

Modern Church History
(Part 8: English Puritanism)
(Taken mainly from B. K. Kuiper's *The Church in History*)

I. Introduction: The Church After the Reformation.

- A. The Reformation created a tremendous upheaval, not only in the church, but in government, economics, education, and culture. It took place in the sixteenth century, but throughout the seventeenth century things continued to ferment in the life of the church and state, especially in England.
- B. The Word of God preached and written had always been of first importance in the building of the church, from the preaching of Peter at Pentecost, through the golden era of preaching represented by Chrysostom and Ambrose, to the preaching of Luther and Calvin. All Christians claimed they received their teaching from the Bible, and yet they differed on many things. The primary question was what does the Bible mean? The Church of Rome developed as it did because of their faulty understanding of Scripture. The Reformers reacted as they did because their understanding differed from that of Rome. After the Reformation, the church went in four basic directions: some held to the Council of Trent, some to the confessions of historic Protestantism, some departed from these explanations of Scripture, and some gave up the Bible as the infallible Word of God.
- C. This first period of the Modern Church era sees the rise of Congregationalism, Baptists, Methodists, and Moravian Churches. It is in this time frame that Modernism also rises.

II. The English Puritans, 1558-1689.

A. The Reformation in England Continues.

- 1. One of the peculiarities of the Reformation in England was that it was more political than religious, and stressed organization more than doctrine.
- 2. Another is that the church in England continued in a state of unrest and change after the other Reformation Churches had become settled.
- 3. One of the causes was that Calvinism began to be felt more keenly in England a good while after it had in France, the Netherlands and Scotland.

B. Calvinism Influences England.

- 1. The Elizabethan Settlement of 1563 did not settle the problems in the Church of England. Many of the Protestants who had fled to Geneva during the persecutions of Bloody Mary came under the influence of Calvin. When Elizabeth succeeded Mary in 1558, they returned excited about the possibility of applying Calvin's ideas to the Church.
- 2. From the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, they cried out for a much more thoroughgoing reform. The Settlement of 1563, which included changes in doctrine (reducing the Forty-Two Articles to the famous *Thirty-Nine Articles*), worship, and government of the Church, did not satisfy them. Because they wanted a more thoroughgoing purification of the church, they were called Puritans.

C. The Puritans Desire Reform.

1. The Puritans wanted an earnest and spiritually minded pastor in every parish, who was able to preach God's Word. They demanded the abolition of the clerical dress, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, the ring ceremony at weddings, and the use of the sign of the cross at baptism. In the clerical dress they saw the claim of the clergy to powers reminiscent of the power of Catholic priests. In kneeling at the Lord's Supper they saw the adoration of the physical presence of Christ, as taught in the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation. The ring in the wedding appeared to them to treat marriage as a sacrament. The sign of the cross at baptism was a Catholic superstition.
2. Before long they went further, wanting to see elders chosen in each parish to exercise discipline, the minister chosen by the people instead of being appointed by the bishop, and the office of bishop abolished. They believed all ministers should be equal in authority. This amounted to a demand for Presbyterian church government.
3. Thomas Cartwright, professor of theology at the University of Cambridge, was the leader of the Puritan movement. In its early stages, his primary opponent was John Whitgift, through whose influence, Cartwright was removed from his professorship. Afterward he wandered and was persecuted, but he continued tirelessly to promote the cause of Presbyterian Puritanism.
4. Although the Puritans had strong objections to the Church of England, they were also strongly opposed to separation and desired to stay in the church and reform it from within rather than leave it.

D. The Separatists Leave.

1. The Separatists saw the cause of reforming the Church of England would be long and tedious at best, and hopeless at worst. They decided therefore to separate from the church, becoming known as Separatists or Dissenters.
2. They also adopted a form of church government that recognized each church as a church in itself, having no power over any other church. Their belief that each church should be independent led to their being called Congregationalists or Independents.
3. Both those Puritans who remained in the Church of England and those who separated were Calvinists. Some of these Separatists went to America and established the Plymouth Colony in 1620. They were also known as Pilgrims. Those who came nine years later to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony were Puritans.

