

A PURITAN THEOLOGY

Doctrine for Life

JOEL R. BEEKE
AND
MARK JONES



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A Puritan Theology

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Puritan Theology Shaped by a Pilgrim Mentality

Puritans saw themselves as God's pilgrims traveling home, God's warriors battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and God's servants under orders to do all the good they could as they went along.

—J. I. PACKER¹

An increasing number of pastors, Christian workers, and godly young people around the world today are seeking to put the biblical, Reformed faith into practice. They are hungry to develop a biblically distinctive lifestyle that brings glory to God and builds families, churches, and nations.

At the same time, a growing number of people around the world today are embracing only part of Reformed theology. They affirm all five points of Calvinism's basic soteriology (TULIP) and teach in a Christ-centered and God-glorifying way that salvation is by grace alone, but they are clinging to a worldly style of living. That worldly living manifests itself in various ways, from participating in contemporary forms of church worship not commanded in Scripture to indulging in forms of entertainment that blatantly conflict with God's moral law, the Christian's guide for life.

Today we need to sound the call that salvation by grace goes hand in hand with godly living and the pursuit of practical holiness, without falling into the trap of legalism. Likewise, when rightly understood, the doctrines of grace stand opposed to moral indifference and to a worldly style of living that makes it difficult for the church and the world to discern who is Christian and who is not. Perhaps no other group of Christians in church history got this issue rightly balanced in a more biblical way than the Puritans.

The Puritans' entire theology and walk of life was shaped by what J. I. Packer has called a pilgrim mentality.² The Puritans saw themselves as pilgrims traveling through this world, much like the characters in John Bunyan's (1628–1688) *Pilgrim's Progress*. Pilgrims are in the world but not of the world, which involves an acute tension. On the one hand, Christians are in the world because they were created as God's image-bearers in this world. They are indigenous to this world and yet called to be salt and light in it. The Puritans believed that the gospel must be manifested by Christians in every sphere of life, in every culture, and to every people group on our planet (Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Thess. 4:11–12). Leland Ryken thus titles his helpful introductory work on

1. J. I. Packer, "A Man for All Ministries: Richard Baxter, 1615–1691," *Reformation & Revival* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 55.

2. I am indebted to an address I heard by J. I. Packer decades ago for the basic framework of this chapter and for several thoughts contained in it.

the Puritans *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*.³ In that sense, the Puritans were very much in the world and thoroughly engaged with all that happens in it.

On the other hand, Puritans believed that Christians must distance themselves from this world. This dimension of Christian living emphasizes the pilgrim status to which Scripture calls every believer (Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). Christians are called to pull away from the world's culture and live antithetically to it (2 Cor. 6:17). They are to view themselves as aliens in their own society, sometimes even in their own families (Luke 12:53; cf. Matt. 10:34–35). They are not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14), nor “have...fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:6–11). With love for God and their neighbor, they are to walk humbly and circumspectly, living as pilgrims in this world, which groans with travail because of the pervasiveness of sin (Rom. 8:23). Because of sin, believers are in perpetual conflict, fighting endless battles with the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:15–17; Rom. 7:14–25; Eph. 6:10–20).⁴

This world is a Vanity Fair, as Bunyan put it, and the Christian must pass through its gates, but as he does so, he must constantly distance himself from its ungodly influences. These ungodly influences are powerful because the Christian's flesh naturally craves what is worldly, and Satan entices him with its pleasures. As pilgrims, Christians must live for God's glory, hastening on to the celestial city and looking for the coming of Christ's kingdom (Heb. 11:13–16).

As a diamond shows various facets of its beauty when it is turned in the light, so the Puritans' pilgrim mentality shines with various facets. We will examine six facets of the pilgrim mentality. True, no man, Puritan or otherwise, can live up to all these ideals, but, nonetheless, the ideal walk of the Puritans gives us a target on which to set our sights in our Christian walk today.

Facet 1: Biblical Outlook

A biblical outlook is living as determined by the Word of God. The Puritans were people of Holy Scripture, which they viewed as the only living book. They loved, lived, and breathed Scripture, relishing the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word.⁵ They regarded the sixty-six books of Scripture as the library of the Holy Spirit that was graciously bequeathed to them. They viewed Scripture as God speaking to them as a father speaks to his children. They saw the Word as truth they could trust in and rest upon for all eternity. They saw it empowered by the Spirit to renew their minds and transform their lives.

The Puritans read, heard, and sang the Word with delight and encouraged others to do the same. Richard Greenham (c. 1542–1594) suggested eight ways to read Scripture: with diligence, wisdom, preparation, meditation, conference [fellowship with other believers], faith, practice, and prayer.⁶ Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) provided numerous guidelines on listening to the

3. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

4. Cf. Jeffrey Volkmer, “The Indigenous Pilgrim Principle: A Theological Consideration of the Christian, the Church, and Politics,” *Bible.org*, <http://bible.org/article/indigenous-pilgrim-principle-theological-consideration-christian-church-and-politics>, accessed June 10, 2010.

5. Parts of this section are drawn from Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 9–14, and Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning, “The Transforming Power of Scripture,” in *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position of the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 221–76.

6. Richard Greenham, “A Profitable Treatise, Containing a Direction for the Reading and Understanding of the Holy Scriptures,” in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ, M. Richard Greenham*, ed. H.[enry] H[olland] (1599; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1973), 389–97. Cf. Thomas Watson, *How We May Read the Scriptures with Most Spiritual Profit*, in *Heaven Taken by Storm: Showing the Holy Violence a Christian Is to Put Forth in the Pursuit after Glory*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (1669; repr., Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 113–29.

