

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 2, Roger Williams and Diversity in Rhode Island Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 2, Roger Williams and Diversity in Rhode Island, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Roger Green's lecture explores Puritanism in America, specifically its decline, significant cultural and theological contributions, and key aspects of its theology such as God's sovereignty, vocation, transcendence, and the priesthood of all believers. The lecture then transitions to Roger Williams, examining his background, his advocacy for religious freedom leading to the founding of Rhode Island, his brief association with the Baptists, and his later shift to becoming a seeker. Rhode Island is presented as a pivotal early American colony established on the principle of absolute religious freedom and the separation of church and state. Ultimately, the lecture provides an overview of Puritanism's influence and contrasts it with Roger Williams' distinct vision for religious liberty in early America.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).



**Greenk_AmXy_Sessi
on02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Green, American Christianity, Session 2, Roger Williams and Diversity in Rhode Island |

Briefing Document: Puritanism in America and Roger Williams

Main Themes:

This session of Dr. Green's lecture on American Christianity focuses on two key aspects of early American religious history: the decline and contributions of Puritanism in America, and the life and significance of Roger Williams in advocating for religious freedom.

I. The Decline of Puritanism:

- Dr. Green raises the question of causality in the decline of Puritanism, pondering whether a "lack of religious zeal" or an "increase of wealth" came first. He suggests it's difficult to definitively say, but notes the shift in focus from the early generations' frugality and investment in church and business to later generations' self-indulgence and opulent living.
- *"But the third generation, fourth generation, and fifth generation started to use the money on themselves, building their beautiful homes, like on Chestnut Street in Salem, and building really lovely colonial churches, which was not true of the first Puritans. So, they started to pour their money really upon themselves. That increase in wealth led to a lack of religious zeal."*
- He connects this phenomenon to Max Weber's "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," explaining how the Puritans' "this-worldly asceticism" – living a disciplined Christian life in the world, reinvesting wealth rather than pursuing monasticism – ironically contributed to their material success.
- *"When he talks about the Puritans in this book, he talks about the Puritans who did not like the monasticism of Roman Catholicism, the getting away from this world... But they lived a very ascetic life, and Weber calls this a this-worldly asceticism. So they lived out the Christian life in this world but in a very ascetic, very disciplined way."*
- Dr. Green notes that the decline of a religious group often leads to the rise of something else, setting the stage for future topics in the course.

II. Contributions of Puritanism:

Dr. Green outlines several lasting cultural and religious contributions of Puritanism to American society:

- **Respect for Lawful Government:** Stemming from their desire for ordered communities, exemplified by the Mayflower Compact.
- **Value of Useful Work:** A strong work ethic, rooted in their theology, which Dr. Green believes still characterizes American culture.
- *"We are still, as I understand it anyway, Americans work harder than anyone else in the world. And where did we get that kind of work ethic from? Well, certainly, partly, that comes from the Puritans' value of useful work."*
- **Civic Participation and Responsibility:** Ingrained in American cultural life, partly due to Puritan influence.
- **Concern for Education:** Evidenced by the founding of Harvard University in 1636, with its original motto being "Veritas in Christo et Ecclesiam" (Truth in Christ and in the Church). The later removal of "in Christ and in the church" reflects a shift in the institution's religious identity.
- *"Truth in Christ and in the church. That was the motto of Harvard University when it was founded in 1636. Now, when it became virtually Unitarian, a couple hundred years later, it dropped the in Christ and the church from the motto. And so, the motto stays today as veritas. But the Puritans never would have founded Harvard just with the motto of veritas."*
- **Sense of National Mission Under Divine Guidance:** This later evolved into the broader concept of American Exceptionalism, although the Puritan version was explicitly rooted in religious belief.
- *"So, a concern for education and a good example of this would be Harvard University, which was founded in 1636... Then, there was a sense that the nation, under divine guidance, had a special mission for the world... This is eventually going to be cast in a broader net and called American exceptionalism."*
- **Religious Background for Social Reform Movements:** The Puritan tradition provided a foundation for later movements like the First and Second Great Awakenings and Evangelicalism.

