

Is It Better to Be Behind on the Path?

Experiencing the Path of Christian Spirituality in Different Millennia

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Part 1

Introduction

Would there have been an advantage to living in the fourth century in the time of Evagrius of Pontus, one of the desert fathers, and to have experienced Christianity when it was young – a time some would consider closer to a pristine original state, than to have learned to follow Jesus during the time of the Puritans, particularly Thomas Brooks, in the seventeenth century when the church had matured and developed in significant ways regarding its understanding of Biblical doctrine? There are those who would warn that many intervening years saw greater introduction of corruption into the original form of Christianity and thus would prefer the earlier practices.

An honest evaluation of the early church with its struggles and development would conclude that the idea of a once-pristine state is a myth. Philip Schaff, the nineteenth-century church historian who migrated from Germany to Pennsylvania to teach in the seminary of the German Reformed Church in Mercersburg, in confronting those who wished to return to this imagined pristine state thus dismissing over a thousand years of church history as useless for the revivalist-oriented thinker of his day, presented a model of church history which understood the church in organic terms, similar to the development of a human being. According to Schaff's model the church progressed from infancy to greater self-awareness and greater depth of knowledge of Biblical doctrine. Why would one wish to return to infancy in one's own life, abandoning all that has been learned in the maturing process, even though error was embraced along with truth and requires attention resulting in removal?

Applying Schaff's model, Evagrius' spirituality may be lacking some of the insights developed by the living out of Christianity for many more centuries from which Thomas Brooks was able to benefit. However, Christianity does not change in essence from its inception, just as a maturing human is still in essence the same human at death as at birth. Christianity itself does not evolve. The doctrines given by Jesus and developed through the apostles are unchanging. If a figure in church history denies these orthodox teachings, he or she is no longer

to be held in high esteem as a good example or as a source of wisdom for the present.

What matures is the church's ability to apply and explain truth. The past must not be discarded. Schaff maintained that Christ's promise to be with the church throughout all ages until the end of time indicates that even though previous eras of church history may seem radically different to readers today, there is benefit in studying them to determine how believers dealt with error, defended truth and applied it in their own context.

The path of growing in holiness and combating Satan's attacks and growing in love for Jesus may look different when one reads Brooks as opposed to when one reads Evagrius. If a traveler as a child accompanies his parents on frequent trips to Philadelphia but due to the family's relocation is an old man the next time he travels the once-familiar road, he may struggle at times to recognize any identifying landmarks. Even though it may take work to feel at home on the trek, in fact it is still the road which will conduct the person to Philadelphia.

This paper's dealing with Evagrius cannot necessarily transfer its conclusions in all points to the eastern church fathers monolithically; nor should all Puritans be assumed to be carbon copies of Brooks. The assumption with which the considerations of both Christians will be launched is just that – that they are both Christian. The latter will be considered first, and then points of correlation or contrast will be developed with the earlier. Three works of Thomas Brooks will provide a sampling of the spirituality he practiced. A detailed summary of the three is provided as the basis for later analysis of the spirituality of these two men.

The Crown and Glory of Christianity

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) was a British Puritan preacher who studied at Cambridge and was licensed to preach in 1640. In 1662 he published *The Crown and Glory of Christianity*, also known as *Holiness the Only Way to Happiness*.

In the "Epistle Dedicatory" he taught that the desire for happiness is natural in humans. It was not removed by Adam's fall.¹ Union with Christ must precede heaven and the experience of happiness there. There is no union with Christ apart from holiness, and holiness is evidence of a real union.² The way this statement is presented, and considering how it will be explained that Evagrius stressed spiritual exercises prerequisite to experiencing union with Christ, if the reader went no further than the opening page, resolution as to whether holiness invites Christ's presence or flows from it would be wanting. Brooks says, "Of all

¹ Brooks, Thomas. *The Crown and Glory of Christianity*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, vol. 4 of *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001, rpt.), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 417.

the many thousands that have travelled to happiness, there is not one to be found but hath travelled thither in a way of holiness.”³ No one will enter heaven without growth in and intentional striving for holiness.

What is not so neatly organized in the writings of Evagrius, Brooks, a product of the Reformation’s development of thought regarding the effects of the fall and the nature of justification by faith, explains that after Adam’s sin original holiness was lost to humanity. In the fall there was a loss of the holy image of God that had been impressed on Adam, an exchange of sonship for slavery to sin, the abrogation of friendship and communion with God thus rendering all humans to be His enemies and strangers, and the forfeiture of a stake in God’s glory. This condition explains human misery.⁴

Brooks makes plain that sanctification (or the believer’s progress in holiness) is inseparable from justification (gaining a right standing with God, being removed from condemnation and becoming heir of righteousness worthy of eternal reward).⁵ Salvation must be embraced as a whole and not in parts.