Word. Come to the Word with a holy appetite and a teachable heart, he said. Sit under the Word attentively, receive it with meekness, and mingle it with faith. Then retain the Word, pray over it, practice it, and speak to others about it.⁷ "Dreadful is the case of those who are loaded with sermons to hell," Watson warned. By contrast, those who respond to Scripture as a "love letter sent to you from God" will experience its warming, transforming power.⁸

Feed upon the Word, the Puritan preacher John Cotton (1585–1652) told his congregation.⁹ The preface to the Geneva Bible contains similar advice, saying the Bible is "the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Satan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God's face, the testimony of his favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls."¹⁰

The Puritans urged people to become Word-centered in faith and practice. They regarded the Bible as an authoritative and trustworthy guide for testing religious truth, for guidance in matters of morality, for determining the form of the church's worship and government, and for help in every kind of spiritual trial.¹¹ "We should set the Word of God always before us like a rule, and believe nothing but that which it teacheth, love nothing but that which it prescribeth, hate nothing but that which it forbiddeth, do nothing but that which it commandeth," said Henry Smith (1560–1591) to his congregation.¹² And John Flavel (1628–1691) wrote, "The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying."¹³

Puritan preachers set the example for this outlook on life by grounding their messages in God's Word. "The faithful Minister, like unto Christ, [is] one that preacheth nothing but the word of God," said Edward Dering (c. 1540–1576).¹⁴ John Owen (1616–1683) agreed: "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word."¹⁵ Millar Maclure noted, "For the Puritans, the sermon is not just hinged to Scripture; it quite literally exists inside the Word of God; the text is not in the sermon, but the sermon is in the text.... Put summarily, listening to a sermon is being in the Bible."¹⁶

A typical page of a Puritan sermon contains five to ten citations of biblical texts and about a dozen references to texts. Puritan preachers were conversant with their Bibles; they memorized hundreds, if not thousands, of texts. They knew what Scripture to cite for nearly any concern. "Long and personal familiarity with the application of Scripture was a key element in the Puritan ministerial makeup," Sinclair Ferguson wrote. "They pondered the riches of revealed truth the way a gemologist patiently examines the many faces of a diamond."¹⁷ Then Puritans used Scripture

7. Watson, *How We May Read the Scriptures*, in *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 16–18, and Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 377–79.

8. Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 379. "There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell." John Preston, *A Pattern of Wholesome Words*, quoted in Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1967), 46.

9. John Cotton, *Christ the Fountain of Life* (London: Robert Ibbitson, 1651), 134.

10. *Geneva Bible* (1599; repr., Ozark, Mo.: L. L. Brown, 1990), 3.

11. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 142.

12. Henry Smith, "Food for New-Born Babies," in *The Works of Henry Smith*, ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 1:494.

13. Cited in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), 49.

14. Edward Dering, *M. Derings Workes* (1597; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1972), 456.

15. John Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1853; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 16:74.

16. Millar Maclure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons, 1534–1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 165.

17. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Evangelical Ministry: The Puritan Contribution," in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1998), 267.

wisely, bringing cited texts to bear on the doctrine or case of conscience¹⁸ at hand, all based on sound hermeneutical principles.¹⁹

Puritan preachers, for the most part, were well-grounded in biblical languages and classical learning. But they were also convinced of the need to be “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:23). They were persuaded that the Holy Spirit worked through Scripture to bring truth home to sinners. The very thought patterns of the Puritans were steeped in the phraseology of the Bible.

If we are prone to be proud of our Bible knowledge, we should open a volume by John Owen, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), or Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), noting how some obscure passage in Nahum is quoted along with a familiar passage from John, both of which perfectly illustrate the point the writer is making, then compare our knowledge to theirs. How can we explain this marvelous grasp of Scripture other than that these divines were *studied ministers of the Word*? These men studied their Bibles daily, falling to their knees as God’s Spirit burned the Word into their hearts. Then, as they wrote or preached their evangelistic messages, one Scripture passage after another would come to mind.

Our efforts to live to God’s glory must be similarly grounded in the Bible. We must search the Scriptures more frequently and love the Word of God more fervently. As we think, speak, and act more biblically, our messages will become more authoritative, our conversation more fruitful, our witness more effective, and our lifestyle more distinctive.

Our problem today is that our thinking is not grounded in Scripture. A mindless Christianity can only produce a spineless and carnal Christianity. Either through ignorance of Scripture or through twisting Scripture to suit our pleasure, we have lost our antithetical convictions regarding the ungodly world around us. Thus churches can without shame justify ordaining female ministers or show leniency to homosexual practice and a host of other evils, despite the clear testimony of the Scriptures to the contrary. Recently when someone was approached about a sin in which he was engaging, he responded, “Well, the way I look at it, everyone disagrees about what the Bible really says, so I’m going to keep doing what I’m doing because I feel it is all right.”

Today, it is not uncommon to hear a self-professing Christian begin a sentence this way: “Well, I know this is wrong, but....” An elder in a Reformed church said to me with a laugh after he had stared at an attractive young woman, “My wife told me that it was OK to look as long as I don’t touch.” He said this without a twinge of guilt or recollection of Jesus’ warning that he who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart (Matt. 5:28). Worse yet, a newly retired evangelical minister whom I was sitting next to on a plane said to me, “The way I figure is that I gave my entire life to the Lord and His church, so now I’m going to live the rest of it for me.”

The Puritans would be aghast at such statements, but I fear that many of us read them without abhorrence, for unbiblical secularism that values self-affirmation rather than self-denial has got its foothold among us. This came home to me last month when I read Jeremiah Burroughs’s (c. 1600–1646) work on Moses’ choice and self-denial.²⁰ How I wish every Christian today would

18. E.g., William Perkins, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist. His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: “A Discourse of Conscience” and “The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience,”* ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraaf, 1966). These works earned Perkins the title of “the father of Puritan casuistry.”

19. See J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 81–105; Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 143–49, 154; Thomas D. Lea, “The Hermeneutics of the Puritans,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 2 (1996): 271–84.

20. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Moses’ Self-Denial* (repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

read this book, repent of his sin, and plead with God for mercy and strength to live a godly life-style. I fear that the Puritan view of self-denial and our modern view are worlds apart.

