

Puritanism generally extended the thought of the English Reformation, with distinctive emphases on four convictions:

1. Puritans believed in the supreme authority of the Bible.

- Puritans came to argue that Christians should do only what the Bible commanded. They made as serious an attempt as has ever been made in the English - speaking world to establish their lives on the basis of biblical instruction.
 - i. When Puritan efforts to reform the kingdom of England faltered in the last years of Elizabeth's reign, they turned to the one sphere they could still control, their individual families.
 - ii. It was during this period around 1600 that Puritans began to place new emphasis on the sabbath, to revive family worship, and to encourage personal acts of mercy to the sick and dying. When Puritan prospects brightened in the 1640s, this "spiritualization of the household" emerged into the open.
 - iii. Puritans argued that Scripture laid down specific rules for constructing and governing churches. Furthermore, the Bible taught a system of church order that was not based on bishops. Puritans maintained this conviction even when they failed among themselves to agree on what that biblical system was.

2. Puritans believed that humankind was dependent upon God for salvation.

- They regarded humans as sinners, unwilling and unable to meet the demands, or to enjoy the fellowship, of a righteous God apart from God's gracious initiative.
- Puritans made distinctive contributions to the general Reformed idea of salvation.
 - i. They advocated a "plain style" of preaching, as exemplified in the masterful sermons of John Dod (1555 - 1645) and William Perkins (1558 - 1602), which was consciously designed to point out simply the broad way of destruction and the strait gate to heaven.
 - ii. They also placed a new emphasis on the process of conversion. In the journals and diaries of leaders like Thomas Shepard (1605 - 49) they charted the slow, and often painful, process by which God brought them from rebellion to obedience. They also spoke of salvation in terms of "covenant." In the notes to the Geneva Bible, the translation of proto - Puritans completed during the reign of Mary Tudor, emphasis was on a personal covenant of grace, whereby God both promised life to those who exercised faith in Christ and graciously provided that faith, on the basis of Christ's sacrificial death, to the elect.

3. Most Puritans believed a single, coordinated set of authorities should govern life in society.

- The result was that Puritans sought nothing less than to make all England Puritan. Only late during the Puritan Commonwealth did ideas of toleration and of what is known today as pluralism arise, but these ideas were combated by most Puritans themselves and firmly set to rest for another generation by the restoration of Charles II.