

A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life by J. I. Packer, Crossway Books: Carol Stream, IL 2010 (reprint) (54 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Biblical Religion is God-Centered

Biblical religion is God-centered not man-centered. To get the love of Christ in focus changes one's whole experience. (Page 13)

2. The unanimous Puritan View

Regular discourse meditation, in which as he quaintly put it you 'imitate the most powerful preacher you ever heard' in applying spiritual truth to yourself, as well as turning the truth into praise, is a vital discipline for spiritual health. This was the unanimous Puritan view. (Page 13)

3. Just One Step from Eternity

Dr. Johnson is credited with the remark that when a man knows he is going to be hanged in fortnight it concentrates his mind wonderfully, and in the same way the Puritans' awareness that in the midst of life we are in death, just one step from eternity, gives them a deep seriousness, calm yet passionate, with regard to the business of living that Christians in today's opulent, mollycoddled, earthbound Western world rarely manage to match. (Page 14)

4. Theologians Called to be Water Engineers

Theologians are called to be the church's water engineers and sewage officers; it is their job to see God's pure truth flow abundantly where it is needed, and to filter out any intrusive pollution that might damage health. (Page 15)

5. Puritans Are Not Wild Men

Informed folk now acknowledge that the typical Puritans were wild men, fierce and freaky, religious fanatics and social extremist, but sober, conscientious, and cultured citizens; persons of principles, devoted, determined, and disciplined, excelling in the domestic virtues, and with no obvious shortcomings save a tendency to run to words when saying anything important, whether to God or to man. At last the record has been put straight. (Page 22)

6. Maturity Exemplified by Puritans

The belief that the Puritans, even if they were if they were responsible citizens, were comic and pathetic in equal degree, being naive and superstitious, primitive and gullible, super-serious, over scrupulous, majoring in minors, and unable or unwilling to relax, die hard. What could these zealots give us that we need, it is asked.

The answer, in one word, is maturity. Maturity is a compound of wisdom, good will, resilience, and creativity. The Puritan exemplified maturity; we don't. We are spiritual dwarfs. A much-travelled leader, a native American (be it said), has declared that he

find North America Protestantism, man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sentimental as it blatantly is, to be 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep. The Puritans, by contrast, as a body were giants. (Page 22)

7. The Lord's Solder-Pilgrims

Spiritual warfare made the Puritans what they were. They accepted conflict, as their calling, seeing themselves as their Lord's soldier-pilgrims, just as in Bunyan's allegory, and not expecting to be able to advance a single step without opposition of one sort or another.

(Page 22)

8. Puritans Had a Holistic Life

Through the legacy of the literature the Puritan can help us today toward the maturity that they knew, and that we need.

In what way can they do this? Let me suggest some specific. First, there are lessons for us in *the integration of their daily lives*. As their Christianity was all-embracing, so their living was all of a piece. Nowadays we would call their lifestyle holistic, all awareness, activity, and enjoyment, all 'use of the creatures' and development of personal power and creativity, was integrated in the single purpose of honoring God by appreciating all his gifts and making everything "holiness to the Lord". There was for them no disjunction between sacred and secular; all creation, so far as they were concerned, was sacred, and all activities, of whatever kind, must be sanctified, that is, done to the glory of God. So, in their heavenly-minded ardor, the Puritans become men and women of order, mater-of-fact and down-to-earth, prayerful, purposeful, practical. Seeing life whole, they integrated contemplation with action, worship with work, labor with rest, love of God with love of neighbor and of self, personal with social identity, and the wide spectrum of relational responsibilities with each order, in a thoroughly conscientious and thought-out way.