What about you, friend? Are you serious about living a distinctively godly, biblical lifestyle that calls for self-denial? When is the last time you denied yourself something you wanted to do because you knew the Bible did not give you sanction for it? Do you daily deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24), or are you the double-minded person, unstable in your ways, that James describes (1:8), because you are trying to live both as a Christian and as a worldling?

Facet 2: Pietist Outlook

The second facet of Puritan pilgrim mentality is its *pietist* outlook.²¹ A *pietist* sees personal holiness in our relationships to God and man, both in the church and in the community around him, as his primary concern. In this sense, the Puritans were pietists.

The word *piety* has become a pejorative term today. Classifying someone as “pietistic” most often connotes excessive religiosity, self-righteousness, or a holier-than-thou attitude. The etymology of the word *piety*, however, is more positive. The Old Testament term for this word means “the fear of the Lord,” and its equivalent in the New Testament, *eusebeia*, means “reverence for God” and “godliness.” The Latin term for piety (*pietas*) indicates conscientiousness and scrupulousness with regard to one’s duty to God, to family, and to the fatherland (*patria*). As such, *pietas* is rooted in love and shows itself in loyalty, kindness, honesty, and compassion. The

21. I am using “pietist” in a generic way here. The term *pietist*, much like the term *puritan*, may be properly applied to more theologians than is sometimes done, provided we use the term *pietist* with a lowercase “p,” rather than *Pietist*, with an uppercase “P” which refers to members of the historical movement of Pietism that developed in Germany. See Joel R. Beeke, *Piety: The Heartbeat of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming); and Carter Lindberg, ed., *The Pietist Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). For a succinct summary of the similarities and differences between German Pietism, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Further Reformation, see Joel R. Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 288–93. Cf. Horst Weigelt, “Interpretations of Pietism in the Research of Contemporary German Church Historians,” *Church History* 39 (1970): 236–41.

The roots of German Pietism have been variously designated. Heinrich Schmid believed it to be largely confined to the Lutheran church (*Die Geschichte des Pietismus* [Nördlingen: Beck, 1863]). Others viewed it as a renaissance of medieval mysticism (Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 3 vols. [Bonn: Marcus, 1880]; Ronald R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism* [Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1974]). Most scholars agree, however, that German Pietism has its roots in English Puritanism and/or the Dutch Further Reformation. Consult Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879); August Lang, *Puritanismus und Piëtismus: Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung von M. Butzer bis zum methodismus* (Ansbach: Brugel, 1941); F. Ernest Stoefler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973); Edgar C. McKenzie, “British Devotional Literature and the Rise of German Pietism,” 2 vols. (PhD diss., St. Mary’s College, University of St. Andrews, 1984); Peter Damrau, *The Reception of English Puritan Literature in Germany* (London: Many Publishing, 2006). Dale Brown provides a simple summary of this school of thought: “By the age of fourteen Spener had read Lewis Bayly’s *Praxis Pietatis* (“Practice of Piety”) as well as other English Puritan devotional works by Dyke, Sonthom, and Baxter. Such Puritan literature, focusing on the conscience, the scrutinization of daily life, and the formulation of rules of living, was eagerly received in Pietist circles. Pietistic manifestations emerged in seventeenth-century Holland through Teellinck and his mysticism, Voet[ius] and his disciplined conventicles which spawned the movement called Precisianism, Koch [Cocceius] and his covenant biblical theology, Lodensteyn and his more charismatic conventicles, and Labadie (who had a profound influence on young Spener) and his radical and separatist tendencies. The impact of these Dutch reform activities spilled over onto German terrain, and historians have confirmed the similarity of the Dutch experience to what was to occur later in Germany by attaching the name Reformed Pietism to the movement.” Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 17–18.

German word (*fromm*) signifies “godly and devout” or “gentle, harmless, and simple.” The English word implies pity and compassion.²²

The sixteenth-century Reformers, most notably John Calvin, would be shocked to see how poorly piety is regarded today, even among those who profess to be Reformed. For Calvin, piety involves developing right attitudes to God. It flows out of theology and includes heartfelt worship, saving faith, filial fear, prayerful submission, and reverential love.²³ Knowing who God is (theology proper) includes right attitudes toward God and doing what He wants (piety). Calvin connected theology and piety, stating, “I call ‘piety’ that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces.”²⁴ Calvin said piety embraces every aspect of one’s life. He wrote, “The whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness.”²⁵ This same concern for pious living is reflected in the subtitle of Calvin’s first edition of the *Institutes*: “Embracing almost the whole sum of piety, & whatever is necessary to know of the doctrine of salvation: A work most worthy to be read by all persons zealous for piety.”²⁶

For Calvin and his successors—the Protestant scholastics, the English Puritans, the Dutch Further Reformation divines, and, to some extent, the German Pietists—theology and practice were inseparably wed. Reformed theologians viewed piety as the heartbeat of their theology and of godly living. This was particularly true of the Puritans. For example, William Ames (1576–1633), a renowned Puritan who authored a classic book titled *The Marrow of Theology*, defined theology as “the doctrine or teaching [*doctrina*] of living to God.”²⁷ For Ames, theology was a divine-human encounter that is not merely speculative but culminates in a practical end—the alignment of the human will with the will of a holy God.²⁸ Ames went on to say that everything in the study of theology is related to practical godly living. He said, “This practice of life is so perfectly reflected

22. This paragraph is adapted from Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 9.

23. For Calvin on piety, see Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald C. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125–52, and “*The Soul of Life*”: *The Piety of John Calvin*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009); Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974), 100–101; Sou-Young Lee, “Calvin’s Understanding of *Pietas*,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, ed. W. H. Neuser and B. G. Armstrong (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Studies, 1997), 226–33; H. W. Simpson, “*Pietas* in the *Institutes* of Calvin,” in *Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984), 179–91.

24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.9.

25. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.2 (emphasis added).

26. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). The original Latin title reads: *Christianae religionis institutio total fere pietatis summam et quidquid est in doctrina salutis cognitu necessarium complectens, omnibus pietatis studiosis lectu dignissimum opus ac recens editum* (Joannis Calvinii opera selecta, ed. Peter Barth, Wilhelm Niesel, and Dora Scheuner [Munich: C. Kaiser, 1926–52], 1:19). From 1539 on, the title was simply *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, but “zeal for piety” continued to be a primary goal of Calvin’s work. See Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 106–7.

27. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (1629, 3rd ed.; repr., Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 1.1.1. For the Latin, see Guilielmum Amesium, *Medulla s.s., theologiae: Ex sacris literis, earumque interpretibus, extracta, & methodice disposita per, Editio Quarta* (London: Apud Robertum Allotium, 1630). For a biographical sketch of William Ames and a summary of his classic, see Joel R. Beeke and Jan van Vliet, “*The Marrow of Theology* by William Ames,” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 52–65. Cf. Jan van Vliet, “William Ames: Marrow of the Theology and Piety of the Reformed Tradition” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002).

28. Ames, *Marrow*, 1.1.9–13.

in theology that there is no precept of universal truth relevant to living well in domestic morality, political life, or lawmaking which does not rightly pertain to theology.”²⁹

The Puritans used a number of means to promote piety. These include (1) encouraging Word-focused, doctrinal, experiential, and soul-saving preaching; (2) reading and searching the Scriptures; (3) meditating on biblical truths and duties; (4) engaging frequently and at length in fervent prayer; (5) communing with the saints, particularly through conventicles or spiritual fellowships; (6) emphasizing continuing repentance; (7) cultivating an inward devotional life through daily devotions and the means of grace; (8) singing psalms; (9) monitoring and making diligent use of the Lord’s Supper; (10) obeying the Decalogue out of gratitude to God; (11) accenting the invisible church more than the visible; (12) maintaining family worship; (13) catechizing the laity; (14) publishing sermons and other edifying literature; (15) stressing theological education for clergy; (16) keeping the Sabbath by dedicating the entire day to God; and (17) keeping journals or spiritual diaries.³⁰

At its heart, Reformed and Puritan theology is pietistic; the concern of Reformation theology is as practical as it is doctrinal. As the majority of the orthodox divines affirm, theology is partly theoretical, partly practical (*partim partim*);³¹ the head and heart are necessary corollaries of each other. For Calvin and the Puritans, reformation of the church involved the reform of piety, or spirituality, as much as a reform of theology. As Matthew Poole (1624–1679) wrote, biblical doctrine is that truth “which is productive of a godly life, lying in the true worship of God, and a universal obedience to the Divine will.”³² The spirituality that was cloistered behind monastery walls for many centuries reduced piety to celibate, ascetic, and penitential devotion. Reformed theologians, however, helped Christians to understand that true spirituality flows from its principal source, Jesus Christ. The Christian’s actions in the family, field, workshop, and marketplace—in short, the entire scope of life—are to be a grateful, pious reflection of the grace found in Jesus Christ.

This dual emphasis of nurturing the mind and the soul is sorely needed today. On one hand, we confront the problem of dry, Reformed orthodoxy, which correctly teaches doctrine but lacks emphasis on vibrant, godly living. The result is that people bow before the doctrine of God without yearning for a vital, spiritual union with the God of doctrine. On the other hand, Pentecostal and charismatic Christians propose emotionalism in protesting a formal, lifeless Christianity, but this emotionalism is not solidly rooted in Scripture. The result is that people put human feeling above the triune God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. The genius of genuine Reformed piety is that it marries theology and piety so that head, heart, and hand motivate one another to live for God’s glory and our neighbor’s well-being.

Piety understood in this sense is not something to be despised or shunned; rather, we are called to promote it in the Reformation teaching of holy, dependent, loving, and godly living. Being called “pious” or “pietistic” in its true sense is a compliment! If we think otherwise, we need

29. Ames, *Marrow*, 1.1.12.

30. For an explanation of many of these marks, see Brown, *Understanding Pietism* and Stoeffler, *German Pietism*.

31. For a representation of the *partim partim* construction, see Johannes Wollebius’s *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, translated as *The Abridgment of Christian Divinity*, trans. Alexander Ross, 3rd ed. (1626; repr., London: T. Mabb for Joseph Nevill, 1660), 1.29.10, where he wrote, “Faith that is not united to firm trust, is no better than historical faith. The papists teach that faith is only in the intellect, not in the will and the heart. Scripture expressly declares the contrary: ‘With the heart man believes unto justification’ (Rom 10:10).”

32. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 3:800 (on Titus 1:1). Poole’s much fuller Latin *Synopsis* comments on the biblical phrase “*et agnitionem veritatis quae est secundum pietatem*” (Titus 1:1), by citing Piscator, “*cujus finis ac fructus est pietas*.” Matthaeo Polo [Matthew Poole], *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae* (Francofurti: Balthasaris Christophori Wustii, 1679), 5:1082.

to reconsider our definition of piety. Does our definition stem from its proper use in Scripture or from its improper application in radical Pietism and in much of contemporary society? Godliness, spirituality, or piety is not a means to an end (i.e., eternal, felicitous life), but an expression of this life merited by Jesus Christ. For this reason, the cultivation of piety is preeminently connected to the means of grace. In short, piety means experiencing sanctification as a divine, gracious work of renewal expressed in repentance and righteousness, which progresses through conflict and adversity in a Christ-like manner for all of a believer's life, anticipating the day when piety will be perfected in eternal sanctification in heaven.

Facet 3: Churchly Outlook

The Puritans embraced what Packer calls a *churchly* outlook. They taught that the true church is the invisible company of the redeemed, with Christ as its head. The church is a spiritual reality rather than an institutional, hierarchical, or physical structure. That is one reason the Puritans called their church buildings "meeting houses," so as "to divert attention from the physical place to the spiritual activities that were the true core of church worship."³³ For the Puritans, this implied voluntary church membership rather than the enforced uniformity of a state church.

