

## The Rise and Fall of Puritanism

### *Introduction*

Urban Dictionary defines “Puritan” as: “an old fashioned, homeschooling mother who thinks that girls should suffer during warm weather because shorts and tank tops will turn them into strippers destined for hell.”

Puritanism is one of those words we use but few of us actually understand.

We use it when we mean “uptight,” “old fashioned,” “judgmental,” or “prudish.” And, yes, the Puritans had certain sexual norms and expectations that looked different than popular culture today. But none of those words get anywhere near the HEART of Puritanism.

We use the word “Puritan” and misunderstand the Puritans.

Another thing we’ll often do if we want to explore Puritanism and colonial New England, is we’ll focus on the Salem Witch Trials. Browse the history shelves at your local bookstore and see how many books there are about the witch trials. But this approach misleading. Here’s why: if you don’t know anything about football and anecdotally learn that Tom Brady was a sixth-round draft pick who has played in nine Super Bowls and won six of them. If that was all you knew about football, you’d have no idea how insane that is. Or how angry that makes the rest of the league.

The same thing is true in studying history. If we want to understand colonial New England but we only study the weird, out of the norm events, we are going to misunderstand it. Today, we are going to look at the norms of Puritan society. After this, if you want to go read about witches, great. But first, let’s talk about the non-witches.

There are really two sides to Puritanism; the ideas and beliefs, and the society which existed in New England.<sup>1</sup> We’re going to look at both; the theological and the cultural. We’re going to examine its origins, its adaptations, and how Puritanism broke down.

One thing we’ll see is that Puritanism was flexible. There were convictions about the nature of God and man throughout their existence. But Puritans adjusted their beliefs about church and society as they encountered new challenges in America.

— *Intro Music* —

[Welcome to American History Remix, the podcast about the overlooked and underexplored aspects of American history. We’re glad you’re here!]

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<sup>1</sup> Darrett Bruce Rutman, *American Puritanism: Faith and Practice* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), vi, 7.

### *Origins and Theology*

One of the themes we've been emphasizing on American History Remix is continuity. The English did not arrive on the continent out of nowhere, they brought with them ideas and traditions of Europe. To understand why they ventured across the Atlantic, and why they established the society they did, we have to look back. Any history of New England Puritanism must begin in old England.

The story of Puritanism begins about a century before the founding of Plymouth, during the English Reformation of the late 1530s. Henry VIII, frustrated that the Pope would not grant him a divorce from his wife, Catharine of Aragon, separated the English church from the Catholic. This act, significant as it was, initially did little to change the practices of the Church of England, also called the Anglican Church. Henry VIII placed himself as the head of the Church, filling the void of the Pope, but the rituals and hierarchy of the Catholic Church remained. He did, however, allow the Bible to be translated into English, and the ideas of the continental Protestant reformers began to take hold in England.<sup>2</sup>

The Puritans were those who wanted to purify the Church of England from all vestiges of Catholicism. Failing to do so, many believed, would bring the wrath of God upon the Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of Puritanism originally was to reform the Church of England, not abandon it. Influenced by the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, an early church theologian, Puritans believed that the present church would never be perfect. So long as it was full of humans, the church would have flaws; to claim perfection was actually a heresy.<sup>4</sup> So the church need not be without sin but still ought to be less sinful than it currently was.

There were several types of reforms they hoped to enact. If you've ever attended a Catholic Mass, you'll know that there is a lot of ritual involved. The Puritans hated this. They believed services should focus on the preaching of scripture. God intended for man to learn from the Bible and what they called "unscriptural ceremonies" only interfered with good and true teaching.<sup>5</sup>

They also disliked church hierarchy which they believed was burdensome and unnecessary. To them, congregations instead should be led by their own minister. Church bishops and their courts had no basis in scripture and were notoriously corrupt.<sup>6</sup>

Fundamental to church purification was the expulsion of blatant and unrepentant sinners who participated in the sacraments of baptism and communion. Puritans believed that the sacraments were corrupted by allowing unworthy men to receive them. To purify the church and avoid the wrath of an angry God, unrepentant sinners needed to be purged from church communities. But, because local churches were not autonomous, church discipline was bureaucratic and ineffective.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rutman, *American Puritanism*, 10-11; Edmund Sears Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 7-9; Rutman, *American Puritanism*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 10-12.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 10-11, 21-23.

