in matters of religion? In mouth, all do confess that only God is worthy of sovereignty. But after many--by the instigation of the devil, and by the

presumptuous arrogance of carnal wisdom and worldly policy--have defaced God's holy ordinance, men fear not to follow what laws and common consent (mother of all mischief) have established and commanded. But thus continually I can do nothing but hold, and affirm all things polluted, yea, execrable and accursed, which God by his Word has not sanctified in his religion. God grant you his Holy Spirit rightly to judge. (p. 10)

While the foregoing historical quotes do lend much credibility to the validity of the regulative principle of worship, they are no substitute for the Scriptures themselves which have a great deal to say about the believer's dutiful worship of his God. For example, in Deuteronomy 12:32, we read: "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it." In what is perhaps the most definitive statement regarding worship in the Old Testament, Exodus 20:4-6, we read:

You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

The introduction of the regulative principle was not without incident either. As Trueman (2012) points out:

The regulative principle has been both positive and negative within Reformed practice. One hundred years after Knox, the debates about the regulative principle were focused on the Book of Common Prayer. There are things in the book that are simply not scriptural. From the 1560s onward, the Book of Common Prayer was used as a means of controlling the church by the British government.

Evidence of this tension can be seen historically in the differences between worship in New England and worship in Britain. In the former, there were weekly sermons preached on the providence of God while, in the latter, the government did not believe that sermons should come from the preacher's own preparation but from a common source. Trueman (2012) argues that it was from this notion that the homily and liturgy (still observed in the Anglican Church today) originated. While the homily made sure that everyone heard the same message, the Book of Common Prayer ensured that no one was even able to utter prayers of their own. The regulative principle was thus designed to secure religious freedom by ensuring that churches who faithfully observed it would not be subject to worshiping in any way not specifically commanded in Scripture. On a contemporary note, although many have accepted the Scriptural teaching concerning the regulative principle of worship, it is not without its detractors. As Waldron (2007) observed:

It seems that one of the major intellectual stumbling blocks which hinders men from embracing the Regulative Principle is that it involves the idea that the church and its worship is ordered in a regulated way different from the rest of life. In the rest of life God gives men the great precepts and general principles of his word and within the bounds of these directions allows them to order their lives as seems best to them. He does not give them minute directions as to how they shall build their houses or pursue their secular vocations. The Regulative principle, on the other hand, involves a limitation on human initiative in freedom not characteristic of the rest of life. It clearly assumes that there is a distinction between the way the church and its worship is to be ordered and the way the rest of human society and conduct is to be ordered. Thus, the Regulative Principle is

liable to strike many as oppressive, peculiar, and, therefore, suspiciously out of accord with God's dealings with mankind and the rest of life. (p. 1)

Despite this particular disagreement concerning how worship was to be conducted in the church, doctrinally speaking, there was not a substantial difference between what the Puritans and Anglicans believed in the 17th century.

Coram Deo

According to Swanson (2012), one of the most important aspects of Puritan spirituality is that they sought to live every moment of their lives "coram Deo." Translated literally, this term refers to something that takes place in the presence of, or before the face of, God. According to Sproul (2013), "to live coram Deo is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God." The Puritans committed themselves to this principle daily. As Ryken (1986) noted:

Puritanism was impelled by the insight that all of life is God's. The Puritans lived simultaneously in two worlds – the invisible spiritual world and the physical world of earthly existence. For the Puritans, both worlds were equally real, and there was no cleavage of life into sacred and secular. All of life was sacred... John Cotton theorized: "Not only my spiritual life, but even my civil life in this world, all the life I live, is by the faith of the Son of God: he exempts no life from the agency of his faith." (p. 208)

Ryken (1986) further explains:

Godliness in every phase of a person's life was the Puritan goal. One Puritan spoke of Christianity as a "universal habit of grace" in which "the whole creature is resigned...to the obedience and glory of its maker." "If God be God over us," wrote Peter Bulkeley,

“we must yield him universal obedience in all things. He must not be over us in one thing, and under us in another, but he must be over us in every thing.” (p. 208)

Examining this principle of *coram Deo* further, anyone who is familiar with the Puritans’ devotion to God can readily attest to its fitness as a means of accurately describing them. As Sproul (2013) continues:

To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze. (p. 1)

As recorded in Thomas (1975), Thomas Watson once observed, “A man has no time for which he is not accountable to God. If his very diversions are not governed by reason and religion he will one day suffer for the time he has spent in them” (p. 141). Far from being a strictly Puritan notion of how life is to be lived, Watson was merely agreeing with the apostle Paul, who wrote in Ephesians 5:15-16, “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” The Puritans did not, as many today are prone to do, separate their lives between the “religious” and “nonreligious.” Once again, Sproul (2013) is instructive here:

To live all of life *coram Deo* is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God. A fragmented life is a life of disintegration. It is marked by inconsistency, disharmony, confusion, conflict, contradiction, and chaos. The Christian who compartmentalizes his or her life into two sections of the religious and the nonreligious has failed to grasp the big idea. The big idea is that all of life is religious or none of life is religious. To divide life between the religious and the nonreligious is itself a sacrilege. (p. 1)

Professing Christians today would do well to recover this most important Puritan principle and incorporate it into their own lives as a means of consistently honoring and glorifying the God they claim to serve.

Seeing God in the Mundane

One of the primary benefits to living life *coram Deo* is that doing so will enable the believer to see God even in those things in which He may never have noticed Him before: the so-called ordinary things of life. As Ryken (1986) notes, the sanctity of the commonplace was a constant Puritan theme:

John Bunyan asked in the preface to *Grace Abounding*, “Have you forgot...the milkhouse, the stable, the barn, and the like, where God did visit your soul? Canst not thou think on the several places thou has lived in and remember that they have each had their several mercies? Walter Pringle told his children the exact places at which certain things happened to him: his first experience of prayer came “at the north-east of Stichel Hall,” and years later he committed his newly born son to God “at the plum tree on the north side of the garden door.” (p. 209)

Far too often, professing believers remain focused exclusively on the monumental, life-changing events and not nearly enough on the commonplace. A renewed commitment to seeing God’s handiwork in every facet of one’s life will give the believer a renewed assurance that God is at work even in the most seemingly insignificant times of his life.

Can the Puritans Teach Christians Anything Today?

This question is particularly relevant in light of the postmodern age in which the church finds herself. For the benefit of the reader who is perhaps unfamiliar with this term, postmodernism refers to the particular philosophical era which began, by most estimates,

sometime in the late 1950s when it replaced the “modern” era or “modernism.” The modern era itself was a replacement for the philosophical era known as “premodernism.” A brief explanation of these periods follows, with a special emphasis on each period’s epistemological framework.

According to Hoffman (2008), Premodernism was the dominant philosophical system prior to the 1650s. The primary epistemology of this period, the author states, was based upon “revealed knowledge from authoritative sources. In premodern times, it was believed that ultimate truth could be known, and the way to this knowledge is through revelation. This revelation was assumed to come from God” (p. 1). In other words, up until the 1650s, the vast majority of people believed in God and relied upon His revelation in the Scriptures as sufficient to govern their thoughts, words, and actions.

In the 1650s, as the shift in power began to move away from the church, giving way to the age of enlightenment, premodernism was replaced with what is known as modernism. As man’s knowledge of science and exploration grew, he soon became dependent, not on God as before, but on his own achievements as a means of answering all of life’s most pressing questions. As Hoffman (2008) observes:

Two new approaches to knowing became dominant in the modern period. The first was empiricism (knowing through the senses) which gradually evolved into scientific empiricism or modern science with the development of modernist methodology. The second epistemological approach of this period was reason or logic. Often, science and reason were collaborative or in conjunction with each other. (p. 1)

As the author notes, premodern thought and modern thought were not such strange bedfellows. Many who maintained a premodern mindset well into the modern era were perfectly comfortable with science as they considered it a rational explanation of the working of God

within the created realm. This somewhat amenable arrangement proved to be unsustainable as, in the end, even science could not address man's deepest concerns.

The modern era lasted until the introduction of postmodernism in the late 1950s. As Hoffman (2008) writes, "Postmodernism brought with it a questioning of the previous approaches to knowing. Instead of relying on one approach to knowing, they advocate for an epistemological pluralism which utilizes multiple ways of learning" (p. 1). In other words, since both the premodern approach and the scientific approach of modernism had failed to provide any real answers, man concluded that another approach was warranted.

While an "epistemological pluralism" may, in fact, sound reasonable enough, postmodernism actually reflects a wholesale abandonment of the notion that there is any such thing as objective, knowable truth. According to Grenz (1996):

In the postmodern world, people are no longer convinced that knowledge is inherently good. In eschewing the Enlightenment myth of inevitable progress, postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism. Gone is the belief that every day, in every way, we are getting better and better. Members of the emerging generation are no longer confident that humanity will be able to solve the world's greatest problems or even that their economic situation will surpass that of their parents. They view life on earth as fragile and believe that the continued existence of humankind is dependent on a new attitude of cooperation rather than conquest. (p. 7)

The philosophical shift to postmodernism has spawned a generation in which there are simply no absolutes. Truth, for example, is not objective but subjective and arbitrary. In other words, what may be one man's truth does not necessarily mean that it will be another man's truth. Right and wrong, once easily distinguishable by the masses, now appear in varying shades of gray.