(Page 23-24)

9. The Puritan's Communion with God

In the Puritans' communion with God, as Jesus Christ was central, so Holy Spirit was supreme. By Scripture, as God's word of instruction about divine-human relationships, they sought to live, and here, too, they were conscientiously methodical. Knowing themselves to be creatures of thought, affection, and will, and knowing that God's way to the human heart (the will) is via the human head (the mind), the Puritan practiced meditation, discursive and systematic, on the whole range of biblical truth as they saw it applying to themselves. Puritan meditation on Scripture was modeled on the Puritan sermon; in meditation the Puritan would seek to search and challenge his heart, stir his affections to have sin and love righteousness, and encourage himself with God's promises, just as Puritan preachers would do from the pulpit. (Page 24)

10. Puritans Were Mature at Home

At home the Puritan showed themselves (to use my overworked term) mature, accepting hardships and disappointments realistically as from God and refusing to be daunted or soured by any of them. (Page 26)

11. Puritanism Was Concerned With God

Puritanism was at heart a spiritual movement, passionately, concerned with God and godliness. (Page 28)

12. Puritanism Was Christian Philosophy

Puritanism was essentially a movement for church reform, pastoral renewal and evangelism, and spiritual revival; and in addition—indeed, as a direct expression of zeal for God’s honor—it was a world-view, a total Christian philosophy. (Page 28)

13. The Holy Spirit’s Main Ministry

The Holy Spirit main ministry is not to give thrills but to create in us Christlike character.

(Page 31)

14. True Religion—Heart Work

True religion claims the affections as well as the intellect; it is essential, in Richard Baxter’s phrase, ‘heart-work’. Page 32)

15. Losses and Crosses

‘Losses and crosses’, that is, bafflement and disappointment in relation to particular hopes one has entertained, must be accepted as a recurring element in one’s life of fellowship with him. (Page 33)

16. God’s Love, A Love That Redeems

The *love* of God: that is a love that redeems, converts, sanctifies, and ultimately glorifies sinners, and that Calvary was the one place in human history where it was fully and unambiguously revealed, and that in relation to our situation we may know for certain that nothing can separate us from that love (Romans 8:38f), although no situation in the world will ever be free from flies in the ointment and thorns in the bed.

(Page 33)

17. The Glory of God

About the *glory* of God, which it become our privilege to further by our celebrating of his grace, by our proving of his power under perplexity and pressure, by totally resigning ourselves to his good pleasure, and by making him our joy and delight at all times. (Page 33)

18. Revival—God’s Work

Revival I define as a work of God by his Spirit through his word bringing the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of Christians who have grown slack and sleepy. In reuel God makes old things new, giving new power to law and gospel and new spiritual awareness to those whose hearts and consciences had been blind, hard and cold.

(Page 36)

19. The Marks of Revival

Taking the early chapters of Acts as a paradigm, and relating them to the rest of the New Testament, which is manifestly a product throughout of revival conditions, we may list as marks of revival an awesome sense of the presence of God and the truth of the gospel; a profound awareness of sin, leading to deep repentance and heartfelt embrace of the glorified, loving, pardoning Christ, an uninhibited witness to the power and glory of Christ, with a mighty freedom of speech expressing a mighty freedom of spirit; joy in the lord, love for people, and fear of sinning; and from God’s side an intensifying and speeding up of the work of grace so that men are struck down by the word and transformed by the Spirit in short order, making it appropriate pastorally as well as theologically to baptize adult converts straight after they have professed faith. It is true, of course, that there can be personal revival without any community movement, and that there can be no community movement save as individuals are revived. Nonetheless, if we allow Acts as our paradigm we shall define revival as an essentially corporate phenomenon in which God sovereignly shows his hand, visits his people, extends his kingdom, and glorifies his name. (Page 36)

20. Dr. Irvonwy Morgan Supplies the Vital Clue. He writes:

The essential thing in understand the Puritans was they were preachers before they were anything else. ... Into whatever efforts they were led in their attempts to reform the world through the Church, and however these efforts were frustrated by the leaders of the Church, what bound them together, undergirded their striving, and gave them the dynamic to persist was their consciousness and they were called to preach the Gospel. (Page 37)

21. Baxter’s Poorest or Smallest Library

What books, especially of theology, should one choose who for want of money or time can read but few? In reply, he lists what he calls ‘the poorest or smallest library that is tolerable’. Bible, concordance, commentary, catechism, something on the doctrines of the gospel, and ‘as many affectionate practical English writers as you can get.’ He names some sixty, all but three of them Puritans, and then repeats: “as many as you can get.’ It is this literature, to which Baxter himself contributes so much (his *Dictionary*, *Saints Everlasting Rest*, *Call to the Unconverted*, *life of Faith*, *Dying Thoughts* , and a great deal more), that concern us now.