The issue of who could receive the sacraments was of extreme importance to the Puritans, and it would resurface as a problem in New England.

Puritan complaints about the Church of England could be very, very specific. But these broad trends we've discussed capture most of them.

While united in opposition to the hierarchy and structure of the Anglican and Roman Churches, Puritans disagreed among themselves about what kind of church ought to be established. Those who would come to be called Congregationalists believed that each church should operate independently. Presbyterians believed in order to maintain orthodoxy the ministers of congregations should be organized into presbyteries and synods, though division between these two would become more pronounced only after they left England. While they remained, the two were difficult to distinguish; developing proper church organization was less crucial than opposing improper organization.<sup>8</sup>

The process of purifying the Church was not linear. During the reign of Edward VI, son of Henry VIII, many reformers were influential in court and Protestant ideas caught on in England. But Edward's short reign, lasting only six years, was followed by Mary I, a devout Catholic. Under Mary's five-year reign, England returned to Catholicism and many Protestants fled the kingdom or risked execution.<sup>9</sup>

When Queen Elizabeth I ascended to the throne, she returned the kingdom to Protestantism and readmitted the exiled churches into the Church of England. The reformers were disappointed in her reign, however, for although they were welcomed back, the Anglican Church, in their minds, still remained far too Catholic. The same was true for her successor, James I. Throughout all of this mess, and the quick successions back and forth, Puritans put their hope in Parliament rather than the monarchy.<sup>10</sup>

But the ascension of Charles I in 1625 crushed these hopes. Charles dissolved Parliament, married a Catholic woman, and filled empty political positions with men who Puritans believed were heretics.<sup>11</sup> It was under these conditions that Puritans increasingly sought to establish their own churches.

But they did not reach the decision to leave England easily or uniformly. On one hand, leaving allowed them to escape the judgment they felt sure God was going to bring upon England. On the other hand, leaving meant they were admitting failure and abandoning their neighbors and countrymen.<sup>12</sup> Puritans debated the issue among themselves. Some argued that Christians were called to support the churches to which they belonged, not to abandon them. All churches are imperfect and therefore the presence of sin is not just cause for abandonment. Separatists countered by claiming that, "the Church of England was no church at all."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 5; Rutman, *American Puritanism*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 7-8, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop*, ed. Oscar Handlin (New York: Harper Collins, 1958), 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 20.

John Winthrop, the eventual governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, discussed the issue at length with his wife, sought the counsel of several ministers, weighed the financial benefits and risks, and assembled all this information as if it were a legal matter. It seems like Winthrop was trying to convince himself of the merits of leaving England. I think it's interesting that someone like Winthrop needed convincing in the first place. This shows how hard a decision it was for many.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to recognize the diversity within Puritanism; not all Puritans were separatists and not all separatists ventured to New England. Some stayed and fought against Charles I during the English Civil War. But that's another story, visit our website if you'd like to know more.

### *The Puritan Character*

Puritanism, however, was more than just a force which sought to purify the Church. It was also an internal force, a way of thinking which "demanded more of the individual than it did of the church." The men and women who subscribed to it often lived their lives in a state of painful self-awareness. Puritan belief required submission to God's laws, seeking salvation and righteousness above all else; yet also held that all men were doomed to practice evil. They were charged to reform the world, to work hard and find pleasure in their labor but were also told that the world could not be saved.

Puritanism is a Calvinistic theology, a form of Christianity which emphasizes predestination over freewill. In this view, God chose who he would save. Only if God had specifically chosen and predestined you to be saved, could you be saved. To some, this divine election became motivation, they would go on to accomplish great things and gain great wealth. Some became prideful and self-righteous because of their salvation. Others, however, lived "in an agony of uncertainty, wondering...whether God had singled them out for eternal glory or eternal torment."<sup>15</sup>

This is a complex belief system.