The effects of postmodernism have undoubtedly had a detrimental effect on how many new believers view the role and function of the church. MacArthur (1993) writes:

Preaching the Word and boldly confronting sin are seen as archaic, ineffectual means of winning the world. That kind of thinking badly skews the mission of the church. True evangelism does not require salesmen but prophets. It is the Word of God, not any earthly enticement that plants the seed for the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23). We gain nothing but God's displeasure if we seek to remove the offense of the cross (cf. Gal. 5:11). (p. 32)

As Spanish philosopher and novelist George Santayana (1906) famously observed, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284) Nowhere is this observation more applicable than as a means of expressing how important it is that Christians today familiarize themselves with the many contributions made by the Puritans, especially concerning living according to what they say they believe.

Lloyd-Jones (1987) suggested that it is the Christians duty to learn from history. He supports this suggestion saying:

My argument is that it is always essential for us to supplement our reading of theology with the reading of church history. Or, if you prefer it, that we should at any rate take our theology in an historical manner. If we do not, we shall be in danger of becoming abstract, theoretical, and academic in our view of truth; and, failing to relate it to the practicalities of life and daily living, we shall soon be in trouble. It seems to me that if we are careful to learn the lessons of history, and to supplement our reading of theology by that, we shall already be prepared, and we shall avoid many of the pitfalls and the dangers into which we shall inevitably fall if we do not do this. (p. 216)

According to Ferguson (2009), Christians today can indeed learn a great deal from the Puritans. Before one can truly learn from them, however, he must first understand the nature of their great contributions to the church-at-large. Referring to John Knox, Ferguson (2009) observed:

He had a burning vision to reform the church of Jesus Christ so it no longer had a face that looked like it had come from Scotland, England, or even Geneva; but a church that was reformed according to the Scriptures; a church that looked, not to tradition, but to the Scriptures in all respects. (p. 1)

The Puritans that would follow Knox shared his vision for a church that would transcend all traditional and cultural boundaries and adhere to a purely Scriptural pattern in all matters of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Sadly (but naturally), the acceptability of such a staunch position of ensuring that all things be done in a manner consistent with Scripture began, over time, to wane considerably and those carrying the “Puritan” moniker soon found themselves cast in an increasingly negative light.

One of the most tragic outcomes stemming from the many negative stereotypes that have been attached to the Puritans is that, in the minds of many, it is believed that there is nothing positive about them from which society today may benefit. Of course, given the state of this country’s current government system and its seeming penchant for all things immoral and unethical, short of true revival sweeping the land, it is highly unlikely that any but a very few will ever reconsider the tenets of Puritanism. A renewed emphasis of certain Puritan distinctives, however, could reap tremendous benefits for Christians. For example, the Puritans sought to purify the church by returning it to its Biblical roots. As Ferguson (2009) notes, we would do well to “recognize that we ourselves need to recapture their vision.” When boiled down to its

most rudimentary elements, Ferguson (2009) argues, “the Puritan movement was a twin-pronged burden: to see the reformation of the church and the revival and renewing of the church by the Holy Spirit” (p. 1).

Among the most important lessons one can learn from the Puritans is that he should not be beholden to the formal church establishment or government. The Puritans instead sought the face of God with the sole aim of doing His will above all else. The reader will note that this in no way implies that these godly men were anti-church government, but simply that they understood quite well the inherent inadequacies of human government and wanted to be sure they were conducting themselves as God-pleasers and not man-pleasers. It was this wholesale dependence on God and the consistent seeking of His will which led to widespread Puritan success in a number of important areas. Ferguson (2009) states, “Men became burdened much like the apostle Paul, going places where the gospel might take hold and spread.”

With this newfound burden came the realization that one of the best places to start their renewed spread of the gospel would be the universities in England. Men like Cambridge’s William Perkins enjoyed a great deal of success in this undertaking. Students under his tutelage included notables such as William Ames, Thomas Goodwin, James Ussher, and Richard Sibbes. Given this focus on reaching the universities, the Puritan movement soon began to move like wildfire throughout England, producing other notable Puritans such as Cotton Mather, John Cotton, Richard Baxter, and John Owen, but a few examples of the fruit of this movement of God in the hearts of those sharing a common burden, a common prayer life, and a common desire to see the gospel carried to the ends of the earth. As Ferguson (2009) opines:

We badly need this today. Not just famous ministers with large congregations but brothers in the ministry spread across the country. No hierarchy, no formal supremacy,

but a burden to bring the gospel to a lost and dying world. God does great things when ordinary people are bound together and committed to a cause which promotes His glory.