What was in these great books? Sermons, mostly, expounding Scripture by the characteristic Puritan method of ‘doctrine, reason and use’—proposition, confirmation, and application. (Page 39)

22. Homiletic Treatises—the Part of Divinity

The contents of these homiletic treatises may be generally described, in John Downname’s words, as ‘the part of Divinity . . . which consisteth more in experience and practice, than in theory and application, and more principally tendeth to the sanctification of the heart, than the informing of the judgment and the in the increasing of knowledge; and to the stirring up of all to the practice of that they know in the duties of a godly life , and in bringing forth the fruit of faith in new obedience . . .’ 19 John Downname, *A Guide to Godliness* (1622), Epistle Dedicatory. (Page 39-40)

23. ‘Am I Among the Elect?’—‘Am I in a State of Grace?’

These books were written because throughout the Puritan period there were many troubled souls who need help of this kind. In many minds the question ‘What must I do to be saved?’ ‘Am I among the elect?’ and ‘Am I in a state of grace?’ were unhelpfully tangled up with each other, and one of the chief strengths of Puritan pastoral writing, as of Puritan pastoral dealing, was the skill with which those questions were separated and confusion about them sorted out. The pioneer work here was Perkins’ *Treatise Tending unto a Declaration whether a man be in the estate of Damnation or in the estate of Grace and if he be if the first , how he may in time come out of it; if in the second, how he may discern it, and preserve in the same to the end* (1586). (Page 41-42)

24. Greenham’s Ministry vs. Baxter’s

Some sense of impact of Puritan books over two generations may be gained by comparing Greenham’s ministry at Dry Drayton with Baxter’s at Kidderminster. Greenham labored for twenty years (1570-90) with virtually no fruit; Baxter worked for fourteen (1641-42, 1647-60), in a situation where ‘they had hardly ever had lively serious preaching’, and saw the greater part of the town, which was about 800 families and 2,000 adults strong, making a profession of faith. ‘O what am I, a worthless Worm . . . that God should thus abundantly encourage me, when the Reverend Instructors of my youth, did labor Fifty years together in one place, and could scarcely say they had converted one or two of [i.e., out of] their Parishes!’ The means used were essentially the same in both cases; Baxter too could say with truth that he spent his time ‘preaching Christ crucified unto my self and Country people’, both from the pulpit and in personal dealings with individuals; but Baxter’s England, leavened by two generations of Puritan preaching and religious writing, was a different place from Greenham’s. The fallow ground had been broken up, the scen sown faithfully over many decades, and now harvest time had come. In ministries like Baxter’s the vision of converted communities that had led men like Greenham and Rogers in their pastoral charges was finding fulfillment at last. (Pagw59)

25. God's Revealed Truth is for Health-Giving Practices

God's revealed truth, they maintained, is for health-giving practices, therefore it is best studied in a practical way; therefore pastors must preach and teach it in that way. Gospel doctrine is to be obeyed; truth is to be, not just biblical, not just acknowledged, but done, in the sense of doing what it requires. So the most biblical theologian will be the most practical theologian, and vice versa; and the preaching style, with practical applications and challenges at every turn, will be the most biblical manner of theologizing. (Page 65)

26. The Bible—Normative Experience & Doctrine

They read the Bible as a book of normative experience, no less than of normative doctrine. (Page 68)

27. Puritan's Classic Theologians & Spiritual Guides

If the reformers are classic theologians, then the Puritans are classic pastors and spiritual guides, as any who read them will soon find. (Page 69)

28. A Passion for Thoroughness

What lead Puritans into such long-windedness was their passion for thoroughness in extracting all doctrines and developing all applications. (Page 73)

29. Puritan Expositors Teach the Whole Word of God

Where we concentrate on focusing the flow of each passage with minimum reference to other Scriptures, Puritan expositors labor throughout to show how each passage reflects and links up with the teaching of the rest of the word of God. (Page 73)

