

# History of the Reformation

## English Puritans

### And

## The Beginnings of Covenant Theology

- PURITANISM
  - Those in the Church of England who wished to further “purify” that church from all unbiblical (or Catholic) ceremony, ritual, and hierarchy.
  - The “Puritan period” is from 1530’s until 1688
  - But Puritanism grew to include the reformation of
    - one’s self
    - one’s family
    - one’s world.
  - It developed into a distinct attitude toward life
    - It was “experimental theology”
    - Living, experimental and devotional Calvinism
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- Leading Traits
  - Always a religious movement, relating everything to salvation, personal holiness, and bringing glory to God.
  - A strong moral consciousness of right and wrong.
  - A visionary movement dedicated to the transformation of society.
    - Politics – controlling the direction of government was an eventual cause of decline in the movement
  - A minority movement that suffered persecution.
  - An educated movement concerned with knowledge, business and politics.
    - Also an education movement
    - Everyone should be able to read God’s Word, original languages all the better
  - Above all, a Bible-centered movement.
- Benefits of Reading the Puritans
  - High respect for the Word of God
    - Reverence for the Holy Scriptures
    - What the Word says, God says
  - Pastoral focus of their writings
    - Application of theology to everyday life
    - “heartfelt knowledge of divinely revealed truths tends to holiness and deep acquaintance with Christ”
    - Theology is not just intellectual
    - Not just presenting facts about the bible, but leading them on to a living acquaintance with God in Christ
  - High view of family, both genetic and spiritual
  - All of life is to be lived *Coram Deo* (before the face of God)
- Dangers of Reading the Puritans
  - Even the Puritans must be compared with the teachings of the Scriptures
    - Must discern when Puritan teaching comes from Scripture and when it comes from theology/political opinions/etc.

- Care must be taken not to “swing the pendulum” in the direction of legalism (law-centric view of scripture)
    - Puritan Sabbatarianism
    - Condemnation of things not condemned in God’s Word
      - Drunkness is bad, therefore anyone who drinks is sinning against God
      - There is no command to celebrate Christ’s birth, therefore it is a sin to observe Christmas
      - Images are not to be worshipped, therefore it is a sin to ever portray the historical Jesus in a picture
  - Reliance on theology rather than Scripture
- Leading Doctrines Puritan Theology
    - The primacy of grace in salvation and in all benefits to people.
      - Common grace
      - Special grace
    - Conversion necessary and linked to holy living.
      - Evidenced by the fruit of godliness
    - Creation pointed to God, and providence indicated his presence everyday life.
    - “Calling” was crucial for everyone
      - The general calling to be a holy Christian
      - The particular calling by God to a life’s work or career
    - The concept of covenant
      - This denoted a relationship of mutual obligation
      - People covenanted together to form a church a family, or a state.
      - Based on God’s covenants in the Bible, but even more, on a specific theological idea called “the covenant of grace.”
      - The covenant of grace concept is one of the features of the Reformed theological system known as **Covenant Theology**.
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  - History of Covenant Theology
    - Augustine taught, with Paul, that there were two covenant heads, Adam and Christ, who represented their people.
      - 1 Cor 15:21-22 – For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive
    - Between Augustine and the Reformation, very little emphasis on covenants.
    - Zwingli, the Swiss reformer in Zurich concluded infant baptism was unscriptural, because it was thought to bring regeneration.
    - In 1522, he realized that independent churches practicing believers-only baptism would threaten the whole church-state structure.
    - Needing to retain infant baptism, he adopted a completely new hermeneutical approach to Scripture as a whole—the idea of the unity of the covenant of grace.
    - Since there was one covenant of grace, children of believers were included in that covenant just like Israelites’ children were in the Old Testament.
    - As the children of those in the covenant in the Old Testament received circumcision as the sign of the covenant, so children of believers should receive baptism.
    - He appealed to Colossians 2:10-12 to argue that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the one covenant of grace.
    - He also taught a covenant of works before the fall, and the covenant of grace after the fall.

- Covenant theology was virtually unknown before Zwingli used it to defend infant baptism.
- Other Reformed theologians began to systematize doctrine
  - Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, in his book, *The Testament or Covenant With God is One and Eternal*
  - Calvin taught it in the *Institutes*
  - Johann Cocceius, Germany, 1648, *Summary of the Doctrine Concerning the covenant and Testament*
  - Herman Witsius, the Netherlands, 1677, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*
  - William Ames, English Puritan, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 1642
  - The divines who wrote *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1647
- The Concept of Covenant theology
  - (See the Trinity Hymnal, p. 852, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VII.)
  - Man is always in covenant relationship with God (VII, I)
  - The whole of Scripture is covered by two covenants
    - The covenant of works (VII, II)
    - The covenant of grace (VII, III)
  - The promised blessing was life, which Adam was given the ability to earn by his obedience to the terms of the covenant. (VII, II and XIX, I, p. 859)
  - The content of the covenant of works was the Ten Commandments (XIX, II)
  - Adam, by his failure to obey, lost the opportunity to earn life by works. (VII, III)
  - God made a second covenant, the covenant of grace. (VII, III)
  - All other covenants are but different administrations of this one covenant of grace. (VII, V)
  - The covenant of grace is now in its final administration, the New Covenant. (VII, VI)
  - The implications of all this
    - No higher law than the Ten Commandments
    - Baptism, being the sign of the covenant, should be administered to infants.
    - The Sabbath commandment is still in force and the day has been changed to Sunday.
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- A QUESTION FOR US
  - Should we, too, live covenantally as the Puritans did?
  - Yes, but under the New Covenant, under the law of Christ!