

CHURCH HISTORY: PORTRAITS OF THE PAST

WEEK 2: BUNYAN, GURNALL, ANNE BRADSTREET AND MORE

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- “The history of the world,” wrote Thomas Carlyle, “is but the biography of great men.” We all owe much to pioneers—not only those who opened up the New World, but also the veterans of the faith throughout the centuries. Theirs is a story just as exciting...we are the inheritors of a tremendous legacy that has been ill-acknowledged. By this neglect we deprive ourselves of a rich benefit¹
- Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19-20** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- Jesus’ direction to those people would leave an indelible mark on the church seen throughout history.
- There’s the outward preaching of the gospel making converts and the inward teaching to build up the saints.
- Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:
 - June 29th: Introduction and John Brown of Haddington
 - July 6th: No Adult Fellowship Group (4th of July Holiday)
 - **July 13th: John Bunyan, William Gurnall, Anne Bradstreet, and others.**
 - July 20th: Smith family the Czech Republic missionary update
 - July 27th: John Newton, William Cowper, Selina Hastings, and others.
 - August 3rd: Music and Composers throughout the history of the church
 - August 10th: Patrick of Ireland, Augustine of Canterbury, George Liele, and others.
 - August 17th: Baker family from Kenya missionary update
 - August 24th: Croatia short term missions update
 - August 31st: No Adult Fellowship Group (Labor Day Weekend)

¹ J. D. Douglas, Philip Wesley Comfort, and Donald Mitchell, *Who’s Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992).

INTRODUCTION

- Many Christians throughout history never thought that they were going to pave the way for others who would come after them.
- The vast majority of influential Christians only sought to please the Lord in their immediate setting, never thinking they would be the subject of instrumental people in church history.
- This is very true for our people today, they wanted reform from within but their “radical” and “nonconformist” views far outlasted them.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND IN THE 16TH - 17TH CENTURY

- To fully understand and appreciate the contributions that these people made to Christianity, it is important to know the context and culture they were living in at that time.

The Effect of the Protestant Reformation

- After the Reformation began in Germany with Luther (1517), the effects of it were felt all around the world.
- In 1534 England was just starting to enter what would be a very long and deadly political and religious course.
- Officially, the English Reformation began when Henry VIII decided that he no longer wanted to be part of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).
 - He did this because he wanted a divorce and the RCC would not allow it. His current wife, Catherine of Aragon, had not produced a son but his mistress, Anne Boleyn had.
- Immediately, Henry VIII passed the Act of Supremacy:
 - English act of Parliament that recognized Henry VIII as the “Supreme Head of the Church of England.” The act also required an oath of loyalty from English subjects that recognized his marriage to Anne Boleyn.²
- This was not yet a break in doctrine...as the new Church of England seemed very RCC. It was a break in power, the RCC no longer had any control over the church in England.
- In fact, Henry VIII shut down RCC monasteries and subsequently confiscated land owned by the RCC and all their wealth.

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Act-of-Supremacy-England-1534>

- Interestingly, it was through these selfish and sinful acts that the Lord would be able to spread the true gospel message through England and other lands.

Protestant Doctrine

- When Henry VII died, his son, Edward VI, took over his father's reign.
- Unlike his father, he was a Protestant.
- It was at this time that a theological reformation took place in the Church of England.
- Edward VI was influenced by reformed writers and brought many Protestant ideas into the Church of England...The Book of Common Prayer, Justification by faith alone, he rejected transubstantiation, and he allowed the priests to get married, and destroyed the icons (hand made idols) in the church.
 - One of the most notable changes was the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer. This was written in English and for the first time the common person would be able to hear God's Word taught and understand what was being said.
 - "The Book of Common Prayer, primarily authored by Thomas Cranmer, brought the English language into the Church of England's worship services during the English Reformation. Before its introduction in 1549, services were conducted in Latin, making them inaccessible to the majority of the population. The Book of Common Prayer standardized and translated the liturgy into English, significantly impacting both religious practice and the English language itself."

