

Differences between Puritan and Pilgrim Lifestyles

Pilgrim and Puritan Lifestyles how they Lived

By: R. Renée Bembry

The difference between pilgrims and puritans were distinct from the ways they lived their lives to how they practiced their religions; and major differences stemmed from each groups' views on separation of church and state. Puritans believed church and state best served the people when the two entities combined and worked in unison. At the same time, however, the puritans disagreed with some church practices and wanted to reform those practices. Pilgrims, on the other hand, believed church and state should separate altogether and that people should rule their own lives. As time passed, pilgrim practices would surpass puritan practices.

Pilgrims and puritans differed in their family lifestyles. Puritans allowed their religious beliefs to dictate their home lives. Their home lives imitated their church lives. From the church's standpoint, puritans were to recognize a "supreme" leader and all life was to center around that leader. In keeping with this philosophy in their homes, the men ran their households as if they were "supreme" leaders reigning over their families.

Puritan fathers read to and taught their families in accordance with views of the church. In their belief, their teachings and traditions were necessary in order to improve moral society. It was the Puritan father's job to teach their wives and children to listen, to believe, and to obey. Wives and children were not encouraged to think, to question, or to

act in nonconforming manners. As a people, Puritans were required to stay in line with whatever the church said lest they would break the church's commandments.

Although the terms pilgrim and "pilgrim fathers" adorn American history books, pilgrims did not refer to themselves as such. In fact, the term Pilgrim Fathers introduction came about in a 1799 newspaper article (Columbian Centennial) wherein author Samuel Davis wrote "Hail, Pilgrim Fathers of our race!" This article appeared just under 180 years after the pilgrims set foot at the infamous Plymouth Rock. In 1820, Daniel Webster gave the term a boost when he used it in a bicentennial oration.

Likewise, although William Bradford – one of the original pilgrims and Plymouth Colony's first governor – referred to himself and his fellow emigrant separatists as pilgrims, the un-phrased term "pilgrims" would not gain popularity for another couple hundred years. It was following the abovementioned incidences that the word pilgrim and phrase Pilgrim Fathers became popular.

During the passing of almost two centuries from the first "pilgrim" landing at Plymouth Massachusetts, many settlers made their way to the New World. These settlers came from different walks of life and included in the groups were more separatists, Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers. It would be these pilgrims who would pave the way for free society as puritans donned their lives in uniformity. (In later England, Separatists were labeled Independents and Congregationalists.)

Pilgrims were plain folks who loathed bigotry, autocracy, formalism, and intolerance. In adhering to their beliefs, they suffered afflictions cast upon them by their adversaries. They lived impoverished lives. They lived and died for their convictions. They took themselves into exile on the far side of the earth – America – the New World – while fleeing for their lives and their beliefs.

Prior to coming to the New World, separatist pilgrims were forced to put their safety on the line often to their own detriment. This was because the Church of England did not recognize or approve of the separatist religious practices. For their safety, these separatist pilgrims held their religious meetings in secret and risked being discovered by Church of England conformist lawmen. These lawmen often captured, imprisoned, and killed separatists when they discovered them. Continual loss of life at the hands of conformists prompted separatists to seek new places to live. Their determination to live freely played a major role in world democracy as we know it today.

Pilgrims, including other groups that believed in separation of church and state, and most particularly separatists who died for their cause, came to America to escape death and imprisonment.

Puritans came to America to practice religion as they pleased with the intent to form a church state government that did not include England's practices the settlers disagreed with.

Members and nonmembers of the puritan community began to ostracize puritan practices. People like Anne Hutchinson became puritan dissenters and critics. In Hutchinson's case, she acquired and taught a following that discovering salvation could only occur from within oneself not from one's visible actions. These teachings were in direct contrast to what puritan leaders preached and so Hutchinson was banished from the colony.

Another puritan adversary, separatist Roger Williams, disagreed with colonists using royal charters to acquire Native American lands in addition to other religious based puritan practices. For speaking out against Puritanism, Williams was also banished from the colony. Still, Williams gained a following in Rhode Island and eventually laid groundwork for the United States Constitution for government

practices that protect "individual liberty of conscience".

William Penn, a Quaker later labeled "America's first great champion for liberty and peace", believed in equal rights for all people including equal rights for women. Penn went to jail for his religious convictions and anti puritan beliefs six times.

It was during the second generation of puritans that most of the anti puritan church practices began. To calm things down, a "half-way-covenant" was established that allowed "moral", baptized, and other Orthodox Church members more church privileges. However, the rule that only elect members could rule and vote continued, at least, in New England.

As time passed, puritan leaders came to realize they not only lost their battle to "purify" the Church of England, but their intentions to form a church-state government in America had also failed. As a result of this realization, puritan leaders settled for independently run congregational church governments in accordance with United States separatist (pilgrim) views. These congregational churches allow Christians to gather with other Christians to worship God's spirit in their place of choice. This type of gathering contrasts England's style that required people in assigned areas to attend assigned parishes.

It is apparent that major difference between pilgrims and puritans had to do with each groups views of church and state governance. It is also understandable why, in the end, pilgrim leadership gathered more followers and puritan leadership gained more criticism. People simply wanted more religious freedom and they wanted churches that ran with less government interference.