

**“Five Men of Grace” by John Calvert. Thursday Morning Studies term 4, 2022**

**Study 2**

**Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679)**

*Peter Lewis, Genius of Puritanism. It is questionable whether Christians can ever look for the regeneration of the world before they seek the reformation of the Church. If we are horrified at the state of the world in our generation, can we be less anxious about the state of the Church within that world? If the light that is in the world be darkness, how great is that darkness!*

**17<sup>th</sup> Century: Monarchs; and Musicians & Composers: and Great Ejection:**

(see previous notes)

**Thomas Goodwin** was born near Yarmouth in Norfolk to Richard and Catherine Goodwin, who sought to train their son for the ministry. Described as having a tender conscience, Thomas, from the age of six had vivid impressions of the Holy Spirit, wept for his sin and had ‘flashes of joy upon thoughts of the things of God’. He entered Christ’s College, Cambridge, ‘a nest of Puritans’, by aged thirteen. Cambridge was still permeated by the memory of William Perkins (1558–1602). Another strong influence was Richard Sibbes (1557–1635), a regular preacher at Trinity Church. Sibbes attracted people ‘who yearned for spiritual edification rather than fancy rhetoric’. When aged fourteen, Thomas was keen to take the Lord’s Supper at Easter. His tutor, William Power, kindly said ‘no’, because of his spiritual immaturity and age. Thomas felt rejected, so he gave up praying, reading Scriptures and Puritan literature and stopped attending Richard Sibbes’s sermons and lectures. He now aimed to be a popular preacher and embrace the rhetoric of preachers who emphasised style rather than substance and who followed Arminianism, emanating from the Netherlands.

**Arminianism**: early 17<sup>th</sup> C. theological reform movement within Dutch Reformed Church. Theology stemmed from Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) a Calvinist who left that teaching on several doctrinal beliefs. Reacted against predestination and other doctrines and clashed with Calvinist lecturers at University of Leyden. His theology was maintained after his death and 46 pastors signed a document called the *Remonstrance* in 1610, that rejected the supralapsarian doctrine of predestination and ideas that God’s decrees were not eternal but made after and in light of the Fall. For Arminius, therefore, election was subsequent to

grace, and is conditional on our response; so God decrees to save all who repent, believe and persevere. The possibility of a true believer finally falling from grace and perishing is not denied. So there is no assurance of ultimate salvation. Therefore, God gives sufficient grace so that one may believe on Christ if he will. His will is free, he can believe, or he can resist God's grace. Arminius was saying that God does not choose anyone but foresees that some will choose him; a belief with a Pelagian basis.

In 1616, Goodwin graduated from Christ's college with a bachelor's degree and continued studies at St Catharine's Hall, Cambridge, three years later. He obtained his master's in 1620 and became a fellow and lecturer. Some of his associates sought to persuade him that rhetoric and Arminianism were not demonstrating the truth. The preaching of Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) and John Preston (1587–1628) in the college chapel were affecting his beliefs. His interest in Puritanism fluctuated for another twelve months, often rising just before the Lord's Supper.

Just after his twentieth birthday he was converted when God brought him to a profound conviction of sin. On the afternoon of 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1620 he and some friends met to enjoy a good time and one of the group convinced the others to attend a funeral. The preacher was Thomas Bainbridge, who preached on the need for personal repentance from Luke 19:41 & 42. Goodwin realised the essential depravity of his heart, his dreadful sins, his averseness to all spiritual good, and his desperate condition that left him exposed to the wrath of God. A few hours later, 'before God, who after we are regenerate is so faithful and mindful of his word', he received a 'speedy word' of deliverance from Ezekiel 16.

Goodwin described his experience.

*'Live, yea, I said unto you, Live'—so God was pleased on the sudden, and as it were in an instant, to alter the whole of his former dispensation towards me, and said of and to my soul, 'Yea, live: yea, live,' I say, said God: and as he created the world and the matter of all things by a word, so he created and put a new life and spirit into my soul and so great an alteration was strange to me ... God [then] took me aside and as it were privately said unto me, 'Do you now turn to me, and I will pardon all your sins though never so many, as I forgave and pardoned my servant Paul, and convert you unto me' (Works 2:Lxi-lxii).*

After his conversion, Goodwin aligned himself with the theological tradition of Perkins, Baynes, Sibbes and Preston. He turned his back on

personal fame and resolved 'to part with all for Christ and make the glory of God the measure of all time to come'. The polished style of the Anglican divines was abandoned for it focused on the preacher. He adopted the Puritan 'plain style of preaching', which was earnest and pastoral and at times 'dry' but which aimed to give all glory to God.