RCC Makes a Comeback

- Before Mary I took over, Lady Jane Grey was Queen of England for 9 days...the shortest ever. She was publicly proclaimed Queen so that her RCC cousin, Mary I, would not take over.
 - Mary I had her imprisoned and since she was a threat to RCC, she was executed at 17 yrs old.
- Mary I (1553 – 1558) was the half-sister of Edward VI and was a devout RCC and sought to completely reverse the Reformation in England.
 - AKA: Mary Tudor or Bloody Mary
- She oversaw the reunification of England and Rome culminating in 1554:
 - The parliament of 1554 advanced the restoration of RCC with the formal renunciation of the title Supreme Head of the Church of England, which put England under the control of the pope again. ³

³ <https://thehistoriansmagazine.com/mary-tudors-counter-reformation/>

- The first part of Mary's religious policy, and the most important, was the return to Catholicism as the official state religion. Bills passed in 1553 suggest that the country was ready to convert back to Catholicism. The 'divers acts touching divine service and the marriage of priests' was a very significant bill as it brought back the sacraments, imagery, and holy days repealing the acts of Edward VI.⁴
- Mary's religious policy was the burnings passed by the 'revive touching heresies and Lollardies' bill April 1554. This was an unsuccessful policy stated by both Loads and Pettegree that burning dissidents didn't work, not that they were unpopular and set to fail. The burnings could only happen with the support of lay magistrates and lay jurors, if they didn't like the policy or support it, then the burnings wouldn't have been used as frequently.⁵
- She would have "executed approximately 300 Protestants during her reign. These executions, carried out primarily by burning at the stake, were a key part of the Marian persecutions. This persecution aimed to restore Catholicism in England and suppress Protestant dissent."

The Religion In-Between

- Elizabeth I (1558 – 1603) introduced a collection of laws and governmental decisions regarding religious practices in England.
- She sought to continue the English Reformation, started by her father, Henry VII, in the mid-1500's.
- There was opposition to the moderate features of the Settlement from both radical Catholics and radical Protestants. In addition, the Pope excommunicated Elizabeth for heresy in 1570 CE. Nevertheless, many of the features of the Settlement such as replacing altars with communion tables, using English in services, and banning traditional mass services, remained in place over the following centuries and their effects can still be seen on today's Anglican Church.⁶
- What Elizabeth set forth had these principal elements⁷:
 - The Act of Supremacy - established Elizabeth as head of the Church of England.
 - The Act of Uniformity - set out the appearance of churches and services, banned mass services.
 - The Royal Injunctions - 57 regulations on Church matters, e.g.: preachers required a license and pilgrimages were banned.
 - The Book of Common Prayer - a new moderate blend of earlier prayer books to be used in church.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1565/the-elizabethan-religious-settlement/>

⁷ Ibid.

- The Thirty-Nine Articles - an attempt to define English Protestantism.
- All of these acts had one thing in common, the Queen was in charge and if you did not do church the way that she prescribed, there were consequences.
- In fact, she had the Privy Counsel established that consisted of her core group of English nobles who would advise her...this went from 50 to 11 people because there were too many opinions.
- Elizabeth also introduced measures to enforce acts, such as the Royal Injunctions Act 1559, which gave clergy a set of instructions including to ban 'fake' miracles and to ban and report recusants. She also sent 125 commissioners to tour the country to check the rules were being followed. The 1559 Act of Exchange allowed the Queen to take land and buildings from the Church and force Bishops to pay rent, adding considerably to the Queen's purse.⁸
- Overall, with the Church of England (Anglicanism) being established, it would seek to be a “happy medium” between RCC and Protestantism.
- While this would seem to prove successful, there was an “extremist” group that was forming from within the Anglican church called the Puritans.

The Rise of Puritanism

- William Perkins, often called “the father of Puritanism,” was born in Warwickshire, England, in 1558—the first year of Queen Elizabeth’s reign.
- Puritans were not a religion or denomination, but a movement from within the Church of England.
- They sought to purify the church from RCC and sought it through preaching the Word, pastoral and congregant discipline in all areas of life, and a lifestyle of worship to God.
- While many stayed within the Church of England, the Separatists left to start their own independent churches that would be free from the Church of England.
- Puritan separatists who left to start independent congregations focused on:
 - Congregationalism...a local church is governed by the local church without state control.
 - Church membership was voluntary...the state did not automatically bring in members
 - Church worship was simple...what does the Bible say about worship?
 - Conscience of the believer...each person had to obey God rather than man

- The problem was, this was illegal. The only church was the Church of England and to hold any services outside of that meant punishment. These could be fines, prison, or execution.
- Just before Bunyan, Gurnall, and Bradstreet were born, in 1620 the Mayflower set sail from England in an attempt to leave RCC behind and start fresh with their biblical religion.
 - While we call them Pilgrims, they were in fact Puritans who made the pilgrimage to the New World, believing that the Church of England was too far gone because of RCC influence to be reformed.

