

# The Puritans as Guides of Conscience

by J.I. Packer

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*J.I. Packer explores the Puritan understanding of conscience as a crucial element of Christian life and preaching.*

**Duration:** 1:22:23

**Scripture:** Exodus 2:11

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Godly Stewardship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of heeding the call of God, whether it be in the gospel ministry, in times of persecution, or in helping others in need. The sermon also highlights the need for Christians to use and possess their material possessions in a way that brings glory to God and promotes the salvation of their souls. The preacher encourages temperance in recreation and the use of God's good things, avoiding excess and luxury. The sermon also discusses the principles of God's commandments, including the implication that where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden, and where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded. The overall message is to keep the goal of eternal happiness in mind, live in the light of God's Word, avoid occasions of sin, and keep the heart focused on heavenly meditation.

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## Transcript

Instead of attempting what, in fact, I couldn't do in under an hour, to introduce you to Richard Baxter, as I hoped to do in this last lecture, I'm just going to finish off as well as I can what I began to say to you two days ago about the Puritans as guides of conscience. And this is partly because I judge that the Puritan teaching about conscience is extremely important, and partly because you can get all the stuff about Baxter quite easily by simply reading the section on him in Hugh Martin's *Puritanism and Richard Baxter*, recommended to you at the beginning of the course. There's also, incidentally, in the library, the first volume of F.J. Powick's *Life of Baxter*, which is very good, I judge.

P-O-W-I-C-K-E, by the way, if you want to take it down. And there's also a new biography of Baxter based on Powick by G.F. Nuttall, N-U-T-T-A-L-L. And between those books, you can get the complete Baxter story without the least difficulty.

There's one book which I wish the library contained, but which unfortunately isn't there. That is G.H. Wilkinson's reprint of a book Baxter published in the year of his wife's death, entitled *Abbreviate of the Life of Mrs. Margaret Baxter*. I really should have brought this in yesterday.

It was republished by Wilkinson with the subtitle *A Puritan Love Story*. It is, in fact, a most charming and moving tribute by the bereaved husband to a woman who must have been a very remarkable, saintly Christian woman indeed. It's one of the... I don't use the word here in a sentimental sense, but in a strong sense, it's one of the sweetest things to have come out of the whole Puritan period.

If you can ever get hold of it, do. The title under which Wilkinson reprinted it was Richard Baxter and Margaret Chilton, *A Puritan Love Story*. And if you still have your doubts as to whether the Puritans were really human in areas like this, well, this is the book to put you out of doubt.

There's a bit about it in Hugh Martin, but you really ought to read Baxter's own treatise. Not treatise. Narrative.

Breviant, he called it. A short account. So, in fact, it's written in treatise style with... no Puritan could write anything except in treatise style, you know, with numbered subdivisions and so many points about Mrs. Baxter and this, that or the other.

However, as I read Hugh Martin, and you will at least get the beginning of the story, it shouldn't take me more than half an hour, I think, to finish what I have to say about the Puritans as guides of conscience, and that will give us a little time to discuss this or anything else arising out of this course that you want to discuss before we finally bid each other farewell. I was speaking of the place of conscience in Puritan Christianity when we packed up two days ago, and I had just made the first of three points designed to show how central the concept of conscience was to the Puritan understanding of what it meant to be a Christian and live the Christian life. Point number one, the Puritan insistence that conscience must be linked to the Word of God, connects this theme with Puritan biblicism.

Point number two, that it is this, that the blessing of a good conscience is the essence of Christianity. This links up the Puritan teaching on conscience with their whole view of what it meant to be a child of God and to serve God. This point needs to be developed a bit.

We've got to realize that to the Puritans, godliness was essentially a matter of conscience. It was essentially a matter of getting and keeping a good conscience through the application of gospel truth. As long as a man is on regenerates of the Puritans, his conscience operates, oscillates rather, between being bad and being asleep.

A lot of the time it's the sleep, sometimes it wakes up, and when it wakes up then it's bad. The first work of grace, they went on to say, is for God to quicken a man's conscience and make it thoroughly bad, by forcing him to face God's demands on him, and so making him aware of his guilt and his impotence and his rebelliousness and his alienation in God's sight. This is picking up Paul's theme of the law working wrong.

Luther's theme too. But then the gospel brings him knowledge of pardon and peace through Christ, and this makes his bad conscience good. And a good conscience, says the Puritans, this is the subjectively at the very heart of God's gift of salvation.

It's God's gift to all those whom, like Bunyan's pilgrim, he enables to look with understanding at the cross. And it's maintained through life, on the one hand by seeking to do God's will in all things as his child, and on the other hand by constantly keeping the cross in view so that you don't lose sight of it in all the daily ups and downs of your life. Let's quote a bit from William Fenner, who's explaining this in his treatise on

conscience.

Suppose a man have peace of conscience, says Fenner, what must he do to keep and maintain it? I answer, three things. First, we must labour to prevent troubles of conscience by taking heed that we do nothing contrary to conscience. Nothing that we get in any evil way will cheer and comfort us in a time of need.

Wretched is he that alloweth himself in any course which his conscience findeth fault with. It is a good rule the apostle giveth, blessed is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth, Romans 14.22. That is, writes Fenner, blessed is he that hath not a condemning conscience. So that's point one.