Continuing in the “Epistle Dedicatory” Brooks challenges pastors to holiness and to work hard, rejecting the pride of public honor due to one’s position. Evagrius, after a near affair with a prominent women, fled to the desert to remove himself from temptation. The now famous leaders of the eastern church had their eye on him as a young leader who demonstrated much potential. Yet Evagrius valued holiness more than the loss of position and relocated away from temptation.

Brooks listed characteristics required of holy leaders. They included the following ways to live: heavenly, graciously, holily, humbly, righteously, harmlessly and exemplarily. Without holiness in all of God’s people, both body and soul will be lost in hell.⁶ The goal of each pastor should be to see holiness birthed in each member, devoting himself to nourishing and promoting it once God’s Spirit introduces it into an individual’s life.⁷ Without holiness there will be no induction into eternal happiness.

As the next section entitled “The Necessity, Excellency, Rarity, and Beauty of Holiness” begins, Hebrews 12:14 is given as the foundation of all that follows. It says, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”⁸ A soul has more worth than a world.⁹ So one must be diligent to preserve the soul and pursue its wellbeing by developing holiness. “Holiness differs nothing from happiness but in name.” “Holiness is happiness in the bud,

³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹ Ibid., p. 36

and happiness is holiness at the full.”¹⁰ Holiness is the defining characteristic of heaven as unholiness is of hell.

Definitions of holiness are then enumerated. First is legal holiness, or exact “conformity in heart and life to the whole revealed will of God.”¹¹ This refers to the holiness that Adam lost originally, a holiness that was derived directly from God. Before the fall, such holiness would have seemed naturally delightful to Adam, just as unholiness seems delightful to Adam’s corrupted descendants. The loss of this original holiness also robbed the human race of true beauty. All natural beauty that remains is only superficial or cosmetic. Surely the soul cannot be satisfied without real beauty.

Brooks also details a holiness that is imagined or conceited which is characteristic of those who are blinded to their own corruption and yet expect to enter heaven. Persons in this category demonstrate licentiousness, rebellion, superstition, idolatry and a lack of gracious behavior. Such imaginary and conceited holiness yields only imaginary and conceited happiness and will not enable the person to see God.¹²

There is also an outward, visible holiness which refrains from scandalous sins and diligently keeps religious ceremonies. But such external holiness does not guarantee genuine internal holiness. Further, there is what our Puritan author refers to as a relative holiness which is practiced by those who correctly reserve themselves for God’s use and withdraw from the world. The Bible says much about separating from the corruptions and pollutions of the world.¹³ One who would encounter God’s glory in heaven must maintain this relative holiness.

Another type of holiness delineated in the text is imputative holiness, or the holiness that Christ imputes to believers. This does not refer to Christ’s holiness of nature, but the holiness He established by keeping the Law perfectly (both active obedience and passive obedience) and being thus qualified as the Mediator between God and man. Anyone lacking this holiness will not see God.¹⁴

Lastly, there is inherent, internal qualitative holiness which represents a grouping of all graces and is not a lopsided emphasis on a single grace. It is the outworking of holy principles, divine qualities and supernatural graces infused into the soul, and thus emerges the new man or new nature. Lacking this form of holiness, none would ever find true and eternal happiness. Heaven is barred from the unholy (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21). A new birth is required (John 3:3).¹⁵ The palaces of princes are open only to family and friends, not

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹² Ibid., pp. 39-40.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 41-45.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 46-48.

strangers.¹⁶ Not only is heaven denied unholy people, but real communion with God in this lifetime will be withheld as well.¹⁷ Without holiness, humans are fools. A fool exchanges what is of great value for what is trivial, what is eternal for what perishes.¹⁸ A fool would have no interest in self-denial and self-sacrifice. As a demonstration of heaven's intolerance of unholy foolishness, the church is to exclude those whose lives are characterized by gross disregard for holiness just as the temple was to be kept free of such influences in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 44:7-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,11).¹⁹ Numerous pages are set aside by Brooks to establish the precedent of the early church fathers of practicing discipline in order to preserve purity in the church, excluding gluttons, frauds, the lustful, slanderers, persecutors, seducers, etc. from the Lord's Table.²⁰ Citing Revelation 1:6 he explains that no resident of heaven will hold a position less than the rank of king, so if unholy persons were to be admitted there, it would become hell for the other inhabitants.²¹

