



A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life

Joel R. Beeke , Mark Jones

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A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life offers a groundbreaking treatment of the Puritans' teaching on most major Reformed doctrines, particularly those doctrines in which the Puritans made significant contributions. Since the late 1950s, nearly 150 Puritan authors and 700 Puritan titles have been reprinted and catalogued by Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson in their 2006 collection of mini-biographies and book reviews, titled, *Meet the Puritans*. However, no work until now has gathered together the threads of their teaching into a unified tapestry of systematic theology.

A Puritan Theology, by Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, attempts to do that. The book addresses Puritan teachings on all six loci of theology, covering fifty areas of doctrine. The book explores Puritan teachings on biblical interpretation, God, predestination, providence, angels, sin, the covenants, the gospel, Christ, preparation for conversion, regeneration, coming to Christ, justification, adoption, church government, the Sabbath, preaching, baptism, heaven, hell, and many other topics. It ends with eight chapters that explore Puritan "theology in practice." Some chapters highlight the work of a specific theologian such as William Perkins, William Ames, John Owen, Stephen Charnock, or Thomas Goodwin on a specific topic. Other chapters survey various authors on a particular subject. The goal of *A Puritan Theology* is to increase knowledge in the mind and godliness in the soul. It was written for theologians, historians, pastors, and educated laymen who seek to learn more about Puritan theology. (Reformation Heritage)

A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life Details

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From Reader Review A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life for online ebook

Andre says

This is an excellent taste of Puritan theology. Written by a well respected scholar and theologian, it really is a systematic theology of seventeenth century British Reformed thought. A massive amount of research must have gone into this body of divinity gleaned from the works of the most voluminous class of pastor-preacher-theologians the world has ever known. Each loci covered gives you compacted and well selected comment from major and some lesser known Puritan divines. Some of the chapters are full blown discussions of doctrinal themes with comment from the authors who wrote major treatises on the subject. Dr. Beeke and Rev. Jones have put many a lover of the Puritans in their debt. This work is destined to be a classic and should be found on the desk of every minister who aspires to be a learned and godly divine. This work, to borrow from that greatest of American Calvinist theologians Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield shows "The Indispensableness of Systematic Theology to the Preacher".

Paul Barth says

Excellent! This is a great introduction to Puritan theology and is loaded with referenced works to keep one busy for a long time. I love the experimental and devotional applications of each doctrine throughout the whole book as well as the scholastic precision, all of which seems to be missing in many modern works. My favorite chapters were,

Stephen Charnock on the Attributes of God
The Minority Report: John Owen on Sinai
The Puritans on Understanding and Using God's Promises
Puritan Preparatory Grace
John Owen on the Christian Sabbath and Worship
Puritan Theology Shaped by a Pilgrim Mentality
The Puritans on Walking Godly in the Home
The Puritan Practice of Meditation

The chapters on Eschatology were disappointing, however. They made it seem as though Puritan Historic Postmillennialism was influenced by the time in which they lived rather than based on their exegesis of Scripture. There was no discussion on their arguments and exegesis for the Papacy as the Antichrist, the future conversion of the Jews, or the duty of civil magistrates to protect and promote the visible Church, for example, all of which were common Puritan eschatological beliefs.

The Eschatology section was the only inadequate section, however, and I was greatly edified by the book!

Job Dalomba says

At the time of this update I still have a couple of chapters to finish, but they are chapters I'm familiar with in general regarding Puritan doctrine so I can give a review and feel certain it won't change based on those

chapters.

This book is wonderful. If you want wide range teaching on the Puritans, this is a great place to start.

Craig Hurst says

One of the most voluminous and rich periods of Christian tradition and writing is that of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritans. The number of works and pages they produced is staggering and is only outdone by their passion for Christ and their commitment to the Scripture about which they wrote. They produced many classics that Christians have read for centuries since. They have been the victim of misunderstanding by many but for those who have taken the time to read them they have been changed forever.

In line with a long string of contemporary reprints and books on the Puritans comes a staggering volume which sets a new standard for Puritan studies. Coauthors Joel Beeke and Mark Jones have written *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* which sets out to provide a systematic theology on the theology of Continental reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Weighing nearly 5 pounds and measuring 2" x 7.5" x 10.2", this book moves beyond an introduction to the field of Puritan theology and provides a rich and vast well to draw from in ones quest for gaining a better grasp of the Puritans. The Works Referenced section is 45 pages long which includes both the primary and secondary sources cited throughout.