(p. 1)

In this writer's opinion, there is no greater need in the world today than for ministers of the gospel to return to this pattern of ministry. When one looks out across the current evangelical landscape, he would be hard-pressed indeed to find churches in which the sole objective is to preach Christ crucified and teach how salvation must be procured through Him alone. As Boice (2001) astutely noted:

We don't like to admit it, but anyone who honestly evaluates the church's life and outlook will understand that these are not good days for evangelicalism. Yes, we've achieved success, but in a worldly sort of way -- big numbers, big budgets, and big outreaches. Yet church attendance is actually down and alleged "born again believers" do not differ significantly in their worldview from their neighbors. Why? We have forgotten our theology and, consciously or not, have pursued the wisdom of the world, accepted its "doctrines," and utilized its methods. (p. 14)

Similarly, MacArthur (1993) observed:

The new philosophy is straightforward: The church is in competition against the world, and the world is very good at capturing people's attention and affections. The church, on the other hand, tends to be very poor at "selling" its product. Evangelism should therefore be viewed as a marketing challenge, and the church should market the gospel in the same way all modern businesses sell their products. That calls for some fundamental changes. The goal in all marketing is "to make both the producer and consumer satisfied." So anything that tends to leave the "consumer" unsatisfied must be jettisoned. Preaching –

particularly preaching about sin, righteousness, and judgment – is too confrontive to be truly satisfying. The church must learn to couch the truth in ways that amuse and entertain. (p. 38)

There can be no doubt that God has raised up in our current generation great stalwarts of the faith; men who are indeed lifting high the banner of Christ and faithfully declaring, “thus saith the Lord” week in and week out to congregations numbering in the thousands. Very often, however, as Ferguson (2009) laments, the unintended consequence of this situation has been the coronation of a relatively new breed of gospel communicator: the celebrity pastor. Though not necessarily a negative thing in and of itself, this trend has created in many men an unhealthy infatuation with and a preoccupation to be like those who have enjoyed such success. Needless to say, when the prospect of career success supplants one’s desire to honor and glorify God, nothing truly good can result. In this writer’s opinion, this very thing has led to such things as the overtly pragmatic emerging/emergent controversy that has infected so much of the church-at-large.

Consider the following excerpt from an article in the June 1991 issue of *Christianity Today*, entitled “Saving the Boomers”:

Leaders of the new style churches say that they are increasingly adopting a marketing approach to religion because traditional practices [are] driving potential parishioners away. “Churches need to get into the entertainment business,” said Rev. David Brandon, the 41 year old senior pastor at the Alliance Church... Among the most successful of the new mega-churches is the sprawling, 64 year old Second Baptist Church in Houston, which advertises itself as providing a “Fellowship of excitement.” The most recent additions to the church building, erected in 1986, cost \$39 million dollars. A new, 6,200

seat auditorium is the center of a complex that covers 42 acres and includes a bowling alley, a 175 seat movie theatre, a pool hall and several athletic courts. At Second Baptist, churchgoers can join one of 36 basketball teams run by the church, take part in a so-called Master's Blast workout in the church's glass walled fitness center and soak afterwards in one of two Jacuzzis. As well, members can see Broadway style musical shows performed by various church choirs, including Hooray for Hollywood, a salute to the movie industry combined with a religious service, which will run for three performances this summer. The church also stages an annual wrestling event in which staff members compete, and runs a 90 seat restaurant that offers low-calorie dishes for "saints" and richer items for "sinners." Lisa Milne, Second Baptist's program coordinator, says that the church tries to offer "a lot of hooks and hope that people nibble at something. You've got to be good to keep them coming." (p. 35)

Another one of the (perhaps) unintended consequences of the overly-pragmatic approaches to church growth is that many consider the once-bedrock principle of cultivating and guarding of a regenerate church membership as no longer important. What seems to matter most to many is finding increasingly innovative ways to attract more people into the church building. This unashamedly pragmatic approach to church growth, it is believed, will, in turn, result in bigger budgets and more lucrative salaries for the church's leaders. In many of these churches, the idea of the church being a counter-cultural organism is considered to be outdated, outmoded and, in the worst cases, simply intolerable. What is needed, many contend, is a church that accepts everyone just the way they are, even if it means approving of that which God clearly considers abominable. MacArthur (1993) provides some rather startling examples of this approach, writing:

I recently read through a stack of newspaper and magazine articles about the user-friendly phenomenon, and a common thread began to emerge. Here are some quotations from clippings describing the preaching in user-friendly churches:

- “There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages.”
- “Services at [the church featured in the article] have an informal feeling. You won’t hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome, not drive them away.”
- “As with all clergymen [the pastor’s] answer is God – but he slips Him in at the end, and even then doesn’t get heavy. No ranting, no raving. No fire, no brimstone. He doesn’t even use the H-word. Call it Light Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt.”
- “The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won’t hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation and hell fire. Preaching here doesn’t sound like preaching. It is sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk. It breaks all the stereotypes.”
- “[The pastor] is preaching a very upbeat message... It’s a salvationist message, but the idea is not so much being saved from the fires of hell. Rather, it’s being saved from meaninglessness and aimlessness in this life. It’s more of a soft-sell.”
- “The idea, [the pastor] says, is to get people through the front doors, then disprove the stereotype of the sweating, loosened necktie, Bible-thumping preacher who yells and screams about burning in hell for eternity.”

So the new rules may be summed up as follows: Be clever, informal, positive, brief, and friendly. Never loosen your necktie. Never let them see you sweat. And never, never use the H-word. (p. 59)

Conveniently, many churches have adopted special (and wholly unbiblical) labels and categories with which to classify those who fail even to attempt to live lives according to Scripture's clear standards. The term "carnal Christian," for example, once widely considered an oxymoronic term, was adopted as a means of identifying those who are allegedly in a saving relationship with Christ and yet bear no evidence of a transformed life in their daily conduct. This term finds its origins in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. There, the apostle Paul writes to a particular subset of immature Corinthian believers, saying:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not *mere* men?

Unfortunately, what the apostle intended as a rebuke and challenge for the immature among the Corinthian brethren to "grow up" has often been turned into a scriptural license to remain weak and immature with absolutely zero spiritual ramifications. As Brush (2000) notes:

When Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote *He that is Spiritual* (1918) it was extremely controversial. He wrote that a believer could be a new creation and yet remain a carnal Christian without any change in character. He stated that the carnal Christian is

characterized by a walk that is on the same plane as that of the natural man. Today that teaching is commonly accepted. (p. 1)

Evidence of the common acceptance of this teaching today can be seen in so-called “Free Grace Theology.” As Houdmann (2013) explains:

The basic teaching of Free Grace Theology is that responding to the “call to believe” in Jesus Christ through faith alone is all that is necessary to receive eternal life. This basic, simple belief brings assurance of “entering” the kingdom of God. Then, if a person further responds to the “call to follow” Jesus, he becomes a disciple and undergoes sanctification. The follower of Christ has the opportunity to “inherit” the kingdom of God, which includes receiving particular rewards based on works accomplished for God on earth. (p. 1)

In addition to the “carnal Christianity” being promoted in many churches, one would also do well to note how many things are becoming acceptable, even normative, in the church that were once believed to be (and indeed are) in direct violation of the Word of God. Only recently, an article written by reporter Morgan Lee (2014) appeared in several prominent news mediums that announced:

A Southern Baptist church in California has broken with the denomination’s stance on homosexuality and has decided to accept the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] community without judgment. The church made the change after its lead pastor announced that he no longer holds to the teaching that homosexuality is a sin. (p. 1)

Similarly distressing, a 2005 interview of Joel Osteen (pastor of what is arguably America’s largest church) by CNN’s Larry King is also quite telling concerning how far many in the

churches of today have strayed from Scriptural truth. In this interview, King asks Osteen, “How about issues that the church has feelings about? Abortion? Same-sex marriages?” Osteen responds, “Yeah. You know what, Larry? I don't go there. I just...” King then interjects somewhat incredulously, “You don't call them sinners?” to which Osteen immediately responds, “I don't.” King then probes further, “Is that a word you don't use?” Osteen replied:

I don't use it. I never thought about it. But I probably don't. But most people already know what they're doing wrong. When I get them to church I want to tell them that you can change. There can be a difference in your life. So I don't go down the road of condemning. (p. 1)