Entering the next section of the *The Crown and Glory of Christianity* one finds reasons why a lack of holiness guarantees a lack of happiness by depriving the subject of the blessed vision of God in heaven. First of all, this is so because God says it. Secondly, "real holiness is that great principle that fits and capacitates souls for communion with God, and for a blessed sight and fruition of God."²² (Cf. Matthew 5:8 – Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.) Just as surely as Adam was ejected from Eden, so all who possess no real holiness will fail to be found in heaven. To these statements Brooks adds that unholy people simply have no heart to go to heaven, saying that "if the heart were bent for heaven, the head would contrive for heaven, the eye would look out for heaven, and the ear would hear for heaven, and the tongue would speak for heaven, and the foot would walk towards heaven, and the hand would do for heaven."²³ Even the rich man in hell in Jesus' parable who conversed with Abraham did not request entrance into heaven but only comfort in hell. "Heaven would be a very hell to an unholy heart"²⁴ who has no desire to be separated from beloved sins. Those who are mere formalists in their practice of religion and fail to wage war on sin will not see God.²⁵ Mere civility and common honesty do not constitute true holiness. Moral honesty cannot acquire heaven, but perhaps a better room in hell. "Moral honesty without piety is as a body without a soul."²⁶ Respectable character qualities in a divided heart will not qualify one for heaven. "Neutrality [or mediocrity] is the spiritual adultery of the heart." "He that is not throughout holy, is

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 63-71.

²¹ Ibid., p. 72.

²² Ibid., p. 77.

²³ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 88-89.

not really holy, and he that is not really holy, can never be truly happy.”²⁷
Common gifts belonging to common grace such as knowledge, faith or prayer
without real holiness will fall short of heaven (Matthew 7:22-23).²⁸

Neither can great gifts serve as accurate indicators that holiness is present. Some of the greatest scholars are the greater enemies of Christianity. Their intellect has enabled them to make wickedness witty. “The highest gifts many times prove but the fairest paths to the chambers of death.”²⁹ Gifts that tickle the ear may not open the way for cleansing to the heart. Gifts that stir emotions or affections may be impotent to purify a heart from corruption. Gifts can even lend a person wisdom which will deceive only self and others. Gifts can gain favor with others yet may not impress God. Gifts can facilitate one promoting his own well-being and profit, but holiness drives one to promote God’s goals and profit and glory. Gifts alone are able to restrain the soul, but only grace can renew it. Gifts feed pride; holiness humbles. Gifts can make a life beautiful like Rachel was beautiful, but holiness produces abundance of fruit like her sister Leah. Gifts direct our attention to fixing others, while holiness incites personal reform.³⁰

Of course, the value of all this logic is that each must perform a self-examination to see if genuine holiness is resident within. “No man lives so miserable, nor no man dies so sadly, as he that lives and dies a stranger to his own soul.”³¹ One must know whether he is in a state of nature or grace, sin or holiness. All are dependent on divine light to illuminate what is false since sinners easily deceive themselves. All who then perceive within themselves a lack of true holiness must cast themselves at Jesus’ feet for mercy.³²

If one wants to be comforted by identifying genuine holiness within herself, it must be plain what are the marks of what is genuine. At the head of the list Brooks places being “much affected and taken up in the admiration of the holiness of God” (Exodus 15:11).³³ Presumptive sinners may be moved by God’s mercy or other qualities, but only a holy person appreciates and marvels at God’s holiness. In other words, there is a tendency to find in God that in which one wishes to indulge.

A second mark of true holiness is its ability to spread to affect every part of a person’s life and existence. Thirdly, holy people cherish others who are holy above those who are merely outwardly talented or attractive in some way. Fourthly, one who is truly holy will always strive to grow in holiness, including praying for holiness. An unholy person’s prayers are frequently limited to

²⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 97.

³² Ibid. pp. 100-101, 406.

³³ Ibid., p. 104.

requesting more pleasure, power and money. Prayers springing from true holiness pursue growth in submission, patience and love. And fifthly, holiness breeds holy hatred of all ungodliness and wickedness because all sin strikes at the glory, nature, being and law of God.³⁴ A holy person detests sin for the hell that is in it; an unholy person detests it for the hell that follows it. Every sin, even the secret one, is taken seriously by the holy person, for no sin is little, since there is no little hell and no little God to be offended.³⁵ Among the secret motives of the heart to be addressed are pride, self-love, lust, murmuring, hypocrisy, envy, carnal confidence, self-applause, and hatred.³⁶