Do nothing contrary to conscience. Secondly, if we will maintain our peace, we must labour to have our hearts grounded in the assurance of the love of God. This is the point of keeping the cross in view.

The third point is an application of the second. We must use, third, we must use the assurance of faith in applying the blood of Christ. We must labour to purge and cleanse our consciences with it.

If we find that we've sinned, we must run presently, that means at once, that's the old English sense of the word, we must run presently to the blood of Christ to wash away our sin. We mustn't let the wound fester or exulcerate, we must presently get it healed. We must every day eye the brazen serpent.

Oh, let us sew out every day a daily pardon. Let us not sleep one night without a new pardon. Better sleep in a house full of adders and venomous beasts than sleep in one sin.

Oh, then be sure with the day to clear the sins of the day, and then shall our consciences have true peace. And the context of all this is Fenner's insistence that this is vital for healthy, standard, normal, New Testament Christianity. There must be this conscious exercise of heart and conscience in keeping the conscience good once God has made it, once grace has made it good.

Labouring not to do anything contrary to conscience, and constantly going back to the cross for the forgiveness of each day's sins. Send the Puritans a good conscience is the greatest blessing that there is. Says Sebes, conscience is either the greatest friend or the greatest enemy in the world.

There's no better friend, says Fenner, than a conscience which knows peace with God. No better friend in all this world for, once again it's firstly, secondly, thirdly, oh and fourthly, first, it is the very head of all comforts. A worthy divine calls it Abraham's bosom to the soul.

That's rather nice. Secondly, a quiet conscience makes a man to taste the sweetness of things heavenly and spiritual. Makes the word of God to be to him, as to David, sweeter than honey.

And what's the next thing David says? I have not departed from thy judgment, O Lord. That's Psalm 119, 102, 103. Again says Fenner, a good conscience maketh a man taste sweetness in prayer, and in a Sabbath, and in the sacraments.

What is the reason so few of you taste sweetness in these things? The reason is this, because ye have not the peace of a good conscience. Thirdly, a good quiet conscience makes the man taste sweetness in all outward things, meat, drink, sleep, the company of friends. Only the healthy man can take pleasure in recreations, walks, meat, sports and the like.

They yield no comfort to people who are bed rid or half dead. So when the conscience is at peace, and the soul is all in good health, all things are enjoyed with sweetness and comfort. And fourthly, it's sweetness evil to a man.

Trouble, crosses, sorrows, afflictions. If a man has true peace in his conscience, it comforteth him in these things all. And so on.

The conscience is God's echo of peace for the soul. In life, in death, in judgment, it is unspeakable comfort. The greatest blessing God can give, a good conscience.

Again, don't sentimentalize by the way Fenner's use of the noun sweetness and the verb sweetened. This is not sugary sentimentality. You know what it's like when sour drinks or sour food is sweetened.

Previously the sourness was positively unpleasant to you. Now the food is pleasant to you and it's delightful. You enjoy it.

You're content. This is the thought that Fenner is expressing here. Whatever comes, life is sweet.

Life under God. Live in the consciousness that you're right with God, that your conscience is good, and so, as you, as consequently you know and are certain, God is at peace with you. They go on to tell us a man with a good conscience can face death with equanimity.

Do you remember Bunyan's Crossing of the Jordan, Pilgrim's Progress Part Two? Bunyan tells us how Mr Honest, in his lifetime, had spoken to one good conscience to meet him there, for which he also did and lent him his hand and so helped him over. A good conscience, said the Puritans, further point this, is a tender conscience. The consciences of the godless may be so calloused that they scarcely ever act at all.

But the healthy Christian conscience of the Puritans, that is the conscience renewed by grace, will be constantly in operation, listening for God's voice in his word, seeking to discern his will in everything, active in self-watch and self-judgment. The healthy Christian knows this frailty and he always suspects and distrusts himself, lest sin and Satan should ensnare him unawares. So regularly he grills himself before God.

That's not a Puritan word, but it's the Puritan thought. Thorough self-examination in the presence of God, as a man scrutinizes his deeds and his motives in the light of God's word, and ruthlessly condemns himself when he finds within himself moral deficiency and dishonesty. Distinguish, by the way, between self-examination and introspection.

Introspection is just looking at yourself, period. Self-examination is looking at yourself in the light of God. That is, looking at God and his word, looking at yourself to measure yourself up by it, and then looking back to God to deal with him about what you find.

It's a basic distinction. Introspection is abominably unhealthy, thoroughly morbid. Self-examination is absolutely basic to healthy Christian living.

It's important that we should learn to draw this distinction. It's only on the basis of regular self-examination, keeping the conscience active and tender in measuring our lives, our motives, our doings, our attitudes by the word of God, that we can expect to keep that glowing piece of conscience which sweetens life in the way that Fenner was just describing. This was a kind of self-judging, said the Puritans, that Paul urged

upon the Corinthians of communion time.

And he told them that for want of it, they'd come into a great deal of trouble. The degree of sharp-sightedness which your conscience shows in detecting your real sin, as distinct from the imaginary ones on which, as the Puritans knew, Satan encourages us to concentrate rather than the real ones, this is an index of how well we really know God and how close to him we really walk. An index, in other words, of the real quality of our spiritual life.