30. Puritan Preachers Displayed Christ's Grace

The Puritans as a body were clear that the preacher's job is to display Christ's grace, not his own learning, and to design his sermon so that they bring benefit to others rather than applause to himself. Therefore, Puritan preaching revolved around the three R's of biblical religion—ruin, redemption, regeneration—and clothed these gospel truths in the vivid dress of studied simplicity. (Page 74)

31. Puritans Were Men of the Spirit

The Puritans were *men of the Spirit*; lovers of the Lord, keepers of the law, and self-squanderers in his service, which are in every age the three main elements of the truly Spirit-filled life. (Page 75)

32. Spiritual Authority Hard to Pin Down in Words

Spiritual authority is hard to pin down in words, but we recognize it when we meet it. It is a product of compounded of conscientious faithfulness to the Bible; vivid perception of God's reality and greatness; inflexible desire to honor and please him;

deep self-searching and radical self-denial; adoring intimacy with Christ; generous compassion manward; and forthright simplicity, God-taught and God-wrought, adult in its knowingness while childlike in its directness. The man of God has authority as he bows to divine authority, and the pattern of God's power in him is the baptismal pattern of being supernaturally raised from under the burdens that feel like death. (Page 77)

33. The Puritan's Approach to Winning Souls

The Puritan approach to the task of winning souls was controlled by the knowledge that fallen men cannot turn to God by their own strength, nor is it in the power of evangelists to make them to do so. The Puritan position was that only God, by his Spirit, through his word, can bring sinners to faith, and that he does this, not to our order, but according to his own free purpose. Our evangelistic practice, the Puritans would say, must be in accord with the truth. Models of action which imply another doctrine cannot be approved. (Page 163)

34. The Gospel Preached

If we do not preach about sin and God's judgement on it, we cannot present Christ as Savior from sin and the wrath of God. And if we are silent about those things, and preach Christ who saves only from self and the sorrows of the world, we are not preaching the Christ of the Bible. We are in effect bearing false witness and preaching a false Christ. Our message is 'another gospel, which is not another'. Such preaching may sooth some, but it will help nobody, for a Christ who is not seen and sought as a Savior from sin will not be found to save from self or from anything else. An imaginary Christ will not bring a real salvation, and a half-truth presented as the whole truth is a complete untruth. Thus the minimizing approach threatens to falsify the gospel by emptying it of doctrinal elements that are essential to it. (Page 164-165)

35. The Words of Thomas Manton:

The sum of the gospel is this, that all who, by true repentance and faith, do forsake the flesh, the world, and the devil, and give themselves up to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as their creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, shall find God as a father, taking them for his reconciled children, and for Christ's sake pardoning their sin, and by his Spirit giving them his grace; and, if they persevere in this course, will finally glorify them, and bestow upon them everlasting happiness; but will condemn the unbelievers, impenitent, and ungodly to receive everlasting punishment. This is the sum of the gospel appeareth by Mark 16:15-16: 'Go, preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned;'—where you have all the Christian religion laid before you in one short view and prospect. (Page 167)

36. Preaching Gospel Sermons Involves Preaching the Whole Christian System

The Puritan view was that preaching ‘gospel sermons’ meant teaching the whole Christian system—the character of God, the Trinity, the plan of salvation, the entire work of grace. To preach Christ, they held, involved preaching all this. Preach less, they would tell us, and what you do preach will not be properly grasped. What the good news of a restored relationship with God through Christ means for religion cannot be understood further than it is seen in this comprehensive context. Gospel preaching centers always upon the theme of man’s relationship to God, but around the center of it must range throughout the whole sphere of revealed truth, viewing the center from every angle of vision that the Bible provides. In this way, they would say, preaching the gospel involves preaching the whole counsel of God. Nor should the preaching of the gospel be thought of as something confined to a set of evangelistic occasions, as if at other times we should preach something else. If one preaches the Bible biblically, one cannot help preaching the gospel all the time, and every sermon will be, as Bolton said, at least by implication evangelistic. (Page 169)