E. The Puritans Gain the Upper Hand.

1. The Puritans were oppressed and persecuted for forty years after the death of Queen Elizabeth, but when the Long Parliament met in 1640, the Presbyterian Puritans found that they were the majority. Immediately, they set out to clean house, bringing their two chief opponents to trial – the Earl of Strafford and Archbishop Laud – both of whom were condemned and executed by beheading.

2. King Charles didn't care for this turn of events, so he decided to seize five members of Parliament who were the leaders of this opposition on a charge of high treason. Since the House of Commons refused to give them up, he decided to use military force to compel Parliament to submit. He left London and raised the royal flag at Nottingham, plunging England into civil war.
3. On the king's side were the majority of nobles and country gentlemen, called Cavaliers, because of their daring horsemanship. On Parliament's side were the shopkeepers, small farmers, and a few of high rank, called Roundheads, because they cut their hair closer to their heads (revealing its shape) to distinguish themselves from the Cavaliers who had long flowing hair.
4. At first, the war favored the king. But one of the gentlemen farmers and a colonel in Parliament's army, Oliver Cromwell, saw the trouble at once. He told Hampden, a Puritan and member of Parliament, "A set of poor tapsters and town apprentices cannot fight men of honor successfully" (Kuiper, 252). He then set out to develop an army that could win, and he did. His regiment was called Cromwell's Ironsides. It was composed exclusively of men of religion. They didn't swear or drink, and they advanced to the charge singing psalms. They were never defeated.
5. An army of twenty-one thousand men, patterned after the Ironsides, was organized, called the New Model army. Most of the soldiers were fervent, God-fearing, psalm singing Puritans. When they weren't fighting, they were studying their Bibles, praying and singing hymns.
6. The Cavaliers were no match for the New Model army and were scattered at the Battle of Naseby, June 14, 1645. The king surrendered, was tried and found guilty of being a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy, and was executed by beheading, January 30, 1649, in front of the royal palace of Whitehall in London, before a great multitude.

F. The Westminster Assembly.

1. While the war was ongoing, Parliament set about to make changes in the church. It abolished episcopacy in 1643 and called together an assembly of one hundred twenty-one clergy and thirty laymen to formulate a new creed and form of church government. This assembly was called the Westminster Assembly because it met at Westminster. It was made up of a few Episcopalians and Congregationalists, but the overwhelming majority were Presbyterian Puritans. They also invited a number of Scottish commissioners to sit in the assembly (since Scotland was helping Parliament in the war) who exercised a strong influence, but they were not entitled to vote.
2. The Assembly prepared a *Directory of Worship* to replace the Episcopalian Prayer Book; a confession of faith known as *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, the last great creed of Protestantism to come out of the Reformation; a *Larger Catechism* for pulpit exposition; and a *Shorter Catechism* for teaching children.
3. By 1648 Parliament had accepted these documents. The Confession was also adopted by the General Assembly of Scotland. The work of reforming the Church of England along Calvinistic lines was finished in the same year the Thirty Years' War ended on the continent with the Peace of Westphalia.

G. Puritan Domination Ends.

1. After the victory at Naseby and the death of Charles, the army was supreme. It was composed mainly of Independents, Cromwell himself being sympathetic to Congregationalism. Parliament decreed that the Church of England should be Presbyterian, but because of pressure from the army, that wasn't possible.
2. From 1649-1653, England was a commonwealth or republic. Cromwell was made Lord Protector, and for all intents and purposes, England had a military dictatorship. Under his rule, England enjoyed a large measure of religious liberty for all religious bodies, especially for all Nonconformists and Dissenters. Cromwell even showed favor to the Quakers, who were generally hated by all groups. During this time, the Episcopal clergy of the Church of England suffered, since from the beginning of the Civil War, they had been deprived of their living.