There are of course a great number of contributing factors to this predicament, but one of the most predominant among them has to be the de-emphasis of the importance of education in sound doctrine in many churches. One is reminded at this point of the phenomenon in Spurgeon's nineteenth century England known as “The Downgrade Controversy.” Reverend Spurgeon and his close associate and fellow pastor Robert Schindler collaborated on a series of articles in and 1887 issue of *The Sword and the Trowel*, the periodical publication of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. This series of articles addressed the concerns that Spurgeon and Schindler shared concerning what they were witnessing in the church at the time. According to Spurgeon, the church had departed from the word of God, placing themselves, as it were, on a downgrade, sliding down a steep hill with little chance of recovery. And to what did Spurgeon and Schindler attribute this slide down a slippery slope? Schindler wrote:

In the case of every errant course there is always a first wrong step. If we can trace that wrong step, we may be able to avoid it and its results. Where, then, is the point of divergence from the "King's highway of truth"? What is the first step astray? Is it

doubting this doctrine, or questioning that sentiment, or being skeptical as to the other article of orthodox belief? We think not. These doubts and this skepticism are the outcome of something going before. The first step astray is a want of adequate faith in the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures. All the while a man bows to the authority of God's Word, he will not entertain any sentiment contrary to its teaching. "To the law and to the testimony," is his appeal concerning every doctrine. He esteems that holy Book, concerning all things, to be right, and therefore he hates every false way. But let a man question, or entertain low views of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and he is without chart to guide him, and without anchor to hold him. (p. 122)

As Ferguson (2009) observes, there is "a vital necessity of recovering the pulpit in order to recover the church." Interestingly, during the early Puritan era, the Anglican Church was also languishing in terms of its ministers' ability to rightly divide the Word of God and clearly articulate it to the people. As stated previously, sermons coming from Anglican pulpits during this time largely consisted of simple recitations from the Book of Common Prayer. What was the result of this approach? In the first place, it had a profound impact on the ministers' need to study the word of God for himself. Secondly, it resulted in a significant decrease in church attendance. As Ferguson (2009) observed, "The ministry was a despised thing in the seventeenth century, so what was needed was a mastering of the Word of God for the benefit of those who heard them teach." The Puritans recognized early on that their ministers needed to be godly and educated. What's more, they felt that they should be available and accessible to those to whom they ministered, insisting that God's Word be preached both in and out of the pulpit.

In further keeping with the premise that the church of today can indeed learn a great deal from the examples set by her Puritan brethren, one of the most important of Ferguson's (2009)

suggestions to this end is that Christians must regain a firm grasp on the need for a spiritual brotherhood, a vision to recover the Word of God in the pulpits of the land, a deeply Trinitarian understanding of the gospel, and a renewed emphasis on the overall significance of the church in the purposes of Christ. Concerning the first of these, Ferguson (2009) explains:

The Puritan churches were not perfect, but they saw the need to commit themselves to one another as to Christ. They understood that unless the church was really a church (e.g. Acts 2), it would never make a true difference in the world. Far more important than being individualistic, the church as a whole needs to be the light on the hill that others look up to.

As Ferguson (2009) goes on to state, it was this sense of commitment to one another which resulted in their placing tremendous stress on the Covenant. They saw the Covenant as something far larger than simply the foundation for the church but as something that bound them together. They wrote their own covenants to promote this pledging of themselves to one another and also believed that the basic metaphor for the church was the family, a tremendously important point in light of the fact that belonging is so important even to the most seemingly individualistic of men.

As this writer can attest, having served in pastoral ministry for more than a quarter of a century, Christian brotherhood is something that seems to be severely lacking in many churches today. With so many churchgoers finding contentment in mere perfunctory attendance each week (square-filling or box-checking, as it were), combined with the individualism that is routinely advocated by the world, the concept of cultivating and maintaining a true spiritual brotherhood seems, sadly, to be something increasingly difficult for many to grasp. The Puritans on the other hand found that there was “safety in numbers” and believed very strongly that the church would

enjoy God's blessing only to the extent that her constituent parts worked together for the common cause of Christ and His kingdom. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:11-16):

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Few would contest the assertion that what is most needed in the church is a spiritual brotherhood, a recovery of the Word of God in the pulpits of the land and a renewed emphasis on the significance of the church in Christ's plan and purpose. What may perhaps be confusing to some is Ferguson's (2009) mention of the need for a deeply Trinitarian understanding of the gospel. As he observes, "What drove the Puritans was the deep sense of the ultimate glory of a Triune God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). They were passionate to defend the Trinity against Arminians and others who would downplay the same" (p. 1). This particular observation is especially important in light of what is undeniably an alarming trend toward either outright anti-Trinitarianism at worst or, at best, an apathetic approach to this and other crucially important doctrines. Taylor (2011) shares a bit of preliminary insight into this modern phenomenon, noting:

