

## **Is It Better to Be Behind on the Path?: Experiencing the Path of Christian Spirituality in Different Millennia**

### **Part VI: Conclusion**

By [Rev. Joel Kletzing](#)

Perhaps the initial question raised by the title of this paper is unfair. It may seem to imply that there may be more truth available after the Reformation than before. When the Scriptures were completed, all truth that is needed for salvation was available to sinners. Developments such as covenant theology are useful tools to relate the parts of Scripture to each other, but the parts were there when the apostles finished writing.

There are advantages to the serious disciple to studying the church's development of thought over time if he or she is willing to glean from each era possible correctives for present-day discipleship. With such rich, heavily-detailed, well thought out, Biblically-saturated literature as Puritans such as Brooks produced, some who indulge could be distracted from the goal of being in God's presence and being satisfied by His glory as if there is discomfort referring to anything mystical. The zeal of Evagrius to know and enjoy God is not lost in Brooks. But it may be lost in some admirers of Brooks just as the glorious foundation of justification by faith could be obscured in the minds of some admirers of Evagrius.

After affirming that justification is by faith apart from works and that the work of salvation belongs entirely to God who rescues from sickness and evil and death and the devil and provides justification, Father Theodore Stylianopoulos in the article referenced previously said, "The mystery of salvation is a duet, not a solo. It is a lifetime engagement with God."<sup>1</sup> As John Owen said, instead of justification or the receiving of Christ's righteousness being described as "revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17), it seems as if it should be "from works to works,"<sup>2</sup> that is, from the work of grace in us to the work of obedience that we do. Both sides felt the tension regarding faith and works.

There is still much in orthodoxy that is unpalatable to present-day Reformed theologians, but the call for passionate devotion to God resonates clearly in the

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<sup>1</sup> Stylianopoulos, "How Are We Saved?"

<sup>2</sup> Owen, p. 22.

writings of both Evagrius and in Brooks. As for the marks of genuine holiness that Brooks identified, Evagrius scores well. He was filled with admiration for God's perfection, was affected with holiness in every part of his life and existence, cherished others who are holy, sought to grow in and prayed for holiness, was grieved at his own sins, desired to see others become holy, etc. Evagrius was more negative in his approach, urging more flight from physical things, but the goal was the same as that of Brooks – to not let anything hinder growth in the image of Christ.

The present society is one which not only tolerates but protects the eight sins Evagrius identified as deadly (gluttony, avarice, vainglory, lust, anger, sadness, despondency and pride). It strives to find fulfillment in busyness instead of stillness. Yet to employ Evagrius' spirituality without a proper emphasis on grace and union with Christ which is highlighted so prominently in Brooks' writings would be to enter the battle with culture lacking some important tools. Brooks' arguments on assurance emphasized that the fuller one's understanding of grace and the work of Christ, the greater one's capacity for standing strong against condemning pressure. One should not brush off Evagrius because of the extremes of the ascetic life when viewed through the lens of present culture. If ascetic tendencies are acted out of a motive of love for Jesus, responding to a divine calling, resting on a platform of grace, and resisting self-righteousness and the proud tendency to judge others as false who do not employ the same methods in the same way, could they not be useful for guarding against Satan's devices? What is cautionary in Evagrius is the deemphasizing of written doctrine in order to seek what is beyond words.

To answer the title's question, it is better to come behind on the path, so that one might benefit from servants of God who pursued the image of Christ in varied cultures and ages. If one tries to live without learning from the past, knowledge will be limited only to what can be acquired in one's own short lifetime.

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