III. Puritan Theology (Four Key Aspects):

Dr. Green highlights four important aspects of Puritan theology:

1. **God as Creator and Ruler:** Puritans believed that "God made the world, and God rules the world," emphasizing God's sovereignty and the idea that everything on Earth belongs to the Lord. This led to the understanding that God assigns stations and vocations in life, and one serves and worships God by fulfilling these roles. Slothfulness and idleness were considered sins.
 - *"God made the world, and God rules the world. God is the creator of the world, and God is the preserver of the world. That is very important to Puritan theology... God has assigned everybody certain stations in life... and these stations are ordained by God and, therefore, are good."*
1. **Understanding of Vocation:** In contrast to the medieval Catholic hierarchy of vocations (monk/nun > priest > layperson), the Protestant Reformation and the Puritans emphasized that "all vocations are equally worthy" as callings from God. One glorifies God through their work in the world, embodying a "this-worldly asceticism." Dr. Green critiques the lingering implied hierarchy of vocations he experienced in his evangelical upbringing.
 - *"Martin Luther himself said all vocations are equally worthy. All vocations and all callings from God are equally worthy. They're on the same plane... The Puritans taught us that the Protestant way is all vocations are equally worthy, and you glorify God then by your vocation."*
1. **Transcendence of God:** Puritans stressed the "transcendence of God," emphasizing his glory, majesty, and greatness. This led to a rejection of attempts to depict God in art and a preference for simple and unadorned churches. The transcendence of God was further understood through his power and inscrutability (God's ways being beyond human understanding), which is particularly evident in the doctrine of predestination.
 - *"But number one would be God made the world, and God rules the world... So, the transcendence of God. God is not your good buddy. God is not your good friend... Therefore, beware of any attempt to try to depict God... They found that offensive to the transcendence, to the majesty of God. Therefore, the Puritan religious life is a life of great simplicity."*
 - *"Now by inscrutable, we mean that God's ways are mysterious to us. They're beyond knowing. They're inscrutable. We just have to trust."*

- *"Calvin comes along and preaches a double election, a double predestination. That is, that God not only elects those who are going to be saved, but he elects those who are going to be damned as well."*
- The doctrine of predestination raised the question of **assurance** (how one could know if they were saved). The Puritan answer often involved examining one's commitment to their vocation and their participation in religious life as signs of God's calling.
- 1. **Priesthood of All Believers:** This doctrine, distinct from the concept of vocation, emphasized that while not everyone is called to preach or administer sacraments, all believers can act as "priests to each other" through prayer, counseling, and mutual pastoral care. This elevated the importance of the laity in the church and became a significant aspect of American Christianity.
- *"The priesthood of all believers does not mean that all people in the church can do that. It doesn't mean that everybody in the church can stand up and preach from the Bible or interpret the Bible or give the sacraments... What the priesthood of all believers means is that we can; however, even though not everybody is called to preach, we can be priests to each other in many ways... It increased the importance of the laity in the church."*

IV. Roger Williams and Religious Diversity in Rhode Island:

- Roger Williams, initially an Anglican who became a Puritan, emigrated to Boston but clashed with Puritan leaders over religious liberty. He believed that belonging to a particular religion should not be a prerequisite for citizenship.
- *"Roger Williams was convinced that you do not need to belong to a Christian denomination, or even to be Christian, to be a member of the state, to be a member of the colony, or to be a member of the community."*
- Forced to leave, he founded Providence and the colony of Rhode Island based on "absolute religious freedom" and a "separation of church and state." His primary fear in advocating for separation was the potential for the state to control the church.
- *"It is founded on absolute religious freedom. And therefore, in order to maintain that religious freedom, there's going to be a separation of church and state. The church is not going to tell the state what to do, and the government is not going to tell the church what to do."*

- In 1639, Williams briefly became a Baptist, helping to establish the first Baptist church in America in Providence. However, he later became a "seeker," without a specific denominational affiliation.
- Dr. Green recounts Perry Miller's observation that towards the end of his life, Williams questioned the existence of other true Christians besides himself and possibly his wife.
- Rhode Island became the first center of religious freedom (not just toleration) in the colonial period.

Noteworthy Facts and Ideas:

- The decline of Puritanism was a complex process potentially driven by both increasing wealth and decreasing religious zeal.
- Puritanism left a significant and lasting impact on American culture, including its work ethic, respect for law, and emphasis on education.
- Puritan theology placed a strong emphasis on God's sovereignty, the importance of vocation, the transcendence of God, and the active role of the laity.
- Roger Williams was a pivotal figure in advocating for religious freedom and the separation of church and state in America.
- The early understanding of the separation of church and state was primarily concerned with protecting the church from government interference.