The life of Jonathan Edwards captures these tensions well. Edwards was an 18th century preacher and the central figure of the Great Awakening (more on that in a bit). He experienced incredible spiritual highs and lows. It is likely his spiritual struggles are what gave power to his preaching.<sup>16</sup>

As a young man, Edwards became convinced of his divine election but continuously worried over the state of his soul. His journals are filled with a continual sense of unease. Writing things such as "Henceforth, I am not to act, in any respect, as my own," and "We never ought to allow any joy or sorrow, but what helps religion." His assurance that God had predestined to save him was comforting but also complex. He was plagued by a concern that he was too prideful, and he

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<sup>14</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, 38, 53; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 64, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, 7; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 105.

could sink into dark periods of depression.<sup>17</sup> The source of his greatest highs and lowest lows, his popular success and failure, were the same thing—his Puritan religion.

Agree or disagree, we have to recognize the power of these ideas. To continue with the sports analogies, think of the mentality of a professional athlete. The unrelenting determination it takes to pursue perfection, knowing you will never actually achieve it. You will never make every basket or win every game. But to win, you need the confidence, the assurance, you can win every game you play.

If you win, great. Take what you learned, improve, go on to the next game. If you lose, be honest, look your mistake in the eye and grow from it. Joy or sorrow, as Edwards said, victory or loss, use it to get better, in pursuit of true religion. It's a powerful way of thinking.

This isn't a perfect analogy, but it gives us a glimpse into the minds of the Puritans.

Puritan men and women had complex responses to their theology; oscillating between assurance and guilt, optimistically establishing a new society in America as a model for the world to show them the way to God. And they were also plagued by the failures of that society.

### *New England Society*

So, that's the origins of Puritanism, its goals, its ways of thinking. What did Puritan society look like in New England?

The Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower landed in Plymouth, MA in 1620. A decade later, Puritan migration surged under leaders like John Winthrop.<sup>18</sup> Winthrop is famous for his "City on a Hill" sermon which he delivered to his fellow Puritans before they arrived in America. He claimed that New England would be a city on a hill, all the eyes of the world would be upon her, and their society would be an example of Godliness. Observers would pray for their homes, "may the Lord make it like that of New England."<sup>19</sup> So, 146 years before the Revolution, we see the belief in American exceptionalism.

To make sense of this new society, there are two things to consider—covenants and hierarchy. Both drew upon theological roots but were also informed by sixteenth and seventeenth century English culture.

English society was organized in a series of covenants. Covenants were agreed upon relationships of exchange. Men gave loyalty to the monarch in return for protection, those who were in the same trade gathered into guilds and companies. Puritan theology likewise conceptualized man's relationship with God as a covenant.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 112-16.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 165.

<sup>19</sup> "John Winthrop Dreams of a City on a Hill, 1630," *The American Yawp Reader*, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/colliding-cultures/john-winthrop-dreams-of-a-city-on-a-hill-1630/>.

<sup>20</sup> Rutman, *American Puritanism*, 25.

Three covenants bound society together. First, the covenant of grace was between man and God whereby man was elected, predestined, and saved through faith. Second, the covenant of the church was the union of believers into the visible church. Membership in a congregation was not optional for Puritans, it was their duty to come together for instruction and encouragement. Lastly, the civil covenant established public order.

The three covenants, however, were distinct only in theory, in practice they were one.<sup>21</sup> It was the duty of magistrates to submit to religious authorities on issues of doctrine and thereafter it was their role to oppose religious dissent. The highest calling of the state, Puritans believed, was the “loving care of the church.”<sup>22</sup> Some Puritans argued that the Church and State should be identical. In England, this never happened, but it did in New England.<sup>23</sup>

Intertwined with these covenants was also a belief in social hierarchy. These ideas drew upon the authority of scripture but were also the product of England’s social organization. In England, the idealized social order was a hierarchy of duty and responsibility; God ruled over man, monarchs over governors, husbands over wives, parents over children. Submission to authority was therefore the proper role of man. According to The Book of Homilies, “God almighty hath created and appointed all things...in a most excellent and perfect order.” Just as the various parts of a man, his soul, mind, memory, body, etc., worked together, so too the varying parts of society were to be arranged in a “profitable, necessary and pleasant order.”<sup>24</sup>