The Puritans had great respect for the local church and its fellowship. James Ussher (1581–1656), whose writings strongly influenced the Westminster Standards, wrote that God makes His church visible on earth in "particular congregations" to which "all that seek for salvation must gladly join themselves."³⁴ Paul's epistle to the Ephesians abundantly justifies the Puritan conviction that no Christian is called to be a lone ranger for God. We are born again into a church family; we were made for fellowship, and we are to live in fellowship. Believers are to identify with the church and become part of the church, bending their prayers and efforts to advancing the well-being of the church in every way, for the church is the center of the purposes of God. However much the gospel makes an individual aware that he must personally deal with God and that no one can do it for him, the gospel does not turn someone into an individualist who goes off to do his own thing, oblivious to whether the rest of God's people know or care.

The Puritans were churchmen, and so they were concerned that God be glorified in the church's worship. From the beginning of the Puritan movement, their consciences were most vigorous in protesting against corruptions in public worship. The Puritans wanted the church's worship to be ordered by Scripture just as they wanted all of life to be ordered by Scripture. This became a problem because the Puritans' understanding of Bible-ordered worship did not harmonize with the legally established worship pattern of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer.

Those who compiled the Prayer Book supported Luther, Melancthon, and Bucer in their view about the *adiaphora*, or "things indifferent." This view taught that while everything the Bible prescribes for worship must be present, additional features not prescribed by Scripture but which have proved their value as furthering reverence, godliness, and edification should be retained. On that basis, the Prayer Book retained four ceremonial elements to which the Puritans objected: the wearing of the surplice (special liturgical clothing of priests), kneeling to receive Holy Communion (a remnant of medieval worship of the bread and cup), the giving of the wedding ring (as a sign of a Roman Catholic sacrament), and the tracing of the sign of the cross on the forehead of a

33. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 117.

34. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity*, ed. Michael Nevarr (1648; repr., Birmingham, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 358 (43rd head).

person on whom the water is poured in baptism.³⁵ The Puritan understanding of biblical authority in relation to worship did not permit the continuance of such *adiaphora*, since none of these things were commanded in the Word of God.

So the Puritan conviction already in the 1560s and 1570s was that by retaining these ceremonies, the Book of Common Prayer was corrupting worship by adding to God's Word. The Puritans said these things must be eliminated from our worship, or it is not true worship according to God's Word, and we cannot expect God to be pleased with it. The goal of worship must be to please God, not ourselves. John Owen wrote, "The worship of God is not of man's finding out.... It is not taught by human wisdom, nor is it attainable by human industry; but by the wisdom and revelation of the Spirit of God. It is every way divine and heavenly in its rise, in its discovery; and so becoming the greatness and holiness of God. For what doth please God, God himself is the sole judge."³⁶ The Puritan stance, which came to be called the regulative principle of worship, was that nothing that is not explicitly commanded or sanctioned by example in the New Testament should be allowed in Christian worship.³⁷ The regulative principle of worship was derived from the basic Reformed understanding of the second commandment, "that we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 96).

Whether in Puritan times or today, those who adhere to the regulative principle believe that God is offended by unauthorized, man-made additions to His worship. The royalty of Christ is violated, and His laws are impeached.³⁸ The Puritans believed that these additions are sinful and irreverent, suggesting that Scripture is not sufficient. They viewed these matters the way many evangelicals view certain peoples' claims concerning prophecy—that they impugn the sufficiency of Scripture and are now out of place because the canon has been closed.

We can learn much from the Puritans, especially when so many churches today give scant attention to purity in worship and put all their emphasis on what pleases people rather than God. The Puritans did precisely the opposite. Their goal was to please God through holy worship. The question was never, "What do I want in worship?" but always, "What does God want in worship?"

In all of church life, the Puritans aimed for purity: purity of worship, purity of doctrine, purity of soul experience (meaning experience grounded in Scripture and the church's sound doctrine), purity of government and discipline, purity in dedicating the entire Lord's Day to God's service, and purity of life itself as the fruit of worship. They aimed for a pure church with a pure doctrine, a pure pattern of worship, and pure lives in its adherents. Their goal was individual holiness and church holiness that flowed out of the orthodoxy of doctrine and life. They had a comprehensive view of what God requires of us and what we must yield to Him.

Puritans are known for their comprehensive churchly outlook about what is right and what we should aim for as we seek to honor God. Today the church is full of people who have been so preoccupied with one thing that they forget the importance of another. The Puritans did not

35. Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (repr., New York: Harper & Bros., 1843), 1:107.

36. John Owen, "The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1853; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 9:72.

37. Owen, "Gospel Worship," in *Works*, 9:71. Cf. Daniel R. Hyde, "'Of Great Importance and of High Concernment': The Liturgical Theology of John Owen (1616–1683)" (ThM thesis, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2010).

38. Christopher J. L. Bennett, "Worship among the Puritans: The Regulative Principle," in *Spiritual Worship: Being Papers Read at the 1985 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1986), 20.

forget the importance of anything in their churchly outlook; *everything* was important. We can learn much from this, for we cannot afford to be unconcerned about any dimensions of purity and rightness.

Facet 4: Warfaring Outlook

The church on earth is a militant church. A battle rages within each believer's soul. This too is part of the life of a pilgrim, the Puritans taught. The Puritans saw the inner life as a field of conflict and tension on which the most momentous warfare is happening. Ussher wrote that "spiritual warfare" is

the daily exercise of our spiritual strength, and armour, against all adversaries, with assured confidence of victory. For the state of the faithful in this life is such, that they are sure in Christ, and yet fight against sin: there being joined with repentance a continual fighting against and struggling against the assaults of man's own flesh, against the motions of the Devil, and enticements of the world.³⁹

The Puritans cited Romans 7:14–25, which they believed describes the holy war that rages within believers.⁴⁰ Paul's inner life contained ongoing strife between his new nature and the remains of his old nature.