Overview

Due to the size and content of the book a review is necessarily general in scope. So, what can be said and what kind of book is this? In answering the second question first, this book is a systematic theology of Puritan thought. There are eight sections to the book which cover the ten traditional headings of theology from prolegomena to eschatology. The first section deals with prolegomena and includes a chapter on the famous *The Marrow of Theology* by William Ames. Angels and demons are taken up in the second section on theology proper along with the doctrine of God. Stephen Charnock's work *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* begins this section. Woven together with anthropology is the Puritans understanding of covenant theology in the third section with a summary of covenant conditions in chapter nineteen. The fourth section deals with Christology with a very applicable chapter on how the Puritans understood the promises of God. The fifth section addresses soteriology with chapters on the Holy Spirit, benefits of salvation such as justification and adoption and perseverance. Ecclesiology is covered in the sixth section. Along with the standard discussions of church polity and sacraments are two chapters on the Puritans theology of preaching. Eschatology is dealt with in the seventh section. Finally, various aspects of the Christian life are covered in the eighth section. This fits well with the subtitle of the book *Doctrine for Life*. More on that later.

Distinguishing Features

There is a lot that can be said about this book. First, the authors clearly qualified to write this book. Beeke and Jones are recognized Puritan specialists and they have an unparalleled command of the primary source material as well as familiarity with other second hand works like their own. As the president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Beeke has authored and coauthored many books dealing with the Puritans. Jones himself is a Puritan scholar and has published several books relate to Puritanism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Ten years in the making, this book is a testament to the authors love and familiarity to

Puritan theology. I suspect there will be many more books from these two as a result of their long and intense research and study. Additionally, Beeke and Jones are honest enough to recognize that the Puritans were not always correct in everything they taught nor did they always use the best language or terminology to describe their theology. For instance, in chapter 28 on preparatory grace, the writers express concern over the use of the term “qualification” and “qualified sinner” when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life before making a profession of faith in Christ (455).

Second, concerning the content of the book, it becomes immediately clear that the Puritans were concerned with two things. First, they were committed exegetes of Scripture and held it in highest regard. In similar fashion to reading the early church fathers, reading the Puritans is like reading Scripture itself. They were devoted to the word of God because from it we receive our saving knowledge of Christ and how it informs the way we live our lives for Christ. They show a command of the languages, systematic and biblical theology. Second, the Puritans were rightly obsessed with Christ himself. As is similar to the work of Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, the Puritans related and saw everything concerning Scripture and the Christian life in light of Christ. They were highly Christocentric in every sense of the word.

Third, as the subtitle states, this book reflects the often missed theme that runs throughout the Puritans works – doctrine is for life. While the final section is on theology in practice, it becomes quickly apparent to the reader that the Puritans connected all of their theology to life. Unfortunately, too many people see the Puritans writing as stuffy, dense and wordy. Surely their writing style certainly has a character of its own but I fear our inability at times to benefit from their works has more to do with us than with them. Whether it is regarding the promises of God to the believer or the nature of God himself, the Puritans sought to bring all of these truths to bear on the life of the believer.

Conclusion

Though an admittedly large and intimidating book, A Puritan Theology is a must read for any Puritan lover. Those wanting to gain a better grasp of the primary sources from experts should start here. Those interested in systematic theology will benefit immensely from this work as it is one itself. Because the Puritans were so devoted to Christ and the application of theology for life, this book almost serves as a walk-through devotional of the Puritans. Plenty of Scripture and application abound. The book is worth its weight in gold and will serve Christians for generations to come.

Jacob Aitken says

This is one of those “game-changer” books. Beeke provides decades of pastoral reflection from the Puritans (and admittedly, there is a lot of repetition) while Jones brings clear Christological reflection from giants like Thomas Goodwin and John Owen. The book is structured around the standard loci. While we perhaps would like more from some chapters, the overwhelming amount of primary sources, and the clear mastery of secondary literature, allows us to continue the research if necessary.

My review will reflect my biases and what I like to study. That can’t be helped, otherwise an exegetical review of this book would take ten pages. This book is a Christological masterpiece. I learned more from the chapters on Christology than I did in my week-long seminary class on Christology. I agree with Carl Trueman, this book is both doctrinal and devotional.

Christological Supralapsarianism

In regard to the end, Goodwin viewed mankind as unfallen in His election of human beings, but fallen in His decrees as the means to that end” (155).

“Means” -- what Christ, as redeemer of God’s elect, performed for his people. It has reference to Christ’s redemptive work, which presupposes a fall.

Key point: “whether God’s decree regarding both the end and the means was pitched ‘either wholly upon man considered in the mass of creability [potential human beings] afore the Fall, or wholly upon the mass of mankind considered and viewed first as fallen into sin” (Jones, quoting Goodwin 156).