This hierarchy manifested itself within the Puritan family. Life in the New England colonies differed from place to place, but there are certain generalizations that were true throughout the region.<sup>25</sup>

Puritans expected that children would be submissive and respectful to their parents. Sermons and conversion narratives often included meditations on the sinfulness of youth.<sup>26</sup> On paper, punishments of youthful sin could be severe. Plymouth law required capital punishment for any child over the age of sixteen who struck or cursed their parent. Now, there is no evidence that this law was ever enforced. We shouldn’t take the law as an accurate representation of how Puritans lived, but rather as an expression of the values and mores of the society. In this case, that children should respect their parents.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, a closer look at the law reveals that the Puritans had a nuanced view of childhood and family relationships. Plymouth law did not require the punishment of children under sixteen for cursing or striking a parent. Puritans understood that sometimes kids are kids, they say and do dumb things. The family could handle the situation itself, there was no need for the courts to get involved. Likewise, the law contained a clause relieving a child of any punishment if their parent

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<sup>21</sup> Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 20, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts: 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 14-17.

<sup>24</sup> Rutman, *American Puritanism*, 52-53.

<sup>25</sup> John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 182.

<sup>27</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 100, 102; Foster, *The Long Argument*, 181.

had “provoked them by extreme and cruel corrections” and the child was therefore acting “to preserve themselves from death or maiming.”<sup>28</sup> These qualifications reveal that Puritans recognized that parental authority was not infallible and that the children also had rights of their own.

New England society also had high expectations of parents. Not only were they expected to provide for their children, but Puritans placed a large emphasis on education. In order to engage with God and his scripture, children, both male and female, needed to be able to read and write. Parents also needed to teach their children useful skills so they could one day provide for themselves. If parents neglected teaching or training their children, the courts could intervene. Parents could be fined and, if the issue was severe enough, the courts could even remove children from the home. Unfortunately, we don’t know how often this actually occurred. But like laws that stressed the respect children owed to parents, these laws reveal the responsibility the Puritan society placed upon parents.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps most critical to family life was the relationship between spouses. The culture expected that all members of society would participate in marriage and that the man was the leader within the family hierarchy. A wife’s proper role was submission to her husband. What is probably most surprising to modern observers is that, inside this structure, there could still exist a deep level of tenderness and affection between spouses. The letters exchanged between John Winthrop and his wife Margaret Tyndal, for example, contain genuine concern for the other and include notes of their longing for each other during times of travel.<sup>30</sup>

As with children, the courts could intervene if a wife was mistreated by her husband. They sometimes altered a man’s will to better provide for his widow if they thought it neglected her care. They would also intervene on behalf of a woman in cases of spousal abuse.<sup>31</sup> These protections, as well as their right to education, meant the women in Puritan New England enjoyed more rights than their counterparts in Virginia and England.<sup>32</sup>

But let’s not overstate the point. It was still a patriarchal society. The courts were more concerned when a wife broke her marriage vows than if a husband did. A woman would be publicly flogged for adultery, a man would not be. A man’s infidelity was a private sin, not one against the community.<sup>33</sup>

The picture these laws present is of a society that had a nuanced view of children, but nevertheless favored parents, and a nuanced view of women, but still favored men.

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<sup>28</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 100.

<sup>29</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 104-5.

<sup>30</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 78, 82; Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 83, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *American Colonies*, 172-74.

<sup>33</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 96-97.

### *Halfway Covenant*

So, those the basics of Puritan belief and society. It was Calvinistic, hierarchical, and envisioned as a series of covenants. All of these beliefs Puritans had brought with them to America, but soon after, they were forced to change.