John Owen helps us understand this. Owen said that as believers we experience sin like a law. When we will to do good, sin is always "present" (Rom. 7:21); it is always at our elbow. Owen draws here upon the Greek word *parakeimai*, which infers that sin is always at hand and acts like an unwelcome foreigner who walks into our home to nag us and plague us.⁴¹

This inclination to do evil is like a law because it won't go away. It argues against the good law placed within the soul from the moment of regeneration. The good law wants to do what is right and good. But as soon as we proceed on a right course, this evil law objects to what we are doing. Paul says that it wars "against the law of my mind" (Rom. 7:23).

The evil law knows no boundaries. There seems to be no limit to the evil suggestions that it persuasively puts forward. This evil law will not be satisfied until it has made us its prisoner. It wants all of us at any price. Today, we sometimes read about the black market sale of various human body parts. Well, Satan owns the blackest market, and he works through the law of our natural inclination, seeking to take possession of our eyes, our hands, our feet, our affections, our will, and our heart at any price.

Our battle against Satan and his hosts of devils is fierce. William Gurnall (1616–1679) reminded us that Satan's army is aggressive, malignant, cruel, and too powerful for us to fight in our own strength, yet we cannot compromise with Satan or surrender to him, nor need we be dismayed if we are in Christ.⁴² We must engage ourselves in this spiritual battle. We must wrestle against Satan's invisible army in hand-to-hand spiritual combat to the death.⁴³ In this battle, Satan enlists our old nature as his ally and also the enticing world, which, together with Satan, seeks to satisfy the cravings of our old nature to move forward rather than upward. Ultimately, Satan

39. Ussher, *A Body of Divinity*, 301 (32nd head).

40. Cf. John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, Etc.*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1853; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 6:2–322.

41. Owen, *Mortification of Sin*, in *Works*, 6:161–69.

42. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour, Two Volumes in One* (1662–1665; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 1:140–48.

43. Joel R. Beeke, *Striving against Satan* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004), 13–15.

wants us to succumb to worldliness, which is human nature minus God, or practical atheism. The people of this world are controlled by worldly pursuits such as the quest for pleasure, profit, and position. A worldly person yields to the spirit of fallen mankind, which is the spirit of self-seeking and self-indulgence without regard for God.⁴⁴ Through Satan, our old nature, and the world, which are often called “the triple-headed enemy” by the Puritans, Satan seeks to take us down through the law of sin.

Paul says these two laws within believers are always waging war against each other. John Bunyan wrote *The Holy War* to depict the holy struggle that goes on within the soul of the true believer by means of the eye-gate and ear-gate and other human senses.⁴⁵

As true believers, we find rest and peace with God in Jesus Christ through the atonement. Paul says, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). But we must not make peace with sin. Rather, we experience the clash of two great armies fighting within us. On one side, Satan battles to bring our flesh and its lusts under his command; on the other, the Holy Spirit commands the new principle of life planted in our heart. So the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit strives against the flesh.

The Christian life is not a middle way between extremes but a narrow way between precipices. It involves living by faith through self-denial and waging a holy war in the midst of a beckoning yet hostile world. And what a war it is, for the world does not fight fairly or cleanly, does not agree to cease-fires, and does not sign peace treaties.⁴⁶

Sadly, we do not always triumph in this strife. The expression that Paul uses in Romans 7:23—“bringing me under captivity”—actually means in the original Greek, “makes and takes me prisoner.” We believe that by the outpouring of God’s grace in our souls, the Holy Spirit subdues our old natures. During the enjoyment of Christ’s tender, saving presence, we may even feel as if we have overcome sin and worldliness. Yet later, we find that our spiritual enemies—the world, Satan, and our flesh—rear their ugly heads again, and the battle once again becomes critical.

The remains of our old nature resemble a volcano. Sometimes they lie dormant like a volcano, sending up only a small waft of smoke. But fire still resides within the volcano and, if not restrained by grace, may break out again. Then we experience once more the power of that contrary law in our members that brings us captive to the law of sin within us. When we would be holy, unholiness breaks out. When we would be heavenly minded, earthly-mindedness drags us down.

Do you, too, experience defeat in the battle against our triple-headed enemy? Does this make you confess with Paul in Romans 7:19, “For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do”? This dilemma makes us cry out with Paul, “O wretched man that I am!” (v. 24).

Do not misread Paul’s words. No one in this world is as happy as true believers. God is our portion forever; we have found Christ and rest in His atonement. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Our sins are forgiven; our guilt purged. We have the hope of eternal glory before us. Still, we often cry: “O wretched man that I am!”

The Puritans said that war with sin is a healthy sign. When John Bradford (1510–1555) wrote a letter shortly before his death to a fellow prisoner, he signed off with these words: “the most miserable, sinful, hard-hearted, and unthankful sinner.” A few days later he joyfully died as a martyr in Christ. Can you say this with Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661): “This body of sin and

44. Joel R. Beeke, *Overcoming the World: Grace to Win the Daily Battle* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 15–16.

45. John Bunyan, *The Holy War* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007).

46. Beeke, *Overcoming the World*, 14.

corruption embittereth and poisoneth our enjoyments—oh, that I were home where I shall sin no more!”⁴⁷

Happily, the Puritans found an answer to this distressful warfare, which is the *Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul writes, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:25a). Paul and the Puritans saw that by faith in Christ alone believers are more than conquerors over sin, even though the warfare continues until they die. They saw that Christ has already won the battle on the cross and through the empty tomb. They saw that they were fighting a winning battle in His strength, and that though they might lose skirmishes along the way, they would ultimately win the war in the strength of Christ.