It is a disturbing fact that the most vigorous form of anti-trinitarianism currently on the market is to be found within the sphere of conservative evangelicalism. In the nineteenth century, the dominant variety of anti-trinitarianism was the old-world Unitarianism which found fertile soil in America... For evangelical Christians of a conservative temperament, Unitarianism as a theological movement was as easy to ignore as any version of liberal theology. It offered a pervasively non-supernatural interpretation of Christianity, and thereby rendered itself irrelevant to churches which were committed to a range of traditional doctrines such as incarnation, atonement, miracle, revelation, the inspiration of scripture, and heaven and hell. Today, however, there is an altogether different kind of anti-Trinitarian teaching putting itself forward, one which bears no relation to the old liberal Unitarianism, and requires a completely different response from either Unitarianism or the more obviously non-Christian Jehovah's Witnesses movement.

(p. 1)

The author is referring to the rise of Oneness Pentecostalism and other non-denominational entities (e.g., Unitarians, Christadelphians, etc.) in which Trinitarian doctrine is either denied altogether or relegated to a position of less importance.

Ferguson (1987) explains precisely why Trinitarian doctrine is so important by noting that Jesus' teaching in the upper room on the last night of His earthly ministry (recorded in John 13-17) concentrated on the revelation and exposition of the Trinity. Ferguson (1987) asks:

Can this be true? After all, this doctrine of the Trinity has caused problems and even divisions in the history of the Christian Church. Was there not virtual war in the early centuries of the Church's life over this doctrine? True! But this controversy can be interpreted and reacted to in different ways. Either it means we should avoid like the

plague even thinking about the Trinity! Or, it means that the very heart of the Christian gospel depends on the Trinity – which explains why the battles were so fierce. Jesus’ teaching in the upper room underlines that the second interpretation is the right one. The amount of time in his sermon on that occasion devoted to the relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit indicates how central this teaching must be. It also suggests that if Jesus concentrated on this subject in his darkest hour and at the time of his disciples’ greatest need for comfort and encouragement, then the doctrine of the Trinity must have the most practical and important repercussions. (p. 13)

It must also be noted that while the Puritans did, in fact, place the highest premium on the importance of Trinitarian doctrine, they did not pretend to understand it completely, insisting rather that it is something that is known by faith. As Thomas (1975) offers, Thomas Watson once noted:

The Trinity is purely an object of faith, the plumb line of reason is too short to fathom this mystery; but where reason cannot wade, there faith must swim... This sacred doctrine, though it be not against reason, yet it is above reason. (p. 297)

In a similar vein, John Arrowsmith remarked:

As to the point of Divine subsistence, Jehovah Elohim, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: three persons, but one God; or in Lee’s expression – one God without division in a Trinity of persons, and three persons without confusion in an unity of essence – it is a discovery altogether supernatural. (p. 297)

Arrowsmith would also add that the Trinity is “a mystery which my faith embraces as revealed in the Word, but my reason cannot fathom” (p. 297). Finally, Thomas Adams observed that “it is

rashness to search, godliness to believe, safeness to preach, and eternal blessedness to know the Trinity” (p. 297).

While the foregoing constitutes a fairly detailed explanation of how the Puritans might teach Christians today some very important things in the areas of spiritual brotherhood, a renewed emphasis on the centrality of the Word of God in worship, and an emphasis on Trinitarian doctrine, it is also quite helpful to acknowledge how they arrived at their particular beliefs regarding such things. This task can be accomplished, in part, by summarizing the basic elements or foci of Puritan concerns. As Beeke and Pederson (2006) relate, there are five of them.

In the first place, the Puritans sought to be Berean in their approach to understanding the Scriptures. The Bereans are mentioned by Luke in Acts 17:11 as being “more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether [the teachings of the apostles] were so.” This observation explains, at least in part, why they were so intent on being confessional and theological Christians.

Secondly, as discussed previously, according to Beeke and Pederson (2006), the Puritans sought to promote a full-orbed Trinitarian understanding of what the Bible teaches:

The Puritans were passionately committed to focusing on the Trinitarian character of theology. They never tired of proclaiming the electing grace of God, the dying love of Jesus Christ, and the applicatory work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of sinners. Their fascination with Christian experience was not so much motivated by an interest in their experience per se as it was in their desire to trace out the divine work within them so that they could render all glory to their Triune Lord. (xvii)

Thirdly, the Puritans placed the highest premium on the significance of the church, believing that the worship conducted in the church was to involve the outworking of her biblical faith. Puritanism thus focused on the clear preaching and teaching of God's Word, liturgical reform, and the brotherhood of the saints. They also believed that the Bible clearly outlined a specific order for church government and sought to conform to that order.