The decree to elect falls under a twofold consideration: a) regarding the end, the fall was not a necessity...but an impediment; b) the decree to elect may be understood also with respect to man fallen, which God foresaw, as the means.

Election has reference to the end. Here God decrees to give men eternal life without consideration of the fall. But when we look at predestination, we view man as fallen. Predestination involves the means to the end.

Covenants

While some have noted concern on the section of the Covenant of Works, the section on the Covenant of Redemption is fantastic. Differences between Covenant of Grace and Covenant of Redemption

- (1) CoR sprang from grace in both parties (Father and Christ), whereas the CoG sprang from grace only from the Father.
- (2) Though both are everlasting, only the CoR is eternal.
- (3) The parties in the CoR are equal; the parties in CoG (and CoW) are not.
- (4) The parties differ in both covenants.
- (5) There is no mediator in the CoR
- (6) The promises of the New Covenant (such as a new heart and forgiveness of sins) cannot be applied to Christ.
- (7) Christ was not threatened in the CoR, whereas those in the CoG are (Heb. 2.3; 1 Cor. 16.22).
- (8) The conditions in each covenant differ.
- (9) The CoR did not require man’s consent.

Taken from Patrick Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 113-117, quoted in Beeke and Jones, 254.

Owen on Justification and Union

For Puritans like Owen and Goodwin, there is a Three fold union

Immanent: being elected in union with Christ from all eternity

Transient: union with Christ in time past; to wit, his mediatorial death and resurrection

Applicatory: experience of union in the present time.

Christ “apprehends” and gives his Spirit to the believer.

Owen: Christ is the first and principal grace in respect of causality and efficacy” (20:150). Union is the cause of the other graces. It is the ground of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers. Such is the

logical priority of union regarding justification. The act whereby Christ unites himself to the elect is the same act whereby he regenerates them (3:464).

Witsius: the elect are united to Christ when his Spirit takes a hold of them and infuses a new principal of life. Yet, there is a mutual union whereby the soul draws near to Christ by faith only. From this follows the other benefits of the covenant of grace.

Charnock: justification gives us a right; regeneration gives us a fitness (3:90).

Conclusion

This review did not cover all, or even much of the book. Indeed, it could not. But not only does it encourage you to read the Puritans, it points one to a number of crucial studies on the Puritans.

Alisson Matias says

This is simply the best puritan sistematic theology ever made before. Joel Beeke will help you to understand how the puritans think about god and how was they worshiped god.

Jesse says

If you want to benefit from the biblical knowledge and wisdom of the Puritans, yet don't have 5 hours a day to read and don't love migraines, this reference book/theology summary is for you. The authors also detail some of the Puritan's lives so you will see that these guys overcame huge obstacles and spiritual struggles. They saw more death and persecution than we will ever see and they not only endured, but were made Christlike through it. These guys were heroes of the faith and not the heartless stoics that the world presents them as. Don't buy the lie-- the Puritans were Spirit-filled in the truest sense. They were spiritual masters.

LaRosa Jr. says

This book was a great read. I had originally purchased this book when it was released by Logos Bible Software to read on my own. I ended up reading it as part of a book club with some men from my church, reading a chapter each week.

A Puritan Theology proved to be my first real introduction to the Puritans and it was quite edifying. The book is essentially a systematic theology from a Puritan perspective, with lots of quotes from their writings and explanation on how they understood various topics. While it was a heavy read in quite a few spots, the devotional writing of the Puritans shined through and I always walked away with a bit of application from each chapter I read. The last section was the most edifying as it encompassed everything together and put it into practical application.

This book is not for everyone. Beeke and Jones expect you to already have a certain familiarity with the Puritans an some original languages (mainly in the footnotes). This is certainly a seminary or graduate level

textbook, but it was well worth the read in my opinion. If you think you can trudge your way through it, I would say it was worthwhile. Would I read it again? Probably not, but I will be using it for reference quite a bit.

Steve Hemmeke says

In this 1,000 page work, authors Joel Beeke and Mark Jones survey a Puritan take on each area of classic systematic theology. They do an excellent job of conveying the Puritan piety, Christ-centered-ness, and concern for the conscience and eternal destiny of sinners.

Weaknesses:

Sometimes an even survey of theology was sacrificed for examining the particular views of a certain person. Perhaps this isn't bad. It must have been a challenge to select what to feature, out of the vast literature the Puritans produced.