Said the Puritans, the sluggish conscience of what they call the sleepy Christian or a drowsy saint. This is a sign of spiritual malaise. This is emphatically a case of sleeping sickness.

The healthy Christian is the man who has the sense of God's presence stamped on his soul, he trembles at God's word, his conscience is always in exercise in the area of the application. This is what God has said. How does it apply to me? What does it say about the life I have been living and what does it say about the life that I've got to live today and tomorrow and the next day? I think this is good doctrine, I commend it to you.

We can begin to assess our real state in God's sight by asking ourselves just how much exercise of conscience along these lines goes into our own daily living and it's a good test. Thus the Puritans expounded the theme of the good conscience as the greatest blessing that God can give and the very essence of the godly life. And then third point, the Puritans teaching on conscience was reflected in their view of preaching.

This picks up something which we've seen from another angle at an earlier stage in this course. When we talked about preaching, I stressed how much emphasis the Puritans put on the application. Now we are talking about conscience and from this standpoint also it's necessary to stress how much emphasis the Puritans put on the application.

As by now you know, the most characteristic feature in the Puritan ideal of preaching was the stress they laid on the need for a searching application of the truth to the hearer's consciences. One mark of a spiritual preacher, that's their word, or a powerful preacher, their word again, was the closeness and faithfulness of application whereby, to use their phrase, he would rip up and dive into men's consciences to make them face themselves as God saw them. See they knew that sinful men are slow to apply truth to themselves although they're quick enough to see how it bears on the lives of others.

That's our natural hypocrisy, that's the way we are, but to see how it bears on ourselves, no we are not so good, we are not so quick. Therefore, said the Puritans, unapplied general statements of evangelical truth are not likely to do much good. The preacher must see it as an essential part of his job to work out the applications in detail so as to lead the minds of his hearer step by step down the avenues of practical syllogisms, if we may coin that phrase, which will bring the word right home to the hearer's hearts to do its judging and healing and wounding and comforting and guiding work.

So, writes Ames, there is a necessity laid on all ministers not only to declare God's will generally but likewise publicly and privately to further the application of it. Application, you might say, is the preacher's highway from the head down into the heart. The applicatory part of preaching, says the Westminster Directory, is a work of great difficulty but it's not to be dodged.

It requires much prudence, zeal and meditation, says the Directory, until a natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant. But nevertheless, the preacher is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, because it's actually discerning the thoughts and intents of their hearts. Well, this is necessary, this kind of preaching is necessary, says the Puritans, if the word of God is to do good.

Why? Because it's only through this kind of preaching that the word of God really homes on and hooks into the conscience. And not till it's really hooked itself into the conscience will it have a transforming effect on the life. So, the Puritan view of conscience, undergirded, indeed justified, required this insistence, so characteristic of them, that preaching should be applicatory, that truth stated from the word should be applied in detail to the hearts and the lives of congregations.

Thus we see the place of conscience in the Puritan understanding of Christian living and the philosophy of attention to the scriptures, self-examination and applicatory preaching that was connected with it. And this, these things are so characteristic of Puritan Christianity, not to say Bible Christianity, that I wanted to stress them and underline them a bit. A further heading now, law-keeping and legalism.

That the Puritans believed in a precise God is something that you all know because I've told you. That the Puritans were extremely detailed in their exposition of the law of God is notorious. That they had principles for expanding and applying the Ten Commandments and the New Testament moral law to every area of human life is something which at least Presbyterians among you ought to know because it's carefully set out in question 99 of the larger catechism.

Question, what rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments? And the following eight rules are given. And when you consider what the application of these rules will mean, I think you'll see as we go along just how broad a thing, how exceedingly broad a thing, the Puritans believe the commandment of God to be. Answer, for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments these rules are to be observed.

One, that the law is perfect and bindeth everyone to full conformity and the whole man unto the righteousness thereof and unto entire obedience forever. So as to require the utmost perfection of every duty and forbid the least degree of every sin. Second, that the law is spiritual and reaches the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul as well as words, works, and gestures.

In other words, the law of God covers the heart as well as the outward action. Three, that one and the same thing in divers respects is required or forbidden in several commandments. Four, that as where a duty is commanded the contrary sin is by implication forbidden and where a sin is forbidden the contrary duty is by implication commanded.

So where a promise is annexed the contrary threatening is included and where threatening is annexed the contrary promise is included. Fifth, that what God forbids is at no time to be done. What he commands is always our duty and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.

And so on and we can skip a little bit of this but listen to number seven. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves we are bound according to our places to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others according to the duty of their places. This one comes up if I may just interpose a comment.

This issue comes up in England where it's solemnly agitated among evangelical Christians ought we to exert our influence in our predominantly non-Christian community to try and have the fourth commandment observed and Sunday kept to the day holy to the Lord. If we are to take seriously the witness of the larger catechism there's no question about the answer. The law of God is for man as such and part of our keeping of it is that we should do everything we can within the sphere of our own influence to ensure that others do the same.

And eighth and final point that in what is commanded to others we are bound according to our places and callings to be helpful to them and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them. This is a matter of course of attitude what you smile on what you try to discourage people from. Well it's obvious that the law expounded this way is going to be pretty broad and perhaps it would be helpful to underline this if I just read you what are the duties required in the first commandment and the sins forbidden in the first commandment so that you may see just how broad it comes when you expound the commandments positively and negatively in terms of general principle.