In the fourth place, the Puritans very much depended on the Word of God to instruct them in the area of good and effective citizenry. As Ryken (1986) observed, "The Puritans were not obscurantists.⁹ They accepted society as something ordained by God and the arena within which they were expected to make Christian principles prevail" (p. 173). According to Lake (1988), Puritan Thomas Lever, in a sermon delivered at Paul's Cross, London, illustrated the Puritan sentiment concerning citizenry beautifully:

The merchant buying and selling, and the craftsman by his occupation, must provide unto the commonwealth the necessary wares and supplies for all. The landlord, by leasing lands at a moderate price must furnish fields to the tenants, and also homes at low rates of rent. The husbandman must till the soil with proper diligence, and so produce the necessary crops, rents, and provisions for himself and the community at large. (p. 182)

In a similar vein, as related by Carroll and Shiflett (2002), William Perkins noted, "He abuseth his calling, whosoever he be that employs it for himself, seeking wholly his own, and not the common good. And that common saying, 'Every man for himself and God for us all, is wicked'" (p. 153).

Finally, the Puritans were very focused on the need for the conversion of the individual. As Beeke and Pederson (2006) observe, "They excelled at preaching the gospel, probing the

⁹ An "obscurantist" is one who deliberately prevents the facts or full details of some matter from becoming known (Source: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/obscurantism).

conscience, awakening the sinner, calling him to repentance and faith, leading him to Christ, and schooling him in the way of Christ” (p. xvii). From this, the Puritans taught that true saving faith should be accompanied by its appropriate evidences or “fruit” which was to be displayed inwardly as well as in the home, in the church, at work, and in society.

Conclusion

Although the Puritans were by no means a perfect people, they do stand prominently in history as men and women who were willing to sacrifice everything for the kingdom and cause of Christ. Having left their homeland in search of a better life in the New World, their singular focus on living life coram Deo is not only commendable but is something which should be emulated by every true believer today. Additionally, the church would do well to recover what Ferguson (2009) cites as the three greatest needs in the Puritans’ collective mind: a grasp of the need for a spiritual brotherhood, a vision to recover the word of God in the pulpits of the land, and an understanding of the gospel that was deeply Trinitarian. Simply stated, what is needed among believers today is the understanding that they are to be more interested in God than in personal godliness; that they are to be God-centered and not experience-centered. Indeed, may the Puritan spirit of devotion and piety, along with the desire to see Christ exalted above all else be realized once again in the churches of our day.

As the thoughtful observer of today’s popular trends in many churches would no doubt agree, what is most desperately needed in order for churches to best honor and glorify the Lord who bought them is a wholesale commitment to a return to the fundamentals of Puritan piety and devotion. Referring to a timely (if not prescient) offering by George Whitefield, Beeke and Pederson (2006) offer a fitting observation with which to end this final portion of this paper:

The Puritans [were] burning and shining lights. When cast out by the black Bartholomew Act, and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in a special manner wrote and preached as men having authority. Though dead, by their writings they yet speak; a peculiar unction attends them to this very hour; and for these thirty years past I have remarked, that the more true and vital religion hath revived either at home or abroad, the more the good old puritanical writings, or the authors of a like stamp who lived and died in communion of the Church of England have been called for... Their works still praise them in the gates; and without pretending to a spirit of prophecy, we may venture to affirm that they will live and flourish, when more modern performances of a contrary cast, notwithstanding their gaudy and tinsel'd trappings, will languish and die in the esteem of those whose understandings are opened to discern what comes nearest to the Scripture standard. (xiii)

With typical eloquence, Packer (2002) also offers what is no doubt a perfect concluding statement relative to this particular undertaking. May God grant all of His children the grace and wisdom to heed his words:

It is by Puritan standards that our stature should be measured, and our shortcomings detected, for those are the standards of the Bible. The pioneers of the Evangelical Revival in Britain and the Great Awakening in New England knew this well, and read, thought, prayed, spoke, and acted accordingly. The fact that today's evangelicals are so largely out of touch with their own history, and so cannot discern how small and dry and lightweight and superficial and childish they are compared to those from whom they take their name, is one of the more glaring of our current shortcomings, all the more so for going constantly unnoticed. (pp. 81-82)

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