JOHN BUNYAN (1628 – 1688)⁹

- He was born into a poor family and did not have a good or proper education.
- At 16 years old he joined Cromwell's New Model Army; fighting in the English Civil War.
- This experience sobered him as he faced near death.
- Bunyan was discharged from the army around 1646. After he returned home, he joined his father in working as a tinker. He walked the countryside, stopping at homes and farms to repair pots and other metal items.
- In 1648, Bunyan married a God-fearing woman whose name remains unknown. Her dowry consisted only of two Puritan books inherited from her father—Arthur Dent's *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety*. After reading these books, Bunyan was once more convicted of sin. He started attending the parish church, stopped swearing, and tried to honor the Lord's Day. After several months, Bunyan met some poor elderly women whose joyful conversation about Christ and the new birth deeply impressed him. He mourned his joyless existence as he realized he was lost and outside of Christ. He felt he had the worst heart in all of England.
- In 1651, the poor women whom he had encountered introduced him to Pastor John Gifford, their nonconformist pastor, who led him to Christ.
- Bunyan was known to struggle with assurance...until one day the Lord pressed upon his heart "Thy righteousness is in heaven."
- He would go on to say about that moment, "I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself..."
 - One day, as John wandered through the fields, he experienced an epiphany: salvation was not tethered to his own efforts or emotional state but was a divine gift of grace. This realization was akin

⁹ <https://www.thefocusedpastor.org/10-puritans-who-changed-the-world-john-bunyan-the-fearless-tinker/>

to shedding the weight of shackles, freeing him from spiritual bondage. With newfound clarity, he marveled at the power of prayer, survived an illness known as consumption, and found peace regarding his salvation. He confided in his wife his aspiration to preach, eager to share the profound joy he had discovered.¹⁰

- In 1655 the Bunyan family became members of Gifford's church and he was soon appointed a deacon.
- He started preaching at several different congregations in Bedford as 100's of people came to listen.
- He preached in such a way that made the Bible understandable and aimed at their hearts.
- Between 1655 and 1661 he published many books and was a reputable Puritan writer.
- It was in 1661 that he was arrested for preaching without an official license from the government.
- On one...occasion, he was asked to simply stop [preaching] and be set free. He replied, "If you release me today, I will preach tomorrow."¹¹
- He would be imprisoned the first time for 12 ½ years (with no formal charges or sentence).
 - During this first imprisonment he wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.
 - This is both his autobiography and a comfort to those who struggle with assurance.
- He was released in 1672 and began pastoring the Bedford congregation. He was there for a couple of years and again arrested.
 - It was during his second imprisonment that he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
- He would be released in 1677 and went about preaching and writing until his death in 1688.
- After riding on horseback in a heavy rain from Reading to London, Bunyan contracted a fever and died on August 31, 1688, at the home of his London friend, John Strudwick. He is buried in Bunhill Fields, London.¹²

How is Bunyan influential today?

- God can use an uneducated man as long as he is Spirit filled and faithful to the Bible.
- Bunyan did not write *Pilgrim's Progress* thinking that it was going to be one of the best-selling books of all time. It has never been out of print and has been translated into over 200 languages.

¹⁰ <https://www.enotes.com/topics/grace-abounding-chief-sinners>

¹¹ https://answersingenesis.org/answers/books/pilgrims-progress/?srsltid=AfmBOoqGvFk0rvqb01xTyPhKjnkhlWf6OxH_Iv9VuEn-fqICydM2U8U

¹² <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/john-bunyan-the-man-preacher-and-author>

- When the great missionary surge began, Protestants translated into various dialects first the Bible, then *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹³

