

THE PURITAN PATH



JOEL R. BEEKE and STEPHEN MCCASKELL





“A superb piece of work.”

— *Michael A.G. Haykin*







“By all means read the Puritans, they are worth more
than all the modern stuff put together.”

— *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*





Sir John Forster became deputy warden of Bamburgh Castle in November 1560. He openly supported the Protestant cause, while many around him remained Roman Catholic.
Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland, England





THE PURITAN PATH

FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE
MODERN ERA : A PICTORIAL WITNESS

JOEL R. BEEKE and STEPHEN MCCASKELL

mediagratiae





A view from inside Wistman's Wood.
Dartmoor, Devon, England







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PREFACE

The famous saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” has been traced back to at least the third century BC in Greece.¹ It suggests that the concept of beauty involves an element of personal subjectivity. That may be true in certain cases, but the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, disagrees and states dogmatically that something is definitively and objectively beautiful: “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15).

An explanation of this frequently misunderstood text is in order. In Bible times the word *gospel* meant any kind of good report or message, and it was used particularly in the context of military engagements or political campaigns when people would be waiting with breathless anticipation for the outcome of an uncertain event on which the future of an individual or nation might depend. During wars, for example, people would climb up into lookouts to scan the horizon for a messenger who might be coming from a faraway battlefield to bring a report. It was said that if the man in the tower looked carefully at the runner, he could tell by the runner’s feet, his gait, and his entire demeanor whether he was bringing good or bad news. If his feet were flying at great speed and with liberty, the word would be passed through the city before the runner even arrived that victory was theirs. Such feet were a beautiful sight. In Romans 10:15, since victory and beauty lie in the gospel and come to us through the human instrumentality of preaching blessed by the Holy Spirit, Paul is translating this ancient custom into gospel terms: “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

What you have in your hands is a book of beauty on multiple levels. Many of these photographs show the natural beauty of God’s

creation. However, as believers, with our God-given, sanctified worldview, we also can see deeper levels of beauty and glory. We can observe God at work through the monumental era of the Puritans. We can reflect on the moving of the Holy Spirit through this extraordinary group of fallible men who brought the infallible “gospel of peace” and the beautiful and life-transforming “glad tidings of good things” to many in their generation, despite the personal cost. We can worship because this same almighty and sovereign God remains faithful in our day when church history is still being written.

Yes, some Puritans ministered in damp, rat-infested jails, and others in stunningly beautiful country churches. Some gave their lives for the truths they unashamedly preached; others died in old age. Each picture points to a different story, but each picture is part of the metanarrative of an omnipotent and omniscient God who works out His beautiful gospel in the lives of sinners through faithful preaching. It thus has a richness and beauty beyond the merely aesthetic dimension. There is true beauty in this book.

Prior to the photos, we have included a fascinating description of an ideal Puritan written by John Gerec, a seventeenth-century Puritan, together with an explanation of his account. This is followed by some reminiscing of *Media Gratiae* about their journey of putting together the Puritan documentary and obtaining these beautiful photographs.

Our desire is that you look beyond the physical beauty of the images in this book to see the beauty and glory of what God has done through the Puritans and their preaching at these places to serve His own glory.

— *Joel R. Beeke and David Woollin*

1. “Idiom of the Week,” Bloomsbury International, accessed September 6, 2019, <https://www.bloomsbury-international.com/en/student-ezone/idiom-of-the-week/list-of-itioms/100-beauty-is-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder/>.



The Character of an Old English Puritan, or Nonconformist (1646)

by John Gere, with notes of explanation by Joel R. Beeke

In 1646, the Puritan John Gere (c. 1600–1649) wrote a short tract describing the sort of person who earned for himself the title *Puritan*—a name spoken with the same disdain then with which *fundamentalist* is uttered by many people today. To call these people Puritans was to insult them, implying that these English Puritans considered themselves to be meticulously pure and a cut above other English Christians. It was slanderously claimed that the Puritans thought the Church of England was not pure enough for them, that they were planning separation from it, and that they were censorious toward their neighbors. While these stereotypes are found in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s nineteenth-century novel *The Scarlet Letter*, they can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when the name *Puritan* was first used.¹