Sixthly, those truly holy will be grieved at their own sins. Religious services and prayer, seventhly, will be easy and pleasant to the holy one. Eighthly, true holiness will produce righteous dealings with others. Ninthly, holiness will exhibit itself in a desire to help others become holy. Tenthly, in a holy life common, earthly things will be employed toward holy ends. Eleven, genuine holiness conforms to Christ's holiness. Twelve, a holy person is grieved at the unholiness of others, namely because it is painful to see one's Lord dishonored. Thirteen, a holy nature is captivated by the holiness and purity of the Word of God. Unholy people may appreciate wit or the style in which a sermon is delivered, but holy people love the holiness of the Word which shines through a human instrument delivering a sermon.³⁷

Fourteen, real holiness holds up even when the subject is in unholy company, including persecutors. Fifteen, holy aims and goals govern everyday life where genuine holiness resides in a person's heart. There is a desire to bring glory to God in every part of life. Even if God withholds blessing, holy allegiance demonstrated in obedience and service will not be withheld (Job 17:9; Habakkuk 3:17-18). This is more than fulfilling a duty. It is derived from a desire to behold God's glory in His sanctuary (Psalm 63:1-3). God is the fountain from which all glory springs and the sea to which it returns. As such He is the Alpha and Omega.³⁸ God's glory is both the drawing agent and the goal of holiness. God may grant a special sense of divine love or of the divine presence of Christ or of sweet fellowship with God or an overwhelming experience of God's beauty and glory in order to inspire greater holiness.³⁹ This, of course, creates a desire for yet more. Sixteen, a holy heart produces a holy tongue and holy speech. So markedly absent will be lying, cursing, profane talk, swearing, slandering and reviling.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 105-109.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 404.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 118-133.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 397.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 406.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 139-150.

In attempting to persuade unsanctified persons to pursue holiness, Brooks teaches that all men are born sinners and only a supernatural power can convert a sinner into a saint. Acquiring holiness is not achieved, though, by those who fail to make great effort toward that end, waging war against the world, flesh and devil. The possibility of holiness is real only because of God's promises (e.g., to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for Him [Luke 11:13]). God is the Author of holiness in the saints, and He alone can cause it to flow into a sinner's heart and infuse it into the soul.⁴¹ Angels are given to aid God's people in the battle against evil. There are examples given in Scripture and in the present church to inspire holiness within believers. Christ's work accomplished a goal of making us holy. "The crown of holiness was fallen from our heads, and Christ freely and willingly, uncrowns himself, that once more we might be crowned with holiness, immortality, and glory."⁴²

Brooks believed holiness to be "the excellency of all a man's excellencies."⁴³ In other words, it is the highest plane for which man can reach. Evagrius would put prayer into this place, but one may aver that the earlier saint was using prayer by metonymy to refer to holiness. It is by holiness that one will be recognized as belonging to Jesus on judgment day.⁴⁴

What must be avoided and what practices engaged if holiness is to develop properly? Repentance is more than a simple display of sorrow. It is a life-consuming change involving heart, mind and outward practice and includes deep loathing of sin and self and a true sense of shame. These things are necessary for a daily drawing closer to God.⁴⁵ Sin must be treated as the enemy it is. A conqueror does not afford shelter or provision for a single enemy. Neither can a believer harbor a single sin.⁴⁶ Repentance should not be put off, for the longer a ship leaks, the harder it will be to empty.⁴⁷ A useful tool for the one who wishes to practice repentance is to meditate on his own death which will cause him to soberly evaluate himself.⁴⁸

In keeping with the style of his day, Brooks is a prolific maker of lists. What is listed next in this work is what must be done in the life of one who wishes to pursue holiness. First, she must lament and mourn over her own unholiness and wickedness. It is better to weep over one's sins here on earth than eternally in hell. For those who may be concerned that they are not regularly moved with a

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 397.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 158-159.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 192-193.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

strong emotion of grief over sin, Brooks comfortingly assures that “He that really grieves that he cannot grieve for sin, is grieved for sin.”⁴⁹

Second, one must seek the Holy Spirit who is the efficient cause of all holiness in the world. God purposed holiness for His people; Christ purchased it; and the Holy Spirit is the agent that produces it in believers as a reality. Thanks should be offered as realization comes that the Holy Spirit is changing a heart, destroying sins, reforming ways and saving the soul.⁵⁰

Third, wait on the Word. Preaching is the ordinary means God uses to produce holiness in hearts (John 17:17). Fourth, associate with holy people. The society of the wicked is a great hindrance to holiness. This is a principle that Evagrius interpreted as endorsing asceticism. Fifth, fulfill any solemn vows you have made to God. Sixth, consider carefully the worth of your soul which is the “breath of God, the beauty of man, the wonder of angels, and the envy of devils.”⁵¹ The soul is capable of union and communion with God, and nothing less than God can satisfy it. The fact that the devil wants to destroy the soul should teach us how valuable it is. Holiness is the only true happiness to the soul. As the body without the soul is dead, so the soul without holiness is dead.⁵²