Puritans suffered a bit from theological myopia and introspection. Although they could list 60 uses (applications) of a biblical text in a sermon, the emphasis was usually the same. (1) Your guilt and danger of hell, (2) the atonement of Christ for you, and (3) your obligation to repent, put to death the sin remaining in you, and use the means of grace (Word, sacrament, prayer, worship) to help clear your guilty conscience. Perhaps they tended to focus more on 1 and 3. The authors don't give much criticism to this. Instead of pointing out that they were more focused on the subjective sinner's experience in his conscience than on the objective work of Christ, they would say the Puritans struck a good balance between the objective and subjective. I'm not so sure. Raising the question for the reader's consideration would have been good, instead of just defending and commending the Puritans.

I'd recommend this to anyone with a basic knowledge of theology looking to go a little deeper, and at the same time be challenged in your piety and sanctification.

David Saxon says

What a magnificent book! Beeke and Jones distilled a vast amount of Puritan reading into a book that is readable, edifying, and enlightening. Even when disagreeing with the Puritans' perspectives (as a Baptist dispensationalist, I often did), I was motivated to have a God-centered and Scripture-saturated theology.

The size of the book might be off-putting to some, but I found that 10-15 pages a day allowed me to enjoy the richness of the material without being overwhelmed by it.

Daniel Wells says

Would like to give this 4.5 stars, but GoodReads isn't so precise. :-)

This book is one of its kind and should be on any pastor-theologian's shelf who has any interest in the Reformed tradition. For me, the value of this book was threefold. First, I was introduced to persons and their ideas that I was woefully ignorant of in the past. Second, I got a taste of some of the debates of 17th

century theology. Finally, this book is littered with quotes, many of which have devotional value. I jotted down more than a few Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, and Samuel Rutherford quotes.

However, beware of a couple of shortcomings in this book. First, this book isn't as technical as other works dealing with Puritan theology. That is fine as far as the purpose of the book goes, though. Second, Beeke and Jones come across too often as cheerleaders for the Puritans where some substantive critique would be welcomed. They give the Puritans the benefit of the doubt when compared to contemporary scholars who might wish to balance the Puritans on a point. (William Evans, J.I. Packer, and RJ Gore are simply dismissed without much warrant.)

Also, I was thoroughly disappointed in the chapter on Sabbath and Worship. Such an important chapter deserved more precision and fleshing out of positions. It was 'safe' at best.

Still, this is a fine piece of historical-systematic theology on the Puritans. High recommendation.

Calvin says

A really great book that changed my perceptions of the group known as the Puritans. Some very helpful modern applications made too, particularly in the final chapters; worth ploughing through to the end. if I could recover a small portion of the piety and zeal and discipline some of these giants of the faith had, my life would be transformed.

Al says

Reading this was quite a labor, but one which was cheerfully undertaken with the realization that this book is not intended to be read cover to cover. After finishing, there are multiple sections which need more careful reading, such as the fourth section on Christology and the fifth section on soteriology. The eighth section (ch. 52), on aspects of Christian life, was the one I found most rewarding, because it wrapped up the rest of the book into practical application of what is essentially a systematic theology text. The entire book is extensively footnoted and the bibliography of primary and secondary sources is awesome in its breadth. Application is found throughout the book, and this will have a significant impact on how I read the Bible. I'm glad that I plowed through it, because now I have a clear idea of what is in the book, and it will be a valuable study companion for many years. This is a must have for anyone who loves Puritan writing and wants to have a good handle on primary source material, as well as to be inspired into deeper study.

Laura says

This was a highly valuable read. It took me over a year—it is not light reading by any stretch—and some of the discussion was a bit too technical for a reader with no formal theological training, but I was frequently challenged and encouraged by the deep truths and godly practices espoused by the Puritans. I have read a fair amount of Puritan writing; this overview spurs me to read more and to explore some of the many Puritan writers whom I have not yet read. Highly recommended as an in-depth examination of the theology and piety of the English Puritans.

Josiah says

Excellent, excellent stuff. Beeke and Jones do a magnificent job of bringing the strengths of Puritan theology to the forefront in a systematized fashion, and even do a great job of mimicking their language and style of speaking at several points. Reading the Puritans' careful explication of Scripture gave me a renewed appreciation for the importance of subtlety and nuance in theology and helped me to think more carefully about areas of theology that I hadn't necessarily thought through as much before. The strength of the Puritans is their combination of strong theology with strong practice, and Beeke & Jones go into that quite a bit in this book making this the rare systematic theology book that has a lot to say about practice along with its theology. Some of the concepts in this book were a bit above my head, but for the most part, Beeke & Jones do a great job of making the Puritans and their teachings accessible to the modern-day Christian. Great work.

Rating: 4.5 Stars (Excellent).