H. The Restoration.

1. Cromwell died on September 3, 1658. Since his son Richard could not fill his shoes, and the greater mass of the English people weren't satisfied with the yoke of rigid Puritanism, the son of Charles I was brought back to England and crowned Charles II. This return of the house of Stuart to the throne of England is known as the Restoration of 1660.
2. The first act of the Parliament chosen after the Restoration was to proclaim a pardon to all who had fought against King Charles I in the Civil War, the only exception being the members of the High Court of Justice who had sent Charles I to the block.
3. In May, 1662, the Parliament, now strongly Anglican, passed the Act of Uniformity, which required that a newly revised Prayer Book be adhered to. Those who refused to submit were heavily punished. Two thousand Presbyterian pastors who had refused were driven from their parishes and reduced to poverty.
4. The Parliament in Scotland joined with England in persecuting the Dissenters. The Covenanters (Scottish Presbyterians) were hunted with bugles and bloodhounds like so many animals. Those who gathered secretly in glens and caves to worship God were hung and drowned without mercy.
5. Among those who suffered in England for their faith was a poor tinker by the name of John Bunyon, who had fought against the king in the Civil War, and was later converted to Puritanism and became a traveling preacher. He was arrested and convicted of having refused to attend church, and was thrown into Bedford jail. It was during the twelve years he spent here that he wrote his famous book, *Pilgrim's Progress*.
6. Another Puritan who suffered was John Milton, a man of excellent education and rare gifts, who in his blindness, loneliness and poverty wrote *Paradise Lost*.
7. As a result of the persecution, the Puritans were now a party outside of the Church of England, in the same position as the separatists. They too were now Dissenters.
8. During his life, Charles II moved between unbelief and Catholicism, but professed the Catholic faith on his deathbed in 1685. His brother James II, who succeeded him, was himself an earnest Catholic and sought to restore England to the Roman Church. He plotted with Louis XIV, the king of France, to bring this about. Louis XIV was the king who revoked the Edict of Nantes issued in 1598 by Henry of Bourbon (King Henry IV) which granted the Huguenots freedom of private worship,

civil rights, and right to public worship in two hundred towns and three thousand castles. Religious and political liberty were now at stake.

I. William and Mary.

1. At this time, William III of the Netherlands came forward to champion Protestantism against Louis XIV. His wife, Mary, was the daughter of James II. The English appealed to William, who came with an army in 1688 and drove out his father-in-law. William and Mary were then crowned the king and queen of England.
2. The next year, James tried to regain his throne. He landed in Ireland with a French army, the Irish in the south taking James side, being predominantly Catholic, while the Irish in the north, being predominantly Protestant, stood with William (because of this, they were called Orangemen). In 1690, the decisive battle of the Boyne took place. James watched the battle from a safe distance. When he saw his army defeated, he fled to France. William showed great courage by leading his soldiers in person though he was wounded. "An Irish officer cried to one of William's soldiers, 'Change kings with us and we'll fight you over again'" (Kuiper 256).
3. William had saved Holland, England and America for Protestantism and liberty against the despotism of Louis XIV and James II. After this there were no more wars in which the issues between the Protestants and Catholics were the main issue.

J. England Enjoys a Measure of Toleration.

1. When William and Mary were crowned, there were four hundred clergy in the Church of England, among them seven bishops, who refused to take the oath of allegiance. They were removed from office.
2. Religious toleration was granted to all Protestant Dissenters in the Toleration Act of 1689. Freedom of worship was granted to all who were willing to swear the oath of allegiance to William and Mary; reject the jurisdiction of the pope, transubstantiation, the mass, and the invocation of Mary and the saints; and who were willing to subscribe to the doctrinal portions of the Thirty-Nine Articles.
3. Dissenter Churches could now exist openly and freely alongside the established church, which was again Episcopal. These Dissenters, being Presbyterians, Congregationalist, Baptists, and Quakers, made up approximately one-tenth of the population of England. The Toleration Act did not grant this freedom to Roman Catholics or those who denied the Trinity.