37. We Need to Reach Sinners Who God Is.

Baxter directed the seeking soul to fix his mind first and foremost on the nature and majesty of God. In the pagan West today, we need to lay the same foundation as Paul laid at Athens. We complain that our ‘gospel preaching’ (in the modern sense) does not register with those who hear it. May not this be in the first instance because they know nothing about God with whom they have to do? Have we taken pains to teach them who God is? The irony of our situation is that if we spend time preaching to modern pagans about the character of God we shall be told that we are not preaching the gospel. But the Puritans would not tell us that; nor would Paul. (Page 169)

38. Jesus Must Be Savior, Lord, Prophet, and King

The Lord Jesus Christ must be received in his whole mediatorial office, as Savior and Lord, as Prophet, Priest, and King for ‘never did any man take Jesus Christ savingly, who took him not for a Husband and a Lord, to serve, love and obey him for ever after, as well as Savior to disburden him of his sins, as King to govern him by his Word and Spirit, as well as Priest to wash him in his blood.’ To accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Priest to evangelical faith; to enthrone him as Lord and King is evangelical repentance. (Page 171)

39. The Offer of Salvation

The persons invited and commanded to believe are sinners, as such. The Savior is freely offered in the gospel to all who need him. The question of the extent of the atonement does not therefore arise in evangelism, for what the gospel commands the unconverted man to believe is not that Christ died with the specific intention of securing his individual salvation, but that here and now the Christ who died for sinners offers himself to this individual sinner, saying to him personally, ‘Come unto me . . .

and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). The whole warrant of faith—the ground, that is, on which believing becomes permissible and obligatory—is found in this invitation and command of the Father and the Son. (Page 171)

40. Repentance

We sinners cannot change our own hearts, but we can employ means of grace (in this case, lines of disciplined prayerful thought) via which God changes hearts. God ordinarily gives faith, the mother, and repentance, the daughter, to those who are resolutely, self distrustfully, imploringly reaching after both. The Puritan evangelist's message was: start reaching now! (Page 175)

41. The Gospel of Free Sovereign Grace

The puritan preaches the gospel of free and sovereign grace. Like Baxter, they were motivated by 'a thirsty desire of Man's Conversion and Salvation'. But two other motives weighed with them also, both greater even than this: the double desire to glorify God, and to magnify Christ. The latter point is, perhaps, the one at present we most need to apply to ourselves. All of us who preach the gospel, I suppose, desire men's conversion. Many, no doubt, are concerned also to glorify God by a faithful declaration of his truth. But how many, when preaching the gospel, are consumed by the longing to magnify Christ—to extol the richness, and freedom, and glory of his grace, and the perfection of his saving work? The cheap and perfunctory way in which the Person of the Savior is sometimes dealt with in modern evangelistic preaching forces this question upon us. Puritan gospel preaching was concerned above all things to honor Christ; to show his glory to needy men and women. It is much to be wished that we who preach the gospel in these days might recover the same overmastering concern to exalt this mighty Savior.

(Page 175-176)

42. Useful Fruitful Obedient Person

The man that understands the evil of his own heart, how vile it is, is the only useful, fruitful and solidly believing and obedient person... *Owens, Works, VI:201* (Page 193)

43. Realistic Self-Knowledge

The Puritan teachers as a body constantly insisted that realistic self-knowledge is a *sine qua non* for living the Christian life. (Page 194)

44. Man Was Made to Know Good With His Mind

Man was made to know good with his mind, to desire it, once he has come to know it, with his affection, and to cleave to it, once he has felt its attraction, with his will, the good in this case being God, his truth and his law. God accordingly moves us, not by direct action on the affections or will, but by addressing our minds with his word, and so bringing to bear on us the force of truth. Our first task, therefore, if we would serve

God, is to learn the contents of ‘God’s Word written’. Affection may be the helm of the ship, but the mind must steer; and the chart to steer by is God’s revealed truth.