This briefing doc provides a summary of the key themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Green's lecture on Puritanism in America and Roger Williams. It includes direct quotes to illustrate significant points made by the speaker.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 2, Roger Williams and Diversity in Rhode Island

Session 2 Study Guide: Puritanism in America and Roger Williams

Key Concepts and Themes:

- **Decline of Puritanism:** Explore the debated reasons for the decline, such as increasing wealth leading to decreased religious zeal, or vice versa. Understand the concept of "this-worldly asceticism" and its potential impact.
- **Contributions of Puritanism:** Identify the lasting cultural and societal impacts of the Puritans beyond just religion, including respect for lawful government, value of useful work, civic participation and responsibility, concern for education (Harvard's founding and original motto), a sense of national mission (leading to American exceptionalism), and providing a religious background for social reform movements.
- **Puritan Theology:** Understand the four key aspects discussed:
 - God as creator and ruler of the world, leading to the concept of divinely ordained stations in life and the importance of glorifying God through one's conduct.
 - The Puritan understanding of vocation as a calling to glorify God in all aspects of life, contrasting with the medieval hierarchical view.
 - The transcendence of God, emphasizing God's glory, majesty, power, and inscrutability, leading to simple forms of worship and the doctrine of double predestination.
 - The priesthood of all believers, emphasizing the importance of the laity in pastoral care and mutual support within the church, distinct from the vocational calling of ministers.
- **Roger Williams:** Understand his background, his Puritan beliefs, his conflict with Boston Puritan leaders over religious liberty, his founding of Rhode Island based on absolute religious freedom and separation of church and state, his brief association with the Baptists, and his later identity as a seeker.
- **Religious Diversity in Rhode Island:** Recognize Rhode Island as the first center of religious freedom (not just toleration) in the colonial period.

Short Answer Quiz:

1. What were the two potential factors discussed as contributing to the decline of Puritanism in America? Briefly explain the tension between them.
2. Describe the Puritan concept of "this-worldly asceticism" and explain how it contributed to their acquisition of wealth according to Max Weber.
3. Name three significant cultural contributions of Puritanism to American society that extend beyond purely religious aspects.
4. Explain the original motto of Harvard University and discuss its significance in understanding the early Puritan commitment to education.
5. Contrast the Puritan understanding of vocation with the hierarchical view of vocations prevalent in the medieval world.
6. Explain the Puritan doctrine of the transcendence of God and provide one example of how this belief manifested in their religious practices or views.
7. Define the Puritan concept of "double predestination" and briefly explain its connection to their understanding of God's transcendence.
8. Explain the Puritan doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and clarify how it differs from the concept of a vocational calling within the church.
9. What was the fundamental disagreement between Roger Williams and the Puritan leaders in Boston that led to his departure?
10. Describe the key principle upon which Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island and explain its significance for religious life there.

Answer Key:

1. The two potential factors were a lack of religious zeal and an increase of wealth. It is debated whether the increase in wealth led to a decrease in religious focus as later generations became more self-indulgent, or if a prior loss of religious zeal caused them to focus more on material pursuits.
2. "This-worldly asceticism" refers to the Puritan practice of living a disciplined, non-monastic Christian life within the world. Weber argued that this disciplined living, focused on hard work and reinvestment rather than personal indulgence, was a key factor in their economic success.
3. Three cultural contributions are respect for lawful government (as seen in the Mayflower Compact principles), the value of useful work (contributing to the

American work ethic), and a concern for education (exemplified by the founding of Harvard).