Ben Jonson (c. 1572–c. 1637), a playwright and contemporary of Shakespeare, caricatured Puritans in his plays. His play *Bartholomew Fair* includes a Puritan character whose name reveals how Jonson wanted his audience to perceive him—Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Another play, *The Alchemist*, depicts a pastor from Amsterdam, a city in which many Puritans found sanctuary, with the sardonic name Tribulation Wholesome. Tribulation Wholesome is accompanied

by a deacon from his church whose name, Ananias, alluding to the man in Acts 5 who lied to the Holy Spirit, suggests hypocrisy. William Shakespeare also had little regard for the Puritans. In his play *Twelfth Night*, the clown Feste says of Malvolio (whose name means “ill will”), “He is a sort of puritan.”

These kinds of caricatures in plays and novels, created with the expectation that the audience would find them humorous or despicable as the other characters alienated them, reveals the prejudice that prevailed against Puritans in that culture. Puritan characters in literature serve as a window through which we can better understand the contemporary attitude toward the Englishmen who were derided as Puritans.

John Gere, however, outlines for us the true character of these so-called Puritans, and the best thing for us is to simply attend to what he says in his own words. Below, Gere’s original tract is presented in an italicized gold typeface, with my comments appearing underneath in regular type. Brackets are occasionally used within Gere’s material to clarify certain terms.

Gere’s Description of the Ideal Puritan with Accompanying Commentary

The Old English Puritan was such a one that honored God above all and under God, gave everyone his due.

A common sixteenth- and seventeenth-century formulation for justice was rendering “to all their dues” (Rom. 13:7–8). It ought to be a twentieth-century formulation for justice also.²

His first care was to serve God, and therein he did not what was good in his own sight but in God’s sight, making the Word of God the rule of his worship.

This was the initial ground of controversy between the Puritans and the hierarchy of the Church of England. The Puritans believed that there were some things in the worship of their national church that had no warrant in the Word of God, according to the second commandment (Ex. 20:4–5).

1. While Hawthorne definitely provides a Puritan stereotype, it ought also to be noted that these are not the only issues he addresses. In fact, he deals even more with the stereotypes of pharisaism, lack of compassion for others, and a refusal to forgive repentant sinners.

2. Some of these notes have been adapted from a J. I. Packer lecture.

He highly esteemed order in the house of God. But he would not under color of that submit to superstitious rites which are superfluous and perish in their use.

The Puritans came to be known by this name because they objected to four ceremonies that were included in the Book of Common Prayer that Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and his colleagues had produced for the Church of England. The Church of England divines these ceremonies by claiming that they maintained order in the house of God. Geree rejects them as “superstitious rites” while defending the Puritans’ commitment to order in God’s house.

Those four ceremonies were, first, using a wedding ring in the marriage service. Superstitious Englishmen associated the giving and receiving of rings with the idea of marriage as a sacrament. Along with the Reformers, the Puritans wanted to dispel the idea that marriage was a sacrament, a medieval superstition, which they thought the use of the wedding ring encouraged.

Second, Puritans objected to kneeling at the Lord’s Table to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. They reckoned that this practice encouraged the continuing superstition of transubstantiation—that Christ is present in the elements, so partakers kneel to worship Him as such.

Third, they objected to the minister wearing the surplice—a long, white, loose-fitting vestment worn over a black gown or cassock. It was the custom of the day to don the surplice to administer the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. But the Puritans believed that the Book of Common Prayer’s requirement of wearing the surplice reinforced the idea of priesthood, that the minister was closer to God than the laity were—that he was, as was believed in the medieval era, a mediating priest between the sinner and the Lord. Like the Reformers, the Puritans held that the ministers of the church were preachers and teachers, not priests. They were happy to wear the black gown of the teacher, but not the white vestment of a priest.

The fourth ceremony to which Puritans objected was marking the forehead of a person being baptized with the

sign of the cross. The Puritans believed that according to Christ’s institution (Matt. 28:19), baptism was rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water. To administer the sign of the cross was to add to the institution of Christ—that is, to do something that the Word of God by good and necessary consequence forbids; for what is not commanded is necessarily forbidden.