What are the duties required in the first commandment? The duties required in the first commandment are the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God and our God and to worship and glorify him accordingly by thinking meditating remembering highly esteeming honoring adoring choosing loving desiring and fearing of him believing him trusting hoping delighting rejoicing in him being zealous for him calling upon him giving all praise and thanks and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man being careful in all things to please him and sorrowful when in anything he is offended and walking humbly with him.

That in terms of headings is what it means to have no other God but the Lord. Question what are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

The sins forbidden in the first commandment are atheism, idolatry in having or worshipping more gods than one or any with or instead of the true God, the not having and avouching him for God and our God, the omitting or neglecting of anything due to him required in this commandment, ignorance forgetfulness misapprehensions false opinions unworthy and wicked thoughts of him bold and curious searching into his secrets all profaneness hatred of God self-love self-seeking and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind will or affection upon other things and taking them off from him in whole or in part vain credulity unbelief heresy misbelief distrust despair incorrigibleness insensibleness under judgment hardness of heart pride presumption carnal security tempting of God using

unlawful means trusting in lawful means carnal delights and joys corrupt blind and indistinct indiscreet zeal lukewarmness and deadness and the things of God there's another inch and a half of it but I think that because we have a certain amount more to get through I'll stop there this is simply to introduce you to the thorough way in which the Puritans expounded the law of God all these things are involved when you come to think that the Puritans of what's involved in not having any other gods but the Lord and all the commandments in fact are expounded in equal detail in the larger catechism and you could hardly have a better compendium of Christian moral teaching than is given you in the question dealing with the law of God in the larger catechism now many of these days criticize the

larger catechism in particular for being legalistic and moralistic by virtue of this detailed exposition of what the law of God requires but it must be said that this criticism is well it tells you more about the critics than it does about the shorter the larger catechism it shows that in fact they know very little about Puritan

theology in the 1640s when the larger catechism was being drawn up at that very time theologians Puritan theologians in England were engaged in controversy with the antinomians one of the works that came out of that controversy has been reprinted by the banner of truth trust the bounds of Christian freedom true bounds of Christian freedom by Samuel Bolton there was a lot more writing along the same line and the thrust of all this writing was to show that though

the law of God is extremely full and detailed and exacting yet we are not emphatically not to revert to legalism and come into bondage to it believing that we've got to keep it all for salvation and that our relationship with God depends upon our keeping the details of it any more than we are to fall into antinomianism and suppose that now that we are Christians the law of God has nothing to say to us no said the Puritans what we've got to do is to hold fast to what the reformers called the second use of the law the first use is to convince sinners of their sin the second use is to act as an ideal a pattern and a spur and a summons to the Christian as to how he's to please and glorify his God and this is the thrust of all this Puritan writing they are not legalists they insist that the

basis of our obedience to the law as children of God is freedom from the law as a system of salvation but that having been freed from the reading of the law as a system of salvation we are now to read it as a revelation of the things that our heavenly father loves and as good children we must recognize that it's our business to provide these things and to learn from the law what these things are we can't trust the spirit to prompt us rightly from within if we don't study the law as it comes to us from without said the Puritans the spirit teaches through the written word not apart from it so though the Puritans labored the need to keep the law they did not do so on legalistic grounds it was not a reversion to justification by works it was not a reversion to legalistic bondage of conscience

if you want to see this all set out in detail incidentally it has been written in a book es Kevin's book the grace of law which I find you can get in the seminary book room he examines all this argument against the antinomians in very great detail and the point becomes abundantly plain from the evidence he produces having clarified that then may we go on to a further issue concerned with the Puritans and the conscience new heading and this is a phrase that I quote comfortable walking it's a Puritan phrase it comes from the title of a book by Robert Bolton some general directions for a comfortable walking with God by comfortable of course he doesn't mean easy he does mean a walking a life with God that is a life of peace and contentment and joy we can't deal in detail with the way that the

Puritans expanded this theme but here we are coming to an area in which they were constantly giving instruction the points that I'm going to mention here come out again and again and again in their preaching and their teaching they believe that Christians were not merely had a right to be in their sense of the comfortable that is at peace with God at peace for themselves joyful contented triumphant as they walked through life as they were as they went through life they were believing that they were anxious that none should be ensnared into courses of action that would rob them of their comfort in this sense so they said things like this first cultivate humility before God recognizing that a sinner like you has no claims upon him other than the claims which he himself has given you by the

covenant of grace and cultivate with humility contentment in the ways of God with you realize his love realize that as Newton's hymn put it hymn puts it um all that I meet shall work to my good you know the verse I'm quoting perhaps if all that I meet shall work to my good the bitter is sweet the bitter grows sweet the medicine is food though painful of present will cease before long and then oh how pleasant the conqueror's song it may be only second class poetry but it's first class christianity cultivate humility before