Puritans had always expressed concern for their children. It was a major factor in their decision to leave England. What would become of their sons and daughters if they remained in such a wicked environment? John Winthrop was fearful for his wayward son Henry who had failed in his economic ventures while on a two-year stay in Barbados but nonetheless liked to indulge his expensive tastes. Henry later scandalized his family by marrying his cousin and leaving for a honeymoon without permission.<sup>34</sup> And I'll be honest, I don't know which was more scandalous, marring his cousin or doing so without permission...it was a different time. Whatever it was, Puritans hoped that living in a more righteous society would temper this sort of behavior.

The generation that migrated to America, though imperfect, remained zealous in their faith and commitment to their new society. The second and third generations, however, did not inherit their fathers' convictions.<sup>35</sup>

Have you ever tried to escape your problems, only to arrive somewhere new and realize you brought them with you? That's what happened to the Puritans. And that's why they're interesting to me.

The vast majority of Puritans placed a high emphasis on the conversion experience, also called regeneration. Without this experience one could not become a full church member and, therefore, could not vote on civic issues. In line with strict Calvinist theology, they believed there was nothing an individual could do to be saved, their salvation rested entirely on God's election. The conversion process was therefore not the act of being saved but instead the process by which one realized that God had elected them to be saved.

To assist the younger generations in the process of conversion, clergymen wrote manuals that described the steps one could expect in this experience.<sup>36</sup> The pathway to conversion was not simple nor straightforward. It included an awareness of God's calling alternating with the heightened knowledge and despair over one's sin. The process could be agonizing. But in the end, Puritans believed they would emerge with conviction that God had saved them.

If you're not religious, it can be tempting to look down on this process with some cynicism; it's highs and lows, confidence and second-guessing, joy and agony, it's weird. But this journey or something like it is actually something most of us have probably been through. Anyone out there ever been in love? This might look familiar then.

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<sup>34</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, 35, 37, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 86-87.

<sup>36</sup> James D. Bratt, "English, Dutch, and Swedish Protestantism in the Era of Exploration and Early Colonization," in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 232.

The first generation of New Englanders were mostly adults, with the narratives of their conversion already or nearly complete when they arrived. They were minorities in England and made the difficult decision to voyage across the Atlantic. This process worked to select those who were sincere and committed in their beliefs from those who were not.

Their children, however, did not come of age in that selective context. And the numbers of conversion narratives declined over time. The elders saw that the younger generation did not heed or meditate on sermons as the migratory generation had, and they neglected their familial responsibilities.

In 1675, after the Massachusetts Bay Colony was attacked by Native Americans in King Philip's War, the elders believed the bloodshed was the result of sin within Puritan society. Among the sins they saw were those of the younger generation who they believed were disorderly, immodest, rude, idle, and preferred skipping lectures to go drink in taverns.<sup>37</sup>

So, within one generation, the City on a Hill, was in a crisis. The elder members of society were distraught. The sinfulness from which they had fled in England was still present with them in America.

Remember, Puritanism functioned not merely as a religious belief system but also as a social order which encompassed all of life, and exclusion from the church was exclusion from society itself. Confronted with the lack of regeneration, congregations had two options. They could exclude their children and grandchildren from membership and thereby lead their churches into extinction or they could allow them membership, lowering the standards and diluting the holiness of the church.<sup>38</sup>

The Massachusetts Bay ministers in 1662 chose a middle ground—the Halfway Covenant.<sup>39</sup> Non-regenerate persons, those who had not had a conversion experience, were allowed to remain within the church as halfway members. They and their children could be baptized, which symbolized being part of the community. But they could not receive communion, which symbolized that a person was regenerated. They were still subject to discipline but could not vote on church matters. This new designation differentiated them from full members, but it kept them from being excluded from society.<sup>40</sup>

The halfway covenant was hotly debated. Churches split over the issue. Some ministers condemned it, claiming it threatened church purity. Some congregations accepted it as the only way to save their churches. Some ministers rejected it while their own congregations accepted it. It was messy.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Foster, *The Long Argument*, 182-85.

<sup>38</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34.

<sup>39</sup> Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 86-87.

<sup>40</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 131-32.

<sup>41</sup> Foster, *The Long Argument*, 203; Melissa Ann Johnson, "Subordinate Saints: Women and the Founding of Third Church, Boston, 1669-1674" (MA diss., Portland State University, 2009), 2, 69-71.