The Puritans had parallel thoughts regarding these four ceremonies. One was that these ceremonies implicitly confirm false ideas that were rampant in England before the Reformation and had not yet been entirely uprooted; and the second idea went with it—that these ceremonies were improper because Scripture did not prescribe, or warrant, them and therefore implicitly forbids or excludes them. The Church of England divines hierarchy insisted on conformity to these rituals as a matter of maintaining good order in the church rather than allow every individual to do what was right in his own eyes. While affirming the need for good order in the church, Geree’s “Old English Puritan” would not, simply for order’s sake, accept or conform to any rites or ceremonies not commanded in God’s Word, as they were only matters of human custom or superstition.

He made conscience of all God’s ordinances, though some he esteemed of more consequence.

An *ordinance* is something appointed, or ordained, by lawful authority—in this case, those things God has appointed for use in worship, such as offering prayer, reading Scripture, preaching the Word, singing psalms, and administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Among these several ordinances of God, the Puritans esteemed “the reading of the Scriptures with godly fear” and “the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience to God, with understanding, faith, and reverence” as the first and foremost parts of “the ordinary worship of God” (Westminster Confession 21.5).

The Old English Puritan was much in prayer. With it he began and closed the day. In it he was exercised in his closet, family, and public assembly.

Those were the three places where the Puritan prayed—first, in his “closet”; that is, alone and in private, praying to God in secret (Matt. 6:6). But Puritans prayed with their families as well. Heads of families gathered their households for worship each morning and evening during the week. How substantial these daily sessions of family worship were can be gathered from the Directory for Family-Worship adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647 to stand alongside the Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God (1645). These exercises include offering prayer; singing psalms; reading the Scriptures; instructing in doctrine, or “catechizing in a plain way”; participating in edifying “conference,” or discussions in which all took part; and administering “admonition and rebuke, upon just reasons.”

From the Puritans came the English and American Christian home as many evangelical Christians still know it today. The basic idea was that every home should be a little church; the father, the head of the family, is the “minister” (or prophet, priest, and king) of that little church, and it is his responsibility to lead the family in prayer on a daily basis and teach them the Word of God. That inalienable responsibility cannot be delegated to anyone else, and the father must do it, said the Puritans.

Prayer was central in Puritan meetings for public worship. The Puritans directed ministers to devote themselves to leading their people in offering up united prayers to God rather than using the brief formulated and oft-repeated prayers of the English liturgy. The minister was furnished with extensive, detailed guidance in the Directory for Publick Worship to assist him in this work. Prayer was regarded as a necessary accompaniment to all other acts of worship, and both pastor and people were expected to be fully engaged and attentive.

He esteemed that manner of prayer best where, by the gift of God, expressions were varied according to present wants and occasions.

In other words, he appreciated extemporaneous prayer, “yet he did not account set forms unlawful.” Today, countless evangelical Christians have inherited a situation in which too many Christians who appreciate liturgical forms dislike extemporaneous prayer, and too many Christians who appreciate extemporaneous prayer dislike liturgical forms. The English Puritan appreciated both, though he had a preference for the extemporaneous, and so should we. It is remarkable that in contrast to the practice of numerous Presbyterian and Reformed churches today, the Puritans commended the Lord’s Prayer as “a most comprehensive prayer...also to be used in the prayers of the church.”

Therefore, in that circumstance of the church he did not wholly reject the liturgy, only the corruption of it.

In the Church of England, the Book of Common Prayer provided set forms for daily and weekly services, the administration of the sacraments and all other rites and ceremonies, and all other occasions of public worship. The Puritan did not necessarily want the liturgy abolished but improved. Scottish Presbyterians had for generations made use of John Knox’s liturgy, and English Puritans such as Richard Baxter, among others, undertook to compose a Reformed liturgy as an alternative service book.

He esteemed reading of the Word an ordinance of God both in private and public, but did not account reading to be preaching.

You may wonder why anyone would think it necessary to make that point. It was because the Elizabethan Church of England experienced a shortage of preachers. Many parish incumbents were so deficient in gifts or learning as to be incapable of preparing and delivering a sermon. In many congregations, only the prayer book services were read, Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day, with no preaching at all. The Puritans considered this failure to preach the Word to be a scandal. Defenders of the Church of England upheld