God and contentment with his providential ordering of your lot he knows what he's doing you're a sinner and he's loved you he's loved you and he'll love you to the end be humble before him therefore and content with his ways as for instance in the matter of money bank

balance possessions certain theorists some people like weber and max weber and rh tawny have argued for a connection between puritanism and capitalism and they described to the puritans the belief that if a man is godly then it's a it's it's a guaranteed fact certainty that God will prosper his ways financially and on the material level love God and grow rich this in fact is a caricature as will be obvious if i read you a summary of perkins's teaching about riches and our attitude to riches in the course of his whole sum of the cases of conscience four principles to bear in mind one a man is accountable to God for everything he possesses the principle therefore of stewardship nothing that i have in my last analysis is my own God has lited me to use for him i'm a steward of it not in any

absolute sense its owner secondly the rich man must if necessary be prepared to abandon all for christ and while he possesses his wealth to possess it as though he possessed it not ready at any time when the call comes to let it go so it may be a perkins in other words is recognizing that it may be a case of serve God and grow poor certainly well this is the next this is actually his next point at the call of God riches must be forsaken this call is given sometimes as in the case of the apostles for the spreading of the gospel God calls you to be a poor man in the gospel ministry or the call may be given under persecution when it's a case of abandon your profession your christian profession or abandon this world's goods and become a fugitive or a refugee sometimes the call is given when

it's necessary for christians to relieve the distresses of their suffering brethren these providential summonses must be heeded this is part of godliness and fourth point we must i'm quoting a sentence we must so use and possess the goods we have that the use and possession of them may tend to God's glory and the salvation of our souls and that leads on to the second the second point for comfortable walking be temperate in your recreation and the use of God's good things this picks up yesterday's point God has given many good things in the created order food drink amusements of different kinds marriage all these things that will be used for the purpose for which he gave them and recreational things that will be used to recreate avoid excess avoid luxury avoid making amusement your end or

your goal if you're a rich man you're peculiarly tempted to do that says the puritans don't do it leading on to third point third rule for comfortable walking work in your calling the puritans picked up the reformation insistence that any sort of work that does good to your fellow men and involves the use of the creatures the created order for the purpose for which God gave it this is something that is holy something that glorifies God something that is just as truly service of God as the work of the minister and they developed the doctrine by insisting what the reformers had not actually said that it's part of God's calling to every man that he should have a calling in this special sense of the word that is a job a particular responsibility to discharge a particular piece of work to do

responsibilities given him providentially and the family the church the state the work that he does to earn to earn his living every man should have some such work and to work in your calling says the puritans is a means of grace nothing like hard work to keep you from the kind of temptations to which you'd be exposed if you were idle well that's obvious in idleness you are exposed to temptation in idleness your thoughts can go roving off in all sorts of uh in all sorts of directions in continued idleness it's very easy to think of nothing but further amusements and further pleasures it's a means of grace therefore to have a job to do a responsible piece of work which you're as unto the lord a profession a vocation in the modern sense or

mother in the home making the home everyone has

some job some calling and one of the secrets of comfortable walking is that you should work hard in it point four avoid all occasions of sin know yourself be realistic about yourself come to terms with yourself if you've got particular weaknesses of character and temperament on which particular circumstances or influences play well avoid those circumstances and influences if certain types of literature are not helpful to you don't read them and so on the principle is of wide application and fifthly keep your heart in heaven heavenly meditation that is meditation on god on his glory on his grace on his love on his goodness on all the attractive and delightful things that the word of god sets before us and on the hope of glory that he set before us richard baxter was specially strong on

this as witnessed his um great though shapeless treatise the saints everlasting rest which is uh oh in most of the most of the quarto all the quarto editions of it i've seen it's more than um it's more than 800 pages of um exposition but the thrust of the whole thing is have the goal the goal of happiness that god has set at the end of the christian's road clearly before your mind dwell on it often think about it have it glowing of a live coal at your son in the mr great heart puts it and then live your life in the light of this hope and by the scale of values which um the scale of values which the word of god gives you in the light of this estimation of in the light of the estimation of this world as temporary and that world with its glory as eternal it's really only a variation on the

pilgrim theme as you travel through a journey just think of what awaits you at the end and it will make your journey that much straighter and that much uh that much less burdensome as you go along and you'll be less apt to be ensnared by the things that might divert you to the right hand or the left as you go along keep your heart in heaven heavenly meditation on god and his grace and his glory some of the advice then that that's some of the advice that the puritans were constantly giving to the christian guiding him into the way of comfortable walking through the keeping of a good conscience you can see how all these points link up with the keeping of a good conscience keeping you out of harm's way keeping you in the right path in which your conscience will your conscience will testify

to you to your sincerity and not give testimony to your sin and now the clock is beating me but i'm just going to put put this bit in final point about the puritans as guides of conscience the puritans dealing with troubled souls this is worth just a moment for those of us who are in or who are going to be in the gospel ministry a person comes to you and is not perhaps quite sure what's wrong is just sure that there is something wrong he has an indefinable sense that things are not well with him spiritually he hasn't any joy he doesn't quite know what's wrong he just knows that things aren't as they should be what do you do with him well here the puritans were great they were remember physicians of the soul they made their business to know how to diagnose and deal with such cases stage

one the puritan asked himself is this person converted is he a fallen or slipped christian or is he perhaps the person who's never come into a living knowledge of grace at all and so he would ask him he would ask him by probing questions two things whether on the one hand he'd been introduced to the reality of his own sin because if a person hasn't got a realistic conviction of realistic awareness of his own sin based on real god-given self-knowledge then you can be pretty sure he isn't yet converted and secondly the puritans would inquire has he a sense of indeed not not only the sense but the instinct and impulse within him of love to god and contentment with god's ways that is if he prepared to be saved god's way is the mainspring of his life thankfulness to god for having redeemed him

