

**William Perkins 1558-1602:** *Buried, He carried my sins far away. Galatians 5: 1 - 8,* Christ freed you to be free; so be free. Live free in Christ by power of Holy Spirit. The best and truest freedom is: 'freedom from my silly little self, in order to live responsibly in love for God and others.' – 'What Christ has done in liberating us, is not so much to set our **will** free from the bondage of sin as to set our **conscience** free from the guilt of sin' (John Stott). *Grace principle is life principle* (GCB).

**1: 16<sup>th</sup> Century:** Renaissance 1400-1600; Monarchs: Edward VI, 1537-1553; Mary I, 1516-1558; (Mary Queen of Scots, 1542-1587); Elizabeth I, 1533-1603.

**Others:** Michelangelo 1475-1564; Walter Raleigh 1554-1618; Spanish Armada, 1588. Francis Bacon, 1561-1626 (Philosopher); Galileo Galilei 1564-1642; William Shakespeare, 1564-1616; Guy Fawkes, 1570-1606, failed gunpowder plot, 1605. **Composers:** Thomas Tallis, 1505-1585; Monteverdi, 1567-1643; Michael Praetorius, 1571-1621. **Theologians:** Erasmus, 1466-1536; Thomas Cranmer, 1489-1556; Melancthon, 1497-1560; Martin Luther, 1483-1546; Huldrych Zwingli, 1484-1531; John Calvin, 1509-1564; John Knox, 1514-1572.

**2: Background:** 'Puritan' was initially a term of abuse & historians used it for those concerned to further reform Elizabethan & Stuart C of E. Puritan era, 1560-1710. Did not call themselves 'Puritan'; insult, term of abuse. Their faith was shaped by struggles with religious culture & RC's. Puritanism's roots in continental Reformation; John Wycliffe (1320-1384) & Lollards (lay preachers); then William Tyndale (1494-1536). **William Perkins** was born the same year that Elizabeth I ascended the English throne. Puritans achieved some public acceptance in Elizabeth's early years; then reverses through James I & Charles I. Some Puritans (Pilgrims) sailed for Holland; then Plymouth Colony in 1620; SE Massachusetts. Puritanism's four Reformation (Scriptural) truths: **i**; personal salvation entirely from God, **ii**; Bible the indispensable guide to life, **iii**; church should reflect the express teaching of scripture, **iv**; society one unified whole. Puritans believed humankind was **utterly** dependent upon God for salvation.

**3: Cambridge:** Perkins was born in Warwickshire. His youth displayed reckless behaviour, profanity & drunkenness. Entered Christ's College, Cambridge & achieved BA & MA by 1584. While a student he overheard woman in street deal with her naughty child by alluding to 'drunken Perkins.' So humiliated he turned from his wicked ways and fled to Christ for salvation. Gave up study of mathematics and fascination with black magic & occult and studied theology. Joined with other men in spiritual brotherhood at Cambridge that espoused Calvinist and Puritan convictions. Cambridge was the leading Puritan centre and his formal training was Calvinism within a strict scholastic emphasis. From 1584 until his death, Perkins was lecturer/preacher across the street from Christ's College at the influential pulpit of Great St Andrew's Church.

**4: Ministry:** Perkin's theology reflected Augustinian & Reformed beliefs applied to the transformation of Elizabethan society, church & individuals. Theology was "the art of living well," and explored in his writings; worship, ministry, family life, vocation, conscience, anti-Roman disputes & Biblical commentaries. He taught the majesty of God's order with its social and personal implications. He was the first Elizabethan theologian & his writings translated into Dutch, German, Italian, French, Czech, Hungarian, Latin, Welsh. Through his

prolific writings, Perkins taught people how to search their consciences for the least evidence of election based on Christ's saving work. He saw this as part of the Pastor's main work to keep **the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility**. They had to be taught to make their election sure by living as the elect of God. He taught that one primary means was through the *golden chain of salvation*; by the instrument of preaching; **Romans 8: 29 & 30**. He taught believers to move from initial faith to full assurance and know: "I am sure that I am a child of God, elected by the Father, redeemed by the blood of the Son, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit." Preaching makes up the number of the elect, and then proceeds to protect them by the Word of God. Puritans were serious about their call; a plaque on Perkins's study table: '**Thou art a Minister of the Word: Mind thy business.**'

**5: Emphasis:** Perkins was troubled by Puritan formalism & spiritual complacency in his era which had replaced RC equivalent. He saw his ministry as afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted. His desire was to maintain continuity with Reformational heritage and disciple people in that belief. Puritans regarded NT spiritual health as; Christ-centred faith, hope and love expressed in good works; assurance, peace and joy; heart and mind constantly engaged in praise and thanksgiving; zeal for God's kingdom and glory, leading to purposeful & energetic action. Spiritual malaise, by contrast, showed doubt, despair, fear, hatred, apathy, bad habits, lack of courage, backbone & zeal; pride, lust, greed, bitterness, discontent, self-absorption, self-pity, indiscipline, etc. Various modes of melancholy (depression) were also part of these failures. Answers were deep empathy; physical, mental, spiritual. Understanding of corruption in fallen human nature; whose death absorbed sin's guilt; whose risen power restores His image in us; all by free grace in Christ. Saw Christian life as battlefield; ongoing conflict with Satan seeking to blunt impact of God's Word by distortion, distraction, uncertainty re final salvation. Were they among God's chosen & called who would be kept safe until heaven?

**6: Marriage:** Perkins resigned his fellowship to marry a young widow, July 1595. He catechised students, lectured, advised & counselled the spiritually distressed. His preaching gifts reached common people with plain language & theology. He pioneered the art of dealing with 'cases of conscience' by self-examination & spiritual diagnosis. Perkins declared: "The common sins of England ... are ... First, ignorance of God's will and worship ... The second main sin of England is contempt for Christian religion ..." Prisoners in Cambridge gaol among first to benefit from his powerful preaching. "He lived his sermons."

(His ministry to common people, plain preaching and theology; *Meet the Puritans*)

**6: Death:** He died from kidney stones just prior to the end of Elizabeth's reign. Now married for seven years, his wife had lost three children from disease, caring for three small children and again pregnant. Perkins's friend James Montagu (later bishop of Winchester) preached his funeral from Joshua 1:2, *Moses my servant is dead*. Buried in churchyard of Great St Andrews. His influence through later theologians & writings spread to continent and New England.

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