But does this sound familiar? The purification of their own churches proved to be no easier than the purification of the Church of England. They were still wrestling with concerns about how holy the visible church ought to be and who was worthy to receive the sacraments. As one historian said, “The halfway covenant brought into the open the difficulties that had been lurking in the Puritan conception of church membership from the beginning.”<sup>42</sup>

But because they embraced the halfway covenant, Puritanism was able to survive as a social order. Though it was tenuous.

### *Awakening and Collapse*

This brings us to the Great Awakening, a religious revival that swept across New England in the early 1740s. Spurred by preachers like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, the revival marked a renewed devotion to Calvinistic theology.<sup>43</sup> The Awakening began as a local revival in Northampton, Massachusetts but soon spread across the colonies and local revivals took a shape not even Edwards or Whitefield could control. Seriously, they went bananas. Many who attended the sermons of these preachers became hysterical, they would scream and roll around on the floor with convulsions.

I honestly don't know what was happening. Neither did people at the time. Whitefield blamed Satan; the president of Harvard condemned the movement and Yale refused to give diplomas to those who participated in the revival. Edwards, argued for a middle ground, that physical effects were not, of themselves, proof of either God or the devil. But, his moderate position never caught on.<sup>44</sup>

Whatever was going on, many of these conversion stories appear sincere. Individuals had profound experiences and embraced the deeply held Calvinistic views of the early Puritans. This is what people were hoping for, right?

But it was then, when the renewed embrace of New England's Puritan roots was prominent, that Puritanism began to unravel. Edwards, the central figure of the awakening, rejected the halfway covenant. He argued that there was no such thing as common grace, it existed only in the regenerate. Those who did not appear to him to be visible saints were barred from church membership and the sacraments.<sup>45</sup>

Edwards himself was dismissed from his church in Northampton in 1750. But people swarmed to him and embraced the system of church membership that existed a hundred years before among the early Puritans.<sup>46</sup>

You might expect that with the revival and renewed commitment to church membership, Puritanism would thrive. But Puritanism was not just a belief system, it was a kind of society.

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<sup>42</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 138.

<sup>43</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 43-44.

<sup>44</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 44; Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 122-25.

<sup>45</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 152.

When Puritans began excluding their own members, the social order broke down. Since their founding, the Puritan colonies had been holding two contradictory beliefs together: they believed their society was covenanted with God, and they believed that only the elect could ever be saved. To keep the church covenant alive, Edwards abandoned the social order.<sup>47</sup> In his writings, Edwards never gave any consideration, neither for nor against, the idea of a holy Puritan society. He appears to have been utterly unconcerned with it.<sup>48</sup>

So, in the end, the zeal of revival “produced a new separatist movement.”<sup>49</sup> And Puritanism collapsed.

In the 1600s, the leaders of society were all ministers. In the mid-1700s, they were secular politicians. The union of church and state was no more.<sup>50</sup>

### *Conclusion*

So, Puritanism began in England as a movement to purify the Church, Puritanism collapsed in New England when its members tried to purify themselves. The world the Puritans made was inherently tied to the world they left and despite their attempts to form a more Godly society, the same troubles remained.

Puritan beliefs and Puritan society were never independent. Puritan society was formed by religious ideals, but the failures of their society caused the Puritans to reconsider their beliefs. Who was saved? Who was eligible to receive the sacraments? How pure and holy could the church really be? Throughout their history Puritans continued to wrestle with these questions. The answers were never purely theological or social—they were both.

If you come away with anything today, I hope it's with more questions. Do you want to know more about the Puritans? What about the ones that stayed in England? How about Puritans and Native Americans? Or the Great Awakening and Jonathan Edwards? Family life? Women in New England? Ever heard of Anne Hutchinson? She's fascinating, check out her story.

Or maybe you have new questions to ask. That's even better. There is plenty more to learn. And all of it will be informed by knowing the arch of Puritanism, its rise, evolution, and collapse.

Thanks for listening.

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<sup>47</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 48; Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 106.

<sup>48</sup> Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 151.

<sup>50</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 30.

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