4. Harvard's original motto was "Veritas in Christo et Ecclesiam" (Truth in Christ and in the church). This highlights the early Puritans' belief that truth was fundamentally rooted in Christian faith and the church, a view that later shifted when Harvard became more Unitarian.
5. The medieval world held a hierarchical view where monastic life and priesthood were considered the highest spiritual callings, with laypeople at the bottom. The Puritans, following Protestant theology, believed that all vocations were equally worthy in God's eyes and were avenues for glorifying Him.
6. The Puritan doctrine of the transcendence of God emphasized God's ultimate power, majesty, and unknowable nature. This manifested in their simple church architecture devoid of religious imagery (like crosses or statues) as they believed such depictions detracted from God's transcendence.
7. Double predestination, according to Calvin and the Puritans, is the belief that God not only elects some individuals for salvation but also predestines others for damnation before the world began. This doctrine was seen as a reflection of God's absolute power and inscrutable will.
8. The priesthood of all believers means that all Christians have direct access to God and can act as "priests" to one another through prayer, counsel, and mutual care, regardless of their vocational calling. It does not imply that everyone is called to the vocational role of preaching or administering sacraments.
9. Roger Williams fundamentally disagreed with the Boston Puritan leaders on the issue of religious liberty. He believed in absolute freedom of conscience and argued that one did not need to be Christian to be a member of the state or community, advocating for a separation of church and state.
10. Rhode Island was founded on the principle of absolute religious freedom. This meant that individuals were free to practice any religion (or no religion) without fear of persecution or state interference, leading to a strict separation of church and state to protect this freedom.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the complex relationship between the Puritans' emphasis on hard work and frugality and the subsequent decline of religious zeal in later generations. Consider the arguments for which came first and the role of "this-worldly asceticism."
2. Evaluate the lasting impact of Puritanism on American culture and society, providing specific examples beyond religious institutions. To what extent do these contributions still shape contemporary American values and beliefs?
3. Discuss the key tenets of Puritan theology, focusing on how their understanding of God influenced their views on vocation, worship, and the individual's relationship with the divine.
4. Compare and contrast the views of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans and Roger Williams on the concept of religious liberty. What were their fundamental disagreements, and how did these differences shape the early development of the American colonies?
5. Explore the significance of Rhode Island under Roger Williams as a unique experiment in religious freedom in the colonial era. What principles guided its foundation, and what impact did it have on the broader development of religious thought and practice in America?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Puritanism:** A religious reform movement that emerged in England in the 16th century. Puritans sought to "purify" the Church of England of what they considered to be remaining Roman Catholic practices and doctrines.
- **Separatists:** A more radical faction of Puritans who believed the Church of England was irredeemably corrupt and advocated for complete separation from it to form independent congregations. The Pilgrims were Separatists.
- **Anglican Church:** The Church of England, the established state church of England.
- **Congregationalism:** A system of church governance in which each local church is autonomous and self-governing.
- **Liturgy:** The customary public worship performed by a religious group.

- **Asceticism:** A lifestyle characterized by abstinence from worldly pleasures, often for religious purposes.
- **This-worldly Asceticism:** A concept popularized by Max Weber, referring to the Puritan practice of living a disciplined and abstemious life within the world, not in monastic seclusion, with the goal of glorifying God through their work and conduct.
- **Vocation:** In Puritan theology, a calling from God to serve Him through one's work and station in life, with all legitimate occupations being considered equally worthy.
- **Transcendence of God:** The theological concept emphasizing God's ultimate power, majesty, and being beyond human comprehension and the material world.
- **Inscrutability of God:** The idea that God's ways and purposes are mysterious and beyond human understanding.
- **Predestination:** The theological doctrine that God has eternally chosen who will be saved (election) and, in Calvinist thought (double predestination), who will be damned.
- **Assurance:** In Puritan theology, the internal conviction and outward evidence that one is among God's elect and will be saved.
- **Priesthood of All Believers:** A Protestant doctrine asserting that all Christians have direct access to God through faith in Christ and share in the priestly role of intercession and spiritual care for one another.
- **Laity:** The ordinary members of a church as distinct from the clergy.
- **American Exceptionalism:** The idea that the United States is inherently different from other nations, often with the implication of a unique mission or role in the world.
- **Religious Liberty:** The freedom to practice any religion or no religion without coercion or interference from the state.
- **Religious Toleration:** The acceptance of different religious beliefs and practices, although not necessarily with full equality or freedom.
- **Seeker:** A term often used for individuals who are not affiliated with a particular religious denomination and are engaged in a personal spiritual quest.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 2, Roger Williams and Diversity in Rhode Island, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Puritanism in America and Roger Williams

1. What were the primary factors that led to the decline of Puritanism in America? The decline of Puritanism is attributed to a complex interplay of factors. While it's difficult to definitively say which came first, a significant contributor was the increasing wealth among subsequent generations (third, fourth, and fifth). Unlike their frugal predecessors who reinvested in their churches and businesses, later generations began spending more on personal comforts, leading to a decrease in religious zeal. Conversely, or perhaps concurrently, a loss of this initial fervent religious commitment may have also directed their focus towards material pursuits. This shift away from the intense religious focus of the early Puritans ultimately led to a decline in their dominant influence.

