

Soli Deo Gloria! - Puritans

A few days back we ate a big lunch with family and friends and called it Thanksgiving Day. It was an official time to give thanks to Almighty God for the blessings that He has given over the past year. My personal belief is that every day is Thanksgiving Day. Every day that we awake and put our feet on the floor to face the world that exists for us should be a moment when we say, "Thank you Heavenly Father for life and my existence." "Thank you for the air that you provide so that I might live." "Thank you for the food that I put into my mouth to sustain my bodily functions." "Lord you are a Great God." These should be our first thoughts and internal words of the day—not because of duty or obligation, but out of a totally dependent, humble creature that is worshiping and praising our Creator and Sustainer of life. Because He created me I exist and am to give all glory and praise to Him, not me. It is because of God Almighty's grace that He shows through His creation and His Son who bled for each believer that we exist in His love. Now when I pause and get my mind around that, I want to fall down in worship. All my inflated self pride goes out the window.

I don't know if you know much about the Puritans. I sure don't. I learned in elementary school that they got together God's bountiful harvest and had a feast of thankfulness near the end of one year back in 1600 something. But I also learned that they were puritanical folks who didn't believe in having pleasure or fun. In the 1970's while stationed at Pease AFB, New Hampshire, my family and I visited Plymouth, MA. It was maintained as a Pilgrim or Puritan village. Even the picture of that held true to what I had been taught in grade school. I got the impression that they were just prudish people. They didn't believe in having fun. Church services were almost all day on Sunday, and if you went to sleep someone tapped you with a long stick to wake you up. I thought that they were somehow conceited and were hypocrites. I don't know where all these ideas came from but that is what I got earlier in life, and it was even reinforced in my 40's. Was this all there was to these people who were the foundation for America that has the greatest history of justice and giving? Surely there was something lost in knowing the Pilgrims or Puritans. They came to be called Pilgrims here in America.

So being an ignorant person I set out a few years ago to find out just what kind of people they were. At the beginning of my studies I learned that most Americans today believe exactly what I had come to believe through my early education and later in Massachusetts at Plymouth about the Puritans. However, my studies of today showed me that they were and are given a bad rap on this. If a person believes focusing all one's life endeavors on worshiping, praising and speaking God's truth from scripture and living that out in life is puritanical, then they sure were guilty of that. Further I learned that they were not religious fanatics, not hypocrites nor freakish social extreme misfits, as is commonly believed.

Well who were these people who settled in the Northeast of our country? Who were the ones who founded Harvard, a great university today, in 1636? Now that ought to tell us something of how we are so wrong in our beliefs about the Puritans. They were a people who not only talked the talk, but walked the walk of believers in Almighty God as sovereign over all his creation. They live on today in their writings because they were prolific writers. They were highly educated, and education in every aspect of their Christian life was crucial to them. Richard Baxter, a Puritan pastor, said this about education: "We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well. We must think and think again, how to compose our lives, as may most tend to men's salvation, as well as our sermons. . . ."

Because they lived their theological life in job, home, education, and church, the vast majority of their writings are of theology. Their writings were not some highly technical scholarly work, but practical for living and believing. In all their writings they aimed at exposing the truth as it comes from God's Word, the Bible. They did not have the King James Version as we know it. They had the Geneva Bible, an English translation before the Kings James Version. The Puritan leaders were physicians of the soul and they believed that truth healed. They did not separate one's life into compartments such as vocation or job life, home life, education life, and entertainment life. All those areas came under one roof. That roof was Christ Jesus as head. Lest we believe that their hard work got them into good standing with God, we must understand that they did not believe that their merits or works would get them to God. Not for a moment were they working to be near God. To them they could only be in God's presence by His Grace, which He bestowed on the ones who believed. The Puritans were dedicated hard workers whether in the home, job, education, or the church, but this hard work did not get them to God. They were a humble people.

The question might be asked, "Why bother with knowing about people who lived 300 or 400 years ago?" My personal take on this is that in a time of moral collapse in education, family life and work life, we can learn much from those who gave us Harvard, a work ethic, political ethic, and home ethic. They saw a person as a whole – one who could not be separated into a private life and public life. Truth was crucial in spiritual life, as well as vocational, social and political life. That truth came through God's Word. Today we don't even know what truth is and really don't care if there is a truth beyond ourselves. Our Bibles are laid on tables or bookshelves and seldom read. Why? Because we as a people of America believe in one thing and that is "me". The result of that is reflected in a recent survey of students that indicated the majority cheated and lied. Another story very recently was about criminal charges of teenage volunteers who assisted in a facility for aged adults who could not care for themselves. The charges were of abuse to the aged in ways too grotesque for me to print. As a college instructor for a number of years I had students who would work harder at cheating than they would at studying, which would have given them better results. Adults' moral behavior differs little from our youth other than being more sophisticated. I recall a saying that was expressed by many when I was in the Air Force that sums up how we live today. "Do unto others and then make it" seems to be America's outlook. How sad that as a people we are destroying ourselves. I must say that as I look back at my life, unwittingly my motto was "Do unto others and then make it." I would certainly have denied that if ever confronted. May I ask, "What is your motto?"

So if you are a believer, please give thanks moment by moment to our God and all that He provides. If you are not a believer, I pray that God will lead you to a Puritan who is perfect and true in all things. All of this is said from an ignorant, sinful person who cares deeply for you.

May your life be comforted. . .

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