the Puritan Era

*Latter 16TH & 17Th Centuries*

WHO WERE THEY? An overview of the entire Puritan era if we are to understand and by motivated by men who were extraordinarily blessed by God’s grace and His Word like Rutherford, Owen, and Bunyan. We need to grasp Christian climate in which all Puritan believers lived. J. I. Packer wrote, “They are the California red woods in the forest of Christianity - giants who grew the tallest, and who set their roots down the deepest, bearing fruit for the glory of God.”

The Puritans were inside the Church of England. They wanted to purify the Church from within. They possessed an unwavering loyalty to the authority of God’s Word. Though, as we shall see in the next session, they were thrown out of the Church of England for their efforts to purify it.

There has probably never been an era so saturated with the Word of God! For example, C. H. Spurgeon wrote regarding John Bunyan, “Cut him anywhere, and he bleeds Bibline” Their speech, their life, their walk bled Scripture. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, “The very greatness of the men themselves as men of God demands our attention. . . . All that is good in modern Evangelicalism finds its fruits in Puritanism.”

They were the generation that followed the Reformers. Their time period is the latter ½ of the 16th century and the entire 17th century. They took the Reformation to the next level standing on the shoulders of the Reformers, and in many ways reached even higher levels. The Reformers were like the icebreaker ships that tore up the frozen tundra of Rome’s false doctrine, while the Puritans took what the Reformers accomplished, and really worked it into the fabric of Church worship, family life, and how to walk with the Lord.

GOD USES KING HENRY THE VIII: To understand the Puritans, we need to go back to Henry VIII. He gave birth to the Church of England by separating the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church. During his reign, Thomas Cranmar ushered in a far more Reformed influence into the church of England with the protection of King Henry. During this time, Cranmar wrote The Book of Common Prayer which governed how the Church of England would worship God. It actually took precedence even over the Church of England’s Doctrinal Statements.

King Edward VI: King Henry VIII died. He is replaced by Edward VI who is Protestant. Under King Edward’s reign, Cranmar becomes far more outspoken re Reformed beliefs and against Catholicism. Knox becomes the Royal Chaplain appointed by King Edwards VI. He preaches throughout England. Knox becomes chief force for the Reformation in England. D. M. L. Jones calls John Knox “the 1st true Puritan within the Church of England”. Knox did not believe The Book of Common Prayer had gone far enough for the Reformed Church in England. So, Knox raises his voice. I.e. Kneeling issue which he opposed because of the practice of the Catholics who kneeled in their worship during the heretical communion services. Knox caused an amendment to be added to The Book of Prayer indicating that the act of kneeling during communion was not to be considered an act of worship. Wrote the 39 Articles of the Protestantism which still in effect today.

The rise of bloody Mary: King Edward VI dies at the age of 15. Before his death, King Edward, not wanting a Catholic to replace him on the throne of England, crafts a deal arranging for Lady Jane Grey to take his place. But Mary Tudor sways the governmental council to switch their allegiance. In 1553 she is crowned. During her 5-year reign, she has almost 300 protestants burned at the stake. Many flee to Geneva to sit under the teaching of John Calvin.

Queen Elizabeth: Mary dies at the age of 42. Elizabeth takes her place and Puritanism as a movement takes off. Elizabeth takes a compromise position re Protestantism and Catholicism. She was very tolerant of much. She rules for 45 years until 1603. During her reign, displaced Protestants in Europe return - the disciples of Calvin. They bring with them the manner of worship of the Reformed Church in Europe. Their manner of worship was simple - singing, prayer, reading of the Word, and preaching of the Word.

The characteristics of the Puritans: They were strong in the doctrines of grace, and wanted Scripture to regulate their worship service. Worship and prayer dominated their homes in the AM and PMs. Mainly taught their children at home because their children were prevented from attending the major schools. They were persecuted and despised.

King James I: He becomes the King of both Scotland and England. The reason we have the KJV is because he hated the Geneva Bible. Its footnotes indicated that believers were to give greater allegiance to God than to earthly kings. A new Bible is authorized by King James without Reformed study notes, with the intent that Protestants give King James greater allegiance since they are not following the Geneva Study notes. He wanted greater allegiance as the supreme head over the Church. He comes to the throne following his mother Mary Queen of Scotts. Crowned King of England at the young age of 13 months old. King James will become an avid opponent of the Puritans. The Puritans wrongly assumed they would have an ally in King James I, but he goes in the opposite direction of Scripture. The KJV Bible’s authorization in 1611 was counter to the Puritans.