Paul speaks with full assurance. Christ has already defeated sin on the cross and has blotted out the handwriting of the law against us. Though sin will continue to do its damage and will at times rob us of inward peace by disturbing our consciences, Christ will have the final victory. Sin may take heaven temporarily out of the soul, but sin cannot keep the soul of the believer out of heaven, because of Jesus, who is our wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). In Christ’s strength, the believer finds strength to put on the whole armor of God described in Ephesians 6:10–20, to fight the good fight of faith. The Christian fights against the devil, the world, and his old nature by looking to Jesus and using the armor of His provision to stay upright as he progresses from this world to the next.

In self-examination, which the Puritans maintained far more diligently than we are prone to do, they were very conscious of the ups and downs of the inner life. They wrote spiritual journals in which they recorded their walk with God to evaluate themselves. They used their journals as private confessionals to help them express thoughts to God and to themselves that they might otherwise have buried. The Puritans believed that journaling could assist them in meditating, praying, remembering the Lord’s works and faithfulness, monitoring their goals and priorities, and maintaining other spiritual disciplines.⁴⁸ They did not write journals to show to others; they wrote them so that they might reread them to discern whether they were progressing or failing to progress in their walk with God. To learn more about Puritan journals, you might look at the reprinted journal of Richard Rogers in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, edited by Marshall Knappen,⁴⁹ or at the book by Owen Watkins titled *The Puritan Experience*,⁵⁰ which explains what is revealed by a study of these journals. You might find it very instructive to compare Puritan journaling with the modern equivalent of writing a diary.

Facet 5: Methodical Outlook

Puritan piety, with its passion for a distinctive, disciplined lifestyle, represents something like the monastic ideal of the ordered life when removed from the monastery and plunked down in public life. The word *methodical* as a description of holiness is a Puritan word.⁵¹ The Puritans believed that the *method* of getting everything straight and organized in the proper way was vital to succeed in any enterprise. Certainly, it was true of the Christian life.

47. Alexander Whyte, *Samuel Rutherford and Some of His Correspondents* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1894), 75.

48. Cf. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 196–210.

49. Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*.

50. Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken, 1972).

51. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 330–31. See, e.g., John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life: A Display of Christ in His Essential And Mediatorial Glory*, in *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 1:21–23.

It is misleading, of course, to describe the Puritans as reformed monks because they lived in the world, enjoyed God's creation, married, raised families, and saw this as part of their Christian calling. Yet their approach to the structure of personal Christian living emphasizing order, method, planning, and the wise use of time does invite comparison with the ideals of the monastery and its rules. There is also something methodical about the Puritans and their passion for holiness. Lewis Bayly's (c. 1575–1631) *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian Walk, That He May Please God* is one example of this.⁵² Bayly tells you what to meditate about as you rise from your bed, as you get dressed, then as you have breakfast, and so on throughout the day.

To most of us in a free-spirited day, this methodical aspect of Puritan living seems over the top. Perhaps in some cases it was. But we can learn from the Puritans that our lives ought to be more disciplined than they are.

Before condemning the Puritans for their methodical living, let us consider that their lifestyle practice of incorporating spiritual disciplines is something that we sorely need to learn. Recently, I heard a professor from a conservative Reformed seminary tell his Sunday school class that if they did not maintain their daily devotions, they should not worry about it, for maintaining daily spiritual disciplines was not significant. The only significant thing was to worship God in His house on the first day of the week. He then went on to assure his class that they should not feel guilty about failing to pray or read their Bible or to follow other spiritual disciplines. The Puritans would rightly view such teaching as disastrous for the believer and the church.

Facet 6: Two-Worldly Outlook

The *two-worldly* Puritan view of life, which includes both this world and the world to come, is explained at great length in Richard Baxter's (1615–1691) first devotional treatise, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*. This book was a bestseller in Baxter's day as well as a major contributing factor to the Puritans' meditation on heaven.⁵³ It was reprinted every year for ten years, despite its size of more than eight hundred pages. It became household reading in many Puritan homes. It was recognized as a first-class statement of what was basic to the Puritan view of life. That same view of life is explored in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Unlike modern Christians, the Puritans believed that you should have heaven "in your eye" the whole time you are walking on earth. For the most part, evangelical Christians today do not live that way. I believe we are poorer for it. The New Testament is constantly exhorting us to live in two-worldly terms: to keep the hope of heaven before our minds so as to keep our life on earth straight, controlled, and energized. We tend to live more like Epicureans, assuming that this life is all that we have and what we don't get now we will never get at all. Thus it is terribly important to us to find fulfillment, contentment, and satisfaction in the here and now. The thought of radical self-denial would make us miserable if we allowed ourselves to take it as our rule for existence.

We are not strong on self-denial these days; we are self-indulgent and spiritually flabby. We do not live in two-worldly terms as the New Testament exhorts us to do and as the Puritans did. They were persuaded that the joys of heaven will make amends for any losses, crosses, strains, and pains that we endure on earth if we follow God faithfully. This outlook was integral to the Puritans. I hope it becomes integral to us today.

52. Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk, That He May Please God* (1611; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997).

53. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 90.

The Puritans lived to the full in this life, but as they did so they kept an eye fixed on eternity. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote, “O God, stamp my eyeballs with eternity!”⁵⁴ How much more in our secular age should we cry out, “Stamp eternity, O God, also upon my mind and soul, my hands and feet, and the totality of my being!”

If we would be true pilgrims in this life for God, we must be active pilgrims for the life to come. It is said that some believers are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. That could not be more wrong with regard to the Puritans, who show us that we can be of no earthly use unless we are heavenly minded. I have often discovered that the more I am focused on future glory, the more zeal I have for the real well-being of those around me. When I visited the Puritan-minded Robert Murray M’Cheyne’s (1813–1843) church in Dundee, Scotland, and its adjacent cemetery, I noticed a large flat stone which, though weathered, had one word written across it. I got down on my knees to trace with my finger the word: ETERNITY. Apparently, M’Cheyne wanted every visitor to consider his eternal destiny while walking among the dead.