Seventh, those desiring holiness must be devoted to Scripture reading. Eighth, much time must be spent in prayer. If holiness is the difference between heaven and hell, then it is prudent to spend much time praying for holiness. Ninth, after diligently applying yourself to obtaining holiness, wait on God with the realization that we cannot bring about holiness within our souls automatically. Turning to your own mechanical devices will fail to produce genuine holiness. Tenth, observe those who have already fallen prey to judgment and take heed from their tragedy.⁵³

But if Adam’s fall resulted in total spiritual death for the human race, how is it that God can command holiness? Adam was initially given both the power and ability to obey God’s law. That power was lost when Adam sinned, but God has not lost His power or right to command obedience. Brooks invites us to imagine a man who outfits his son with money and all necessary supplies for a trip, perhaps for the purpose of transacting family business, but his son squanders the money foolishly and is unable to go. Is the father for that reason going to forget the son’s obligations? No. Likewise, God is just in continuing to command holiness from humans who are bankrupt spiritually.

Brooks says that man’s impotence to act is his obstinacy. If a person would apply himself in his own strength to obedience, who knows but that power may be

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 212-213.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 214-215.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 216-221.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 222-223.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 223-240.

supplied from God to accomplish what He commands. Consider the man with palsy whom Jesus healed by commanding him to take up his bed and walk (Matthew 19:1-9) or Jesus commanding the man with the withered hand to stretch it out (Matthew 12:10-14). While those men complied, it was supernatural power that enabled them to do so. Acknowledging our own inability, we must run to Christ for strength and sanctification, clinging to His promises, and trusting Him to produce in us proper faith and repentance (2 Timothy 2:25).⁵⁴

Counsel is given to those who would put forward objection to holiness that it ruins joy. Brooks instructs the reader that the only kind of joy holiness robs from a person is that which is temporary and is produced by sinful delights and pleasures. These are the dangerous types of joys that would lead only to destruction of the soul. He relates, "There is nothing in carnal delights but imagination and expectation; for they can neither fill the heart nor satisfy the heart." Pleasures of sin "are but the shapes and shadows of pleasure; they are the seeds of future grief; they are but an earnest laid down for sorrow or ruin." "If there were the least real delight in sin, hell could never be hell."⁵⁵ Later it will be considered how Evagrius sought to lead his hearers to imageless prayer where the intellect is not cluttered with the imaginations to which Brooks referred.

Another objection that might be raised against holiness is the suffering it may invite, particularly due to persecution. Brooks explains that God can bring pleasure in pain because of the sweetness of His presence with those who suffer for His sake. He cites the persecution of Theodoret who reportedly saw an angel who ministered to him with sweetness while he was tortured on the rack.⁵⁶ Giving perspective Brooks wrote, "it is infinitely better to suffer for God, than to suffer from God."⁵⁷ One who suffers is given objective proof of the upright state of his own heart.⁵⁸ This assurance of salvation is reason in itself to rejoice. Practically speaking, persecution can stir believers to apply themselves more diligently to holiness. "Suffering times are the Christian's harvest times."⁵⁹

Considering that Evagrius embraced a life of physical deprivation for the sake of drawing near to God, one can see a connection with Brooks' logic he expresses when answering an anticipated criticism that holiness impoverishes a person financially while here on earth. The Puritan explained that it is actually wickedness which impoverishes, not holiness. While it is not necessary to be rich on earth, it is necessary to be holy because it would be better to be poor on one's way to heaven rather than wealthy on the road to hell. "A whole world will never fill nor satisfy an unsanctified heart; yet a little, a very little of the world will satisfy

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 241-244.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 250-255.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 277.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 279.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 281.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 286-287.

and content a holy heart.”⁶⁰ In a footnote he quotes Socrates who said, “It is great riches not to desire riches, and he has most that covets least.”⁶¹ It is not impossible for a holy man to be wealthy (e.g., Abraham and Job).

In maintaining that “holiness is man’s greatest honour and excellency” Brooks identifies pride as the greatest hindrance to holiness.⁶² When Christ returns it will be plain to all that riches without righteousness, power without piety, and greatness without holiness have zero return. Possessing wealth obligates one even more to handle money in a holy manner. All goods and opportunities should be employed in the pursuit of holiness. Brooks explains, “They are therefore higher than others, that they may be holier than others.”⁶³ Having greater leisure time can afford one more time to listen and read to what promotes holiness. Influential people must be conscious of their