Goodwin spent seven years, from 1620–27, seeking personal assurance of faith. We understand these years as a period of spiritual struggle, which any of us may experience. He had numerous letters and conversations with Rev. Price, a godly minister of King's Lynn. He came to see his need to "live by faith in Christ, and to derive from him life and strength for sanctification and all comfort and joy through believing". He later said about this time of spiritual struggle; 'I was diverted from Christ for several years, to search only into the signs of grace in me. It was almost seven years ere I was taken off to live by faith on Christ, and God's free love, which are alike the object of faith.'

Goodwin finally found rest in Christ alone. His preaching became more Christ-centred and he agreed with Sibbes's advice: 'Young man, if you ever would do good, you must preach the gospel and the free grace of God in Christ Jesus'. Prior to this time, in 1625, Goodwin had been licensed to preach. The next year he helped bring Sibbes to St Catharine's Hall as Master. Then, in 1628, Goodwin, aged twenty-seven, succeeded Sibbes as lecturer at Trinity Church and served as vicar from 1632–34. However, because he was unwilling to submit to Archbishop William Laud's articles of conformity, he was forced to resign his office. Among those converted under his ministry were several who later became influential as Puritan pastors.

Despite the advances made by Luther, Calvin and others, Goodwin was convinced that the church of his day needed 'a New or second Reformation'. He believed that popish worship, ceremonies and doctrine had infiltrated the C of E, especially with the growing influence of Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645). Laud's theology tutor at Oxford was part of a group against Puritanism. Ambitious, career focused, officiated at coronation of Charles I. Archbishop of Canterbury 1633. His theology influenced by Arminius, he loved ceremony and harmonious liturgy. Opposed non-conformity and intolerant of opposition. Attempted to force uniformity in worship. Insisted on conformity by congregations in Ireland, Scotland and American colonies. Riots in Edinburgh and Scots repulsed King Charles' attempt to impose his

authority by military force—Bishop's Wars 1639–40. Laud was finally imprisoned in Tower of London, three years, trial before House of Lords. Beheaded 1645.

Goodwin adopted Independent principles of church government and 1634–39 he was a Separatist preacher in London, then took refuge in the Netherlands. With Laud impeached, Parliament invited Nonconformists to return, and Goodwin was appointed a member of the Westminster Assembly, preached before Parliament, appointed lecturer at Oxford, president of Magdalen College (John Owen dean of Christ Church), and a close advisor to Cromwell. In 1638 he married Elizabeth Prescott but she died in the 1640s leaving him with one daughter. In 1649 he married Mary Hammond, who was seventeen (wise beyond her years) and he forty-nine. Two sons died on a voyage to the East Indies and two daughters died in infancy.

During Goodwin's years at Oxford, he and John Owen lectured on Sunday afternoons to students, and both were chaplains to Cromwell. Spiritual fervour spread, Philip Henry, Matthew's father attended Oxford. Henry wrote, 'Serious godliness ... many scholars used to meet for prayer ...' But 1662 was on the horizon! When he was dying, aged eighty, Goodwin's son wrote of his godly father: 'In all the violence of [his fever], he discoursed with that strength of faith and assurance of Christ's love, with that holy admiration of free grace, with that joy in believing, and such thanksgiving and praises, as he extremely moved and affected all that heard him ... He rejoiced in the thoughts that he was dying, and going to have a full and uninterrupted communion with God. 'I am going,' said he, 'to the three Persons, with whom I have had communion: they have taken me, I did not take them ... I could not have imagined I should ever have had such a measure of faith in this hour ... Christ cannot love me better than he doth, I think I cannot love Christ better than I do; I am swallowed up in God ...' With this assurance of faith and fullness of joy, his soul left this world.

Goodwin was buried near other Puritans in Bunhill Fields, his epitaph written in Latin. In addition to the above account, he was also a prolific author and editor. Later preachers influenced by Goodwin's writings include John Cotton (1584–1652), Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), George Whitefield (1714–1770) and John Gill (1697–1771). Alexander Whyte (1836–1921) wrote: 'I have read no other author so much and so often. And I continue to read him to this day, as if I had never read him before.'