Friend, if you were to die today, would you be ready to enter eternity? Do not live just for this life; live for eternity as well. Remember, you must be in Christ now to fare well in eternity. You must look for Christ in this life if you would spend eternity with Christ. Hebrews 9:27–28 clearly says, “As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

Soon, Christ will execute judgment on all people. Matthew 25:46 says, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” Those who refused to respond to the winsome invitations of the gospel in this lifetime will be compelled to hear the dreadful sound of Christ’s rod. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,” says 2 Corinthians 5:11. How dreadful will it be to be cast together with Satan into hell, to be ever dying but never dead—to be ever being consumed, yet never consumed!

Unless you are in Christ on that day, God will say of you, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13). *Cast*—what a word this is! Joseph was *cast* into a pit; Paul and Silas were *cast* into an inner prison (Acts 16:23), but there is no pit or prison like hell. Jesus, the Greater Joseph, the Lion out of the tribe of Judah, will cast all unbelievers into the bottomless pit, where the fiery wrath of God and a burning conscience will forever eat away at them. Nebuchadnezzar’s burning fiery furnace would be ice compared to the heat of God’s wrath.

The city of hell has no exits, the building of hell no doors of escape, the society of hell no relationships. Hell is radical loneliness, radical forsakenness of the favor of God and men. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” asks Hebrews 2:3. J. C. Ryle said: “The saddest road to hell is that which runs under the pulpit, past the Bible, and through the midst of warnings and invitations.”⁵⁵ Make haste for your life’s sake; flee the wrath to come. Stop putting your heart into this world. What will it profit you if you gain the entire world but lose your soul? Repent and believe the gospel while it is still the day of grace and salvation.

Soon it will be too late to repent. Christ will say on the judgment day, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still” (Rev. 22:11). There will be no atheists in hell, but “*Too late*” is written across the gates of hell. Consider, friend, that the eternity

54. Gabe Phillips, “Stamp My Eyeballs with Eternity,” *Life Changers*, Feb. 24, 2010, <http://www.lifechangers.org.za/popular/stamp-my-eyeballs-with-eternity/>, accessed June 15, 2010.

55. J. C. Ryle, *Home Truths* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1860), 14.

of eternity is the hell of hell. An endless hell can no more be removed from the Bible than can an endless heaven.

We are but a heartbeat from eternity, which hangs upon the thin thread of time. Consider that if you have no vision of eternity, you have no understanding of time. Our lives are not just a journey to death; we are journeying to heaven, that eternal day that knows no sunset, or to hell, the eternal night that knows no sunrise. Which destination are you heading for? Are you a follower of Christ Jesus? If you were arrested today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Dear believers, you will receive a never-fading crown on judgment day. Your Savior will usher you into the heaven of heavens with other believers as one family. As a living member of His perfected church, He will present you as His bride without spot or wrinkle to His Father to enter glory. You will dwell forever with Christ, who will feed you and lead you to living waters. You will drink of the fountains of the triune God, praising Him for all eternity in the most holy, glorious activities, many of which are beyond imagination (1 Cor. 2:9). All that you have experienced here of God and His gracious salvation will be but shadows compared to what you will enjoy in heaven.

In heaven, every negative will disappear and every positive will be multiplied. The negative is that we no longer will battle with Satan, the tempting world, our old nature, tears and sorrow, ill health, and ill treatment from others, for all will pass away when we come to that better world. There will no more fear of temptation, of death, of falling, of bringing shame on Christ's name, or of departing from the faith.

Heaven will also be full of positives. The supreme positive will be the fulfillment of the last words of Robert Haldane (1764–1842), who saw revival in Geneva when he preached to students. He cried out repeatedly with his dying breaths, "Forever with the Lord!"⁵⁶ In that world, Christ will never be out of your sight, dear believer. He will be in your eye, before your face, and within earshot for you to talk to and to worship. He will be there to adore, to answer your questions, and to thank for what He has done for you.

Heaven will also be a place of perfect activities, such as worshiping God with praise and singing, serving God and exercising authority by reigning with Christ, fellowshiping with saints and angels, learning about God and His truth, and resting in perfect peace. Then, too, heaven will be a place of gracious reward for believers' faithfulness here below and of abundant compensation for their suffering on earth. Heaven will also be a place of perfect holiness. As Rowland Hill (1744–1833) said, "If an unholy man were to get to heaven, he would feel like a hog in a flower garden."⁵⁷ Heaven will be absolutely pure and clean. There will be no infirmity there and not one speck of dust. All evil will be walled out; all good walled in.

Finally, heaven will be a world of love. Spurgeon put it this way: "A fish can more easily drink the oceans dry than we can ever exhaust the love of God in heaven." He added: "Drink away little fish, you'll never drink it all dry!" Oh, magnificent hope; magnificent love! Edwards said God's love in heaven is an ocean without a floor and without a shore!⁵⁸ Dear pilgrim, keep your eye on the celestial city!

56. Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and His Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (New York: Robert Carter, 1853), 549.

57. Vernon J. Charlesworth, *Rowland Hill: His Life, Anecdotes, and Pulpit Sayings* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), 224.

58. Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven, A World of Love* (Amityville, N.Y.: Calvary Press, 1992), 43 (cf. <http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/Worldoflove.html>, accessed June 14, 2010).

Conclusion

The Puritan mentality was biblically based, pietistic, churchly, warfaring, methodical, and two-worldly. In these ways, the Puritans were pilgrims, heavenly visionaries who traveled through this world to a land they could see only in the Scriptures with the eyes of faith. The Puritans were strong where we are weak. Because we are biblically illiterate, stress godly piety so little, fail to cherish the church, do not oppose sin with might and main, and live undisciplined lives that consist more of trivial pursuits than traveling as pilgrims to the celestial city, we would do well to study the Puritans. They can teach us, as no other group of writers in church history, how to live a disciplined life to God's glory without falling into dead orthodoxy or deadly legalism.

May God grant that we all can say with Bunyan's pilgrim, "I am come from the City of Destruction, and am going to Mount Zion."⁵⁹

59. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1895; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 46.