King James does two things to infuriate the Puritans. In 1618, he has the Book of Sports passed requiring that every pastor in the Church of England on Sunday announce all the sporting events for that afternoon. Puritans were fiercely committed to the principle that Sunday is to be sanctified to the Lord. They are enraged that their pastors are now desecrating the Lord’s day by announcing all these sporting events on Sundays in the church services. Secondly, the 5 Articles of Perth is established which required the following: 1) Kneeling at the Lord’s Supper. 2) Private communion for the sick. 3) Private baptism. 4) Infant baptism, no longer than one Lord’s day after birth may be administered if baby is about to die. 5) Holy Days such as Christmas, Easter must be observed. Some of the Puritans could not tolerate this. They got on ships and came to America – the Pilgrims, 1620-1630.

Charles I: James I dies in 1625. He is succeeded by Charles I. King Charles I believed in the divine right of the King that whatever the king says is right, and that whatever legislation he wants Parliament to bring about is right. He marries a Roman Catholic, and he becomes very Catholic. He puts a man, William Laud, into power as the Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury to bring about a pro Catholic agenda. Archbishop Laud becomes the enemy of Puritanism, and demands that everyone worship in the manner that he prescribes. He was very Arminian, and very resistant to all Calvinistic doctrine. Very pro Catholic. Anti-Protestant.

The Scottish Resistance (1637). A believer named Jenny Getty picks up a stool and throws it at the preacher, which starts a strong resistance. In 1638 the Scottish National Covenant is signed indicating that “we have no head but Christ, and the King of England is not the head of this church.” They gather at Greyfriars Kirk, a place which became a symbol of the conviction of Scottish resistance to the tyranny of the King of England re how to worship God. *We ourselves need to understand that the church of Christ has always had to sail through stormy seas. Prosperity has always damaged the Church while adversity and persecution make the church strong.*

The Bishops War (1639-1640) The King of England dictates to the Archbishop of Canterbury the specific men who would serve as Bishops. The Bishops then decide who the pastors will be. Scotland is the birthplace of Presbyterianism where there are no Bishops who appoint the pastor. Instead each congregation is allowed to call their own pastor, and their churches are governed by local elders.

King Charles sends 20K troops to the Scottish border, and all of this is over Church government. After much conflict, Charles I accepts a truce which was short lived followed by a second war, and with a smaller army the Scotts defeat the English army. Charles I is forced to agree not to impose his worship upon the Church of Scotland. The King is concerned over the cost of this war, appeals to Parliament to raise taxes to pay for this war, and Parliament opposes him. So, he fires the Parliament. Replaced by a new Parliament. It is very Puritan, a pro Catholic king in conflict with a Puritan Parliament.

The English Civil Wars (1642-1651) Oliver Cromwell will champion the Puritan cause. This is the closest the Puritans will ever come to taking control of England. Military conflicts ensue. 3 civil wars take place -1642-1646. These wars are between the Catholics against the Puritans.

The Solemn League and Covenant (1643) The king of England needs support of the Scotts against the Irish. Scotland agrees to give their military support to the King if he will also allow them to worship under Presbyterianism with elder rule over the local congregations. And the king agrees.

Westminster Assembly meets (1643-1647) This is made up of largely of Puritans who come together because the Parliament called for this assembly to write a Puritan Confession of Faith, to compose a Puritan way to worship God, to guide families re how to teach children in the home, and to instruct them re the best way to worship and serve God as families.

Samuel Rutherford writes a book entitled Lex Rex – “The law is King”. It will become very influential in the birthing of America. It will give rise to The American Revolutionary War against King George III to indicate they will not have his government to rule over them. Rutherford argues for a limited government, for a strict constitution, and that the government shall be run by constitution and not by the shifting whims of a king.

Charles I is captured in (1645) He will have his dead decapitated. Driving all of this is the Puritan movement wanting no head but Christ to run the church – a desire for the law to be king, a law rooted and grounded in Biblical, moral values rather than whims of the king.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) This confession becomes the most important doctrinal statement that the church has produced in over a 1000 years.