2. What were some of the lasting cultural and societal contributions of Puritanism in America, beyond just religious influence? Despite its decline, Puritanism left an indelible mark on American culture. Key contributions include a strong respect for lawful government, evident in early documents like the Mayflower Compact. They also instilled a profound value for useful work, contributing significantly to the American work ethic. Civic participation and responsibility were also deeply ingrained in American life partly due to Puritan ideals. Furthermore, the Puritans placed a high value on education, as demonstrated by the early founding of Harvard University in 1636 with the original motto "Veritas in Christo et Ecclesiam" (Truth in Christ and in the Church). Finally, they fostered a sense that the nation had a special mission in the world under divine guidance, a concept that later evolved into the broader notion of American exceptionalism. They also provided a religious foundation for many subsequent social reform movements.

3. What were some key aspects of Puritan theology that defined their beliefs and practices? Puritan theology was characterized by several important aspects. First, they believed that God created and actively rules the world, assigning individuals specific stations in life and vocations, which were to be undertaken to glorify God. Second, they held a unique understanding of vocation, asserting that all callings from God are equally worthy and a means to glorify Him, rejecting the medieval Catholic hierarchy of vocations. Third, they emphasized the transcendence of God – His glory, majesty, and power – leading to a simple form of worship devoid of religious art and a belief in God's

inscrutability, particularly evident in the doctrine of double predestination. Finally, they embraced the concept of the priesthood of all believers, which emphasized the importance of the laity in providing mutual spiritual care and support, though it did not equate to everyone being called to preach or administer sacraments.

4. How did the Puritan understanding of "vocation" differ from the medieval Christian view? The Puritan understanding of vocation represented a significant departure from the medieval Christian perspective. In the medieval world, there was a clear hierarchy of spiritual callings, with monastic life considered the highest form, followed by the priesthood, and then lay life as the least spiritually significant. Protestantism, including Puritanism, rejected this hierarchy, asserting that all vocations or callings from God are equally worthy in His eyes. Whether one was a minister, a laborer, or a housewife, their work could be a means of glorifying God. This leveled the playing field of spiritual significance across different occupations and roles in society.

5. What was the Puritan doctrine of predestination, and how did it relate to their understanding of God's transcendence? The Puritan doctrine of predestination, heavily influenced by John Calvin, was a belief in double predestination: that God, before the creation of the world, not only elected some individuals for salvation but also predestined others for damnation. This doctrine was deeply connected to their understanding of God's absolute transcendence, power, and inscrutability. They believed that God's will and ways are beyond human comprehension, and His sovereign choice in election and reprobation reflects His ultimate glory and majesty. While acknowledging the mystery and difficulty of this doctrine, they accepted it as a manifestation of God's supreme authority and power.

6. How did the Puritan belief in predestination lead to the issue of "assurance," and how did they address it? The doctrine of double predestination inevitably raised the question of assurance: how could an individual know whether they were among the elect destined for salvation? The Puritans addressed this by emphasizing the importance of living out one's God-given vocation and actively participating in religious life. A life characterized by diligence in one's calling, regular church attendance, Bible study, and a desire to honor Christ was seen as a potential sign of God's electing grace. Conversely, a life of rebellion and neglect of these duties could be interpreted as a sign of possible damnation. While salvation was ultimately God's sovereign choice, these outward behaviors and commitments provided a degree of assurance for believers.

7. Who was Roger Williams, and what were his key beliefs that led to conflict with the Puritan leaders in the Massachusetts Bay Colony? Roger Williams was a theologian and advocate for religious liberty who arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a Puritan but soon developed radical beliefs that clashed with the established Puritan leadership. His central point of contention was his conviction that religious belief should be a matter of individual conscience, entirely separate from civil authority. He argued that individuals should not be required to belong to a particular church or hold specific religious beliefs to be citizens or participate in the governance of the colony. He advocated for absolute religious freedom, not just tolerance, and believed in a strict separation of church and state, fearing the potential for the state to corrupt the church.

8. What was the significance of Roger Williams founding Rhode Island, and what principles characterized this new colony? The founding of Rhode Island by Roger Williams in 1636 was highly significant as it established the first major settlement in colonial America based on the principle of absolute religious freedom. Unlike the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where religious conformity was enforced by the state, Rhode Island offered a haven for individuals of all faiths, or no faith, to live according to their own consciences without fear of persecution or civil penalty. To ensure this religious liberty, Williams implemented a strict separation of church and state, preventing either entity from controlling the other. This commitment to religious freedom made Rhode Island a unique and influential colony in early American history, attracting diverse religious groups seeking refuge.