WILLIAM GURNALL (1617 – 1679)¹⁴

- William Gurnall (1617-1679), Rector of Lavenham, in Suffolk, and author of “The Christian in Complete Armour,” is a man about whom the world possesses singularly little information. Perhaps there is no writer who has left a name so familiar to all readers of Puritan theology, but of whose personal history so little is known. Except the three facts, that he was a Puritan divine of the seventeenth century,—that he was Minister of Lavenham,—and that he wrote a well-known book of practical divinity, most persons know nothing of William Gurnall.
- Born, as he was, in a seaport town of no mean importance,—the son of parents who held a prominent position in the town, —educated at Cambridge, at one of the best known colleges of the day,—the contemporary of leading divines of the Commonwealth times,—minister of the largest church in West Suffolk for the uninterrupted period of thirty-five years,—author of a work which, from its first appearance, was eminently popular,—Gurnall is a man, we naturally feel, of whom more ought to be known.
- He did not secede from the Church of England! He was not one of the famous two thousand ministers who gave up their preferment on St. Bartholomew’s Day, and became Nonconformists. He retained his position, and continued Rector of Lavenham. Puritan as he undoubtedly was, both in doctrine and practice, he did not do what many of his brethren did. When Baxter, Manton, Owen, Goodwin, and a host of other giants in theology, seceded from the Church of England, Gurnall stood fast, and refused to move. He did not act with the party with which he had generally acted, and was left behind.
- He was a Puritan in doctrine, and yet he steadfastly adhered to the Church of England. He was a minister of the Church of England, and yet a thorough Puritan both in preaching and practice. In fact, he was just the man to be disliked and slighted by both sides.

How is Gurnall influential today?

- He is best remembered for his work *The Chrisitan in Complete Armour*.
 - He brought the spiritual battle in view for the church and called for readiness.
 - In it he writes with pastoral wisdom using vivid illustrations and a vast knowledge of the Bible.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/puritan-favorites/william-gurnall-1617-1679/>

- It talks about fighting temptation, how to defend against Satan's attacks, how to have endurance in trials and to strengthen weak faith.
- This writing has been influential in warning against spiritual laziness, practical holiness, and forming a spiritual posture and rhythms in one's walk with the Lord.
- His life of holiness and posture of standing firm in trials influenced Charles Spurgeon and J.C. Ryle.
- Spurgeon saying about this book, "Every line is full of wisdom; every sentence suggests a sermon. It is one of the best books ever written."
- Ryle calling Gurnall one of the "fathers of evangelical theology."

ANNE BRADSTREET (1612 – 1672)¹⁵

- Anne Dudley was the daughter of Thomas Dudley, chief steward to Theophilus Clinton, the Puritan earl of Lincoln.
- She married Simon Bradstreet, another protégé of the earl's, when she was 16, and two years later she, her husband, and her parents sailed with other Puritans to settle on Massachusetts Bay.
 - "Anne Bradstreet sailed to America on the ship *Arbella*. She traveled with her husband, Simon Bradstreet, her parents, and other Puritan emigrants as part of the Winthrop Fleet. The *Arbella* was the flagship of a fleet of eleven ships that carried around seven hundred colonists to Massachusetts in 1630."
- In the New World, "she wrote her poems while rearing eight children, functioning as a hostess, and performing other domestic duties. The Bradstreets moved frequently in the Massachusetts colony, first to Cambridge, then to Ipswich, and then to Andover, which became their permanent home. Bradstreet's brother-in-law, without her knowledge, took her poems to England, where they were published."
- Although Anne Dudley Bradstreet did not attend school, she received an excellent education from her father, who was widely read— Cotton Mather described Thomas Dudley as a "devourer of books"—and from her extensive reading in the well-stocked library of the estate of the Earl of Lincoln, where she lived while her father was steward from 1619 to 1630.¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anne-Bradstreet>

¹⁶ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anne-bradstreet>

How is Bradstreet influential today?

- She was a devout Puritan, gracious wife and mother of 8 children.
- She experienced faith, doubt, grief, and hope which she wrote about in over 7000 lines of poetry.
- Anne Bradstreet was the first woman to be recognized as an accomplished New World Poet. Her volume of poetry *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* ... received considerable favorable attention when it was first published in London in 1650. Eight years after it appeared it was listed by William London in his *Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books in England*, and George III is reported to have had the volume in his library. Bradstreet's work has endured, and she is still considered to be one of the most important early American poets.¹⁷
- Anne Bradstreet has several strong connections to Harvard University. Her father, Thomas Dudley, was a founder of Harvard College and one of the original overseers. Her husband, Simon Bradstreet, also served as an overseer. Furthermore, two of their sons, Samuel and Simon, graduated from Harvard. In 1997, Harvard honored Anne Bradstreet by dedicating the Bradstreet Gate, near Canaday Hall in Harvard Yard, to commemorate her as the first published American poet. The gate's inscription includes a quote from her work.¹⁸
- One of the most read poems at weddings is from Anne Bradstreet, "To My Dear and Loving Husband."

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay;
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

¹⁷ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anne-bradstreet>

¹⁸ <https://lewis.seas.harvard.edu/pages/october-3-1997-anne-bradstreet> (not a direct quote from the article.)