Consequently, it is the preacher’s first task to teach his flock the doctrines of the Bible, eschewing emotionalism (the attempt to play directly on the affections) and addressing himself constantly to the mind. (Page 195)

45. Christian Living

Christian living must be founded upon self-aborrence and self-distrust because of indwelling sin’s presence and power. Self-confidence and self-satisfaction argue self-ignorance. The only healthy Christian is the humble, broken-hearted Christian. (Page 196)

46. All Men Err, Even Puritans

They would further assure us that, since all men, even Puritans, can err, we must always test their teaching with the utmost rigor by that very word which they sought to expound. Or, again, we can make a wrong application of their teaching. We can parrot their language and ape their manners, and imagine that thereby we place ourselves in the true Puritan tradition. But the Puritans would impress on us that that is precisely what we fail to do if we act so. They sought to apply the eternal truths of Scripture to the particular circumstances of their own day—moral, social, political, ecclesiastical, and so forth. (Page 233)

47. We Can Learn From the Puritans

To content ourselves with aping the Puritans would amount to beating a mental retreat out of the twentieth century, where God has set us to live, into the seventeenth, where he has not. This is as unspiritual as it is unrealistic, and he has been given to teach Christians how to live to God to in the situation in which they are, not that which some other saints once were. We quench the Spirit by allowing ourselves to live in the past. And such an attitude of mind is theologically culpable. It show that we have shirked an essential stage in our thinking about God’s truth—that of working out its application to ourselves. Applications may never be taken over second-hand and ready-made; each man in each generation must exercise his conscience to discern for himself how truth applies, and what it demands, in the particular situation in which he finds himself. The application *may* be similar in detail from one generation to another, but we must not assume in advance that it will be so. And therefore our aim in studying the Puritan must be to learn, by watching them apply the word to themselves in their day, how we must apply it to ourselves in ours. (Page 234)

48. Puritan Preaching Had Bad Press

Puritan preaching has had a bad press in these latter days: the caricature is that Puritan sermons were regularly long, abstruse, and dull. In fact, one hour was the recognized length, practical biblical exposition was the actual substance, and liveliness was a regular mark of the style. Puritan preaching prolonged the down-to-earth raciness of

presentation, with verbal pictures, narrative illustrations, and allusions to Bible stories scattered throughout in abundance.

(Page 280)

49. Puritans Preached the Bible Systematically

What made Puritan preaching into the reality that it was, however, was less its style than its substance. Puritans preached the Bible systematically and thoroughly, with sustained application to personal life, preaching it as those who believed it, and who sought by their manner to make their matter credible and convincing, convicting, and converting. (Page 280)

50. Revival Preaching in the Puritan Vein

The well-being of the church today depends in large measure on a revival of preaching in the Puritan vein. (Page 281)

51. All Grace Inters by Understanding

It was a Puritan maxim that ‘all grace inters by the understanding’. God does not move men to action by mere physical violence, but addresses their mind by his word, and calls for the response of deliberate consent and intelligent obedience. It follows that every man’s first day in relation to the word of God is to understand it; and every preacher’s first duty is to explain it. The only way to the heart that he is authorized to take runs via the head. So the minister who does not make it his prime business, in season and out of season, to teach the word of God, does not do his job, and the sermon which, whatever else it may be, is not a didactic exposition of Scripture is nor worthy of the name. (Page 281)

52. Preaching is an Act of Worship

Nothing honors God more than the faithful declaration and obedient hearing of his truth. Preaching, under any circumstances, is an act of worship, and must be performed as such. Moreover, preaching is the prime means of grace to the church. (Page 281)

53. Not Quenchers of the Spirit!

‘Whereas some men are for preaching only extempore and without study.’ Baxter states the principle positively:

If we give to reason, memory, study, books, methods, forms, etc., but their proper place, in subordination to Christ and his Spirit, they are as far from being quenchers of the Spirit, that they are necessary in their place, and are such means as we must use, if ever we will expect the Spirit’s help. (Page 282)

54. Satan's Regular Mode of Operations

Satan seeks to carry away revived believers by exploiting the strength of their feelings, tempting them to pride, censoriousness, impatience with all established order in the church, and a persistent belief that the Spirit has more freedom to work when Christians leave themselves in a state of disorganization, and when preach without bothering to prepare their sermons; as if spur-of-the moment spontaneity is the supreme form or condition spirituality. Satan further seek to delude revived believers by immediate suggestions and inspirations, inviting them to conclude that all the thoughts and text which come into their mind unbidden must be messages from God. By this and other means he seeks to lead then into imprudences of all sorts in the heat of their zeal. Such is his regular mode of procedure when a revival is in progress. (Page 325)