from sin is he heartily willing to go the way that christ leads him however rough it may be to leave anything that christ may call him to leave however costly that may be to take up his cross and follow the savior as he summoned to do does he love god and is he out of love to god content to go god's way and to be saved god's way if the answers given to these questions were not satisfactory then the puritan would proceed with him on the assumption that though there might have been some general work of the spirit in its heart he'd not yet got to the point where he passed from death into true spiritual life but supposing it works the other way supposing that the these questions are answered satisfactorily and yet the man complains of spiritual malaise what's to be said of him well the next

thing to ask is whether perhaps his distress is not due to non-spiritual causes whether perhaps he isn't ill either physically ill with something like anemia which produces depression or mentally ill with that that well with any of those states of soul and spirit which the puritan which the puritans recognized as melancholy and depression having in some having partly a physical route sometimes wholly a physical route partly to um a mental a mental route in some kind of unbalance of mind can you recognize the melancholy well here's baxter's description of them i just slipped this in to show you that they knew what they were talking about have you met this class of people they're commonly exceedingly fearful causelessly or beyond what they're caused for their imagination most errours in

aggravating their sin or dangers or unhappiness they're always addicted to excess of sadness some weeping they know not why some thinking it ought to be so and if they should smile or speak merrily they feel they've sinned they place most of their religion in sorrowing and austerity to the flesh they accuse themselves turning all manner of accusation against themselves which they hear or read or or see or think of quarreling with themselves for everything they do the only thing they're clear about is that they're wrong they're always apprehending themselves forsaken of god they're prone to despair they often think the day of grace is past and it's too late to repent or find mercy they're often tempted to gather despairing thoughts from the doctrine of predestination they never heard of

any miserable instance that is anything going wrong in anybody's life but they think that this is their case and yet at the same time they think that never anyone was in as great trouble as they are they're utterly unable to rejoice in anything their consciences are quick to tell them of sin but they're dead to all beauties that tend to consolation no they say that's not for me they always say they can't believe they're always complaining that they haven't got faith they're always displeased and discontented with themselves much addicted to solitariness given up to fixed musings and long pouring thoughts to little purpose much averse to the labors of their calling and given to idleness either to lie in bed or sit thinking unprofitably by themselves and so on and so on their thoughts are

all perplexed like raveled yarn and silk they're endless in their scruples they're greatly addicted to superstition they've lost the power of governing their thoughts by reason and well we haven't time i'm afraid to finish the description but you've met these people well the puritans had met them too and this is a psychophysical trouble which can't be cured by holy spiritual means medical treatment is called for as well as guidance on spiritual in the spiritual realm and the guidance that they gave in the spiritual realm was don't be on your own don't let your thoughts run free keep in company with healthy cheerful christians we've said this before there is no mirth like the mirth of believers pray in fellowship rather than praying on your own recognize your own weakness recognize the

cause of it and in fellow and seek the help of god in fellowship with others but again this may not be the trouble either if it turns out that the man's distress is not due to physical causes then you've got to consider

whether it may not be that the christian though his mind and his heart are right and though it's not unconfessed sin or any such trouble has actually been deserted for a time by god these things happen as the lord led job through black patches so he does with others of his children and this in fact is part of their spiritual education they must recognize what's happening god in fact is trying them out as he tried job out the exercise though it may not be pleasant to go through will be wonderfully strengthening as they will find perhaps afterwards and they in this situation

must learn in humility to walk with god to recognize that god sometimes does deal with christians in this way but it's not necessarily a sign of bad spiritual health that he does so but rather it may be a sign of the next stage in your spiritual education something like what catholic expositors of prayer have spoken of as the dark knight of the soul but set in an evangelical context and rooted in the teaching of job and the psalms and said the puritans to such a man don't torment yourself because you aren't constantly experiencing the exuberant joy that others are perhaps blessed with but walk humbly with your god and as for a time for purposes best known to him he's brought you into darkness so walk patiently with him in darkness until he brings you out and that's the way to keep your

conscience good and clear while you're in the dark and this is part of what it means to walk humbly with your god well i see that i've betrayed myself here's our class finished it's the last class and i'm sorry that we shan't have time for discussion of these things and for general questions which you may very well have about the puritans the time waits for no man there it is the course is over the job's done i can only say as i conclude not simply that i hope you've enjoyed it though i would be uh i would be dissembling if um i didn't say that i hope you've enjoyed it i've tried to make the puritans as palatable to you as i can but i hope that over and above that over and above this business of doing justice to these great men of god whose faith i suggest to you we ought in many many

ways to follow in our day over and above that i trust that some of these things will be directly relevant and helpful to you in the ministry to which god has called you and if this is so well believe me i as instructor shall then have my reward thank you so in this series that you just heard on the puritans there was evidently other tapes that we were unable to locate at westminster seminary the following part of a lecture by dr packer is indicative of this fact this tape was found partially erased to go on with god to them the perkins teach both an exposition justification sanctification perseverance for things preservation and the law the rule of life don't teach it to them as a judge that condemns them but as an ideal as a standard as god's ideal for human life as god's marker for the

