

**Puritan Papers. Volume 1, 1956 - 1959. Edited by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.**  
**Foreword by W.Robert Godfrey. Softcover, 320 pp.**  
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**Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.**

What is Puritanism? It began as part of the Protestant Reformation in England. It appeared as an organized movement during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the 1560s and reached its peak of power after the Civil War of 1642-46. It was controversial and unpopular from its beginning.

An early 17th century popular accused Puritans of hypocrisy:

Pure in show, an upright holy man,  
Corrupt within - and called a Puritan.

Historian Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59) caricatured them as kill-joys: "The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." But this popular conception is very unfair to the general tone and temper of the historic Puritans. The latter were not long-faced, not teetotalers, not haters of art and music. They had God and His glory as their unifying centre. They were devout, intelligent, self-controlled, plain dressed Reformation Christians who held to simplicity and democratic principles.

As a way of life, puritanism has always represented strict obedience to the dictates of conscience and strong emphasis on the virtue of self-denial. It was, above all else, a Bible movement with its deep respect for Scripture and its desire to know and carry out its teachings. The Puritans insisted that Scripture was clear on all matters essential to salvation and Biblical morality. They stressed that the truths necessary for salvation were clearly shown in Scripture. Their 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.

The result of the Puritans high view of Scripture was their longing to preach and declare God's Word to their people. Their style of preaching was plain and aimed at practicality. They were as eager for social and political reform as they were preaching the Gospel as a timeless message. They applied Scriptural principles at work, in the home, and in education. Christian life was seen as a "gymnasium and dressing room where we are prepared for heaven."

Thanks to O. Raymond Johnston, James I. Packer, and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the "Puritan Conference" was founded in the late 1940s with the aim to tap into the vitality and power of the Puritan movement to stimulate pastors and Christians in general. The first conference took place in December 1950. And for many years it became an annual event. Dr. Packer wrote in a foreword to the 1958 conference papers, "[the conference] exists because its organizers believe that historic Reformed theology in general, and the teachings of the great Puritans in particular, does justice to certain neglected Biblical truths and emphases which the church today urgently needs to re-learn... The Puritans were strongest just where Protestants today are weakest, and their writings can give us more real help than those of any other body of Christian teachers, past or present, since

the days of the apostles." This quote from Packer says it all. The republication of the conference papers offers a profoundly realistic vision of the Christian life. The twenty-three studies cover a wide range of topics ranging from the doctrine of election, keeping of the Lord's Day, the life and work of the minister, to discipline in a Puritan congregation. They are not merely academic. They are constructive, and beneficial not only for pastors but for all God's covenant people. The Puritans' depth of conviction, their God-centred preaching and teaching, and their disciplined life style present a real challenge to all of us. I warmly recommend this first volume of "Puritan Papers."