way that they must go use of the law in reformation theology the law as a guide to deliver sixth class of men to whom you minister those who we simply as fallen what he means by that is people who have lapsed either from an evangelical and true faith which they once professed or they've lapsed in manners that is they've fallen into sin they've backslidden how do you make application of the word of god to them well first says perkins by trial that is by bringing the word of god to bear on them in such a way that they may be able to see and if you're doing this in private if you're doing it in private you too may be able to see by what they say in answer to the effort to the application of the probing that you make so that they may be able to see whether in fact they're left from faith and

right living is a sign that they're not yet converted at all or whether they are simply christian people who have slipped as need as christians to repent and seek pardon and seek restoration but the basic question for the person who's fallen from sound faith a sound profession fallen from a respect that they've got to ask themselves now am i under the law or am i under am i in the kingdom or out of it am i converted or

unconverted what does this lapse of mind mean and you've got to apply the word to this class of people in such a way as to make them ask themselves their question and to show them from the word what the answer is of persons who though they've made a profession are yet unconverted and conversely how a person under grace can tell that though he slipped from orthodoxy and

right right living nevertheless he still is showing the marks of it and then when you've seen when you've exposed where the last christian the fallen christian really is then you apply the doctrines of the gospel in the form of promise as the person appears to need it if he's exhorted to trust in christ whole first time if conversely he's a left christian when speaking as a christian when you've got to measure it to the needs of these different and then finally there's a seventh class a mingled uh and perkins says very truly a mixed people a mingled people is the assembly sorry are the assemblies of our churches rather quaint but very true then now as this when you stand up to preach before and therefore you've got to mix your sermon and you've got to put it in and when you're doing the

applications you've got to so that there's something for everybody and this is part of the sacred and this is so essential a part of it that the job hasn't really been done until you've made a thorough application you find the same sort of teaching and smaller compass now in the westman's more thinking of this most of us preacher they're very good at expounding the doctrine and applying it in a very general way one word to the saints and another word to the sinners that the puritans carried the thinking a good deal further and surely once one has seen it laid out before one it's obvious isn't it that this is this kind of detail and sermons which contain the kind of applications that are specially beamed on these different are likely to do more good than sermons which just fire truth off

generally into the air without any definite or detailed application at all i do believe with one of the but now all this is in the realm of theoretical principles and i want to go on from stating it in terms of general principles actually to look in a little more detail at work in their preaching to see what they did and why they did it in some particular examples and so we move on from our study of the source material and the rules laid down in the preacher to the puritan use the presuppositions in other words of biblical presupposition number one it as a whole and it is the utterance of god god's words set down in writing god's mind opened and are god's eternal truth the historical process which the in his mind the plan that he formed before the world was and so thomas goodwin writes

quote what our scriptures have set down and written is all but that is is simply extracts and copies taken out of the scriptures in god's heart from which they were in which they were written from everlasting this is the word of god that invited forever honor because it is settled forever in god's own heart hence the unity of the bible many human authors many styles and literary forms but the unified utterance of a complete and coherent albeit complex as a revelation of the single will and purpose of the one god you see to the puritan bible students it was god who uttered the prophecies god who recorded the histories god who expounded the doctrines god who declared the praises and wrote the visions of which scripture was made up and therefore the words of the human penmen must be read as

words of god part of the word of god and so thomas watson wrote in his body of divinity think in every line you read that god is speaking to you why are you to think that because it's true so he is what is written and must be read and handled as what scripture says god is just as god's mind is unfathomable so there are illimitable depths in scripture no one ever comes to the end of understanding it or quote owen the stores of truth laid up in it are inexhaustible and it's always the case therefore as john robinson is alleged to have said the lord has yet more truth to break out of his holy word as interpreters therefore we never reach the

end of god's thoughts and we mustn't imagine that we ever have quote goodwin again never think you have knowledge enough one thing's for sure you

haven't studied a word more fully to add to it and so in god safeguards our humility never in this world to the utmost of what is from the word to be made out and and as early as greenham the puritans are found echoing augustine's remarks that just as there are shallows in scripture where a lamb may wade so there are depths and swim depths which the most learned and the most godly have yet to flood so the minister could approach the study of scripture knowing on the one hand that it's all god's word and his living word spoken to men of men and spoken to men in this very day knowing on the other hand that they know everything even if they bring a more in the scripture that it was in truth the word of the living god it goes right that leads to presupposition the preacher's presupposition

number two this can you'll remember that the shorter catechism and its third question and all those westminster standards are the scriptures based on the things they reveal concerning god and priests showing us the duty that god requires of revealed by the then on the earth because these things are only and so owen writes sorry baxter writes before and after you pray earnestly looks founded to you and then as it teaches what we are to believe concerning god so it teaches us our beauty how we are to live so as to please god it's a practical book it tells us what to do and said the puritans god will only prosper us if we continually exercise ourselves to live by what we learn which means for the preacher that as calvin once said it's better that he should break his neck going up into the

pulpit if he's not going himself to be the first to follow god and live by his own priest by the things that he himself gives our knowledge will see we'll have more but otherwise the truth that god has given us will run out simply into sterile verbiage and perhaps mental error quote owen the true notion of holy evangelical truths will not live or at least not flourish where they are divorced from a holy conversation as we learn all for practice so we learn much by practice and herein alone can we come to the assurance that what we know and learn is indeed of god and he quotes john 7 17 it's only if a man is willing to do the will of god that he knows of the doctrine whether it be of god apart from this without obedience so going the mind will be quickly stuffed with notions with notions

head knowledge as we call it so that no streams can descend into it anymore from the fountain of truth a man then will have no more light and that which he has will be tending to go bad on him so a man who would in must himself be a holy man a man of reverent humble prayerful teaching a man who himself is an exemplar of obedience to the truth that he preaches this is why ministers of the puritans ministers have got to be holy ministers they will not be truly spiritual preachers if they're not holy ministers they may be very brilliant and good at talking calling attention to themselves by their verbal pyrotechnics in the pulpit they may be very orthodox preachers in the sense that they can roll out a system of divinity in the pulpit as well as the next man but they won't be

heart-searching and edifying creatures because it'll be merely head knowledge that hasn't been digested in the man's own heart that the puritans receive the truth you'll never be able to apply it effectively to others and screw it effectively into their hearts so if a minister is not a holy minister he won't be much use as a minister this all follows from well that was this and that led that guided them in their interpretation of scripture when it came down to the detailed handling of text two points here that i'd make point one interpret scripture literally and grammatically this was simply following the insistence of the reformers against the medieval habit of depreciating the literal sense in favor of allegorical senses this is their insistence with the reformers that the literal sense

is the only sense that scripture has the other senses are quite simply false senses and it's this sense therefore that you've got to seek an exposition and it's from this sense that you derive your doctrines and your applications therefore it's sound text in the grammatical historical manner putting them in their context bringing out the flow of the thoughts william bridge says if you would understand the true sense of a controverted scripture look into the coherence the scope and the context thereof perkins was already saying this in the art of prophesying the art of prophesying i'm sorry notes by the way in passing that the puritans did think that there were some places in scripture where the literal sense that is the intended sense of the writer was itself an allegorical sense because

it was precisely an allegory that the man was writing the puritans for instance they wrote a lot of commentaries on the subject and one of the commentators a scottish puritan named james durham has some interesting remarks on this point i grant he writes the book has a literal meaning but i say that literal meaning is not that which first looketh out as in historical scriptures that is the literal meaning the intended meaning is not simply that it's a love song the literal meaning is that which is spiritually meant by these allegorical and figurative speeches for the literal sense is that which floweth sorry that which floweth from such a place of scripture as being intended by the spirit in the word and intended therefore by the human writer whom the spirit was inspiring and you got to

look at what he wrote to see whether he was writing properly that is literally in the modern sense or figuratively and you got to decide that question from the whole complex of his expressions together as in the case of parables you stand back from the parable and you look at it and you see that it's meant as a parable it's not meant not meant strictly of allegory it's a parable and that's its literary character and you expound it literally when you expound it as a parable and similarly with the song of solomon when you expound it as an allegory of the lord's love to his people and when taking the further step in christian exposition you read christ back into it as having been always intended by the holy ghost when he inspired it that's durham's thesis well you are bringing out the

literal sense of the song of solomon i know indeed that dr young would put a question mark but it seems to me that the pure when they pointed to the way in which in the third chapter the fifth chapter of the song of solomon is taken up and applied with quite a clear allusion and echo and a very explicit christological sense this is this and the invitation and the warning in the context of the let him come in well this is all an echoing and if the new testament writers were prepared to use the song of solomon like that then it seems to me that there's a strong case for saying that to read but isn't it something more put it in the context of the whole scripture and i think the question one to which the older reformed answer is at least a serious possibility but you may want to think that

the point anyway is that durham is saying you expound allegorically when you and for one more general point about interpretation and finish off this hunk of a note the second general principle about interpreting interpret scripture consistently and harmonistically because this was a way of demonstrating to regard scripture as the expression of a single mind god's mind and therefore consistent with itself and here's an interesting point with a very contemporary application to harp on apparent contradictions says william bridge one of this brotherhood chose real irreverence and listen to this lovely quote store it up for use when next you're in a you know how it was with moses says bridge when he saw two men fighting one an egyptian when he saw two hebrews fighting now says he i will go and

reconcile them for their brethren why so that's because he and so it is with a gracious heart when he sees the scripture fighting with an egyptian a heathen author or apocryphal he comes and kills the heathen no

problem there um he uh simply backs the scripture against the egyptian or the apocrypha but when he sees two scriptures at variance in view so in truth not oh said he these are brethren and they may be reconciled so i will labor all i can to reconcile them but when a man shall take every advantage of seeming different to say do you see what contradictions there are in this book and he doesn't labor to reconcile them what does this argue but that the malice against the word of the lord and the puritans recoiled from and they sought to interpret scripture as a unity to expound it

reformation wise by the principle of the analogy of scripture obscure parts to be expounded in the light of clear parts and so they sought in all their preaching to exhibit the unity of scripture and the oneness of its message well as you can see we've all that we've done is to lay the foundation for what i'm going to say about the actual mechanics of puritan preaching we've defined their approach but nevertheless we've got the theory right and next class i'll give you some examples of the puritan preachers at work if you've got questions and queries you you want to raise save them till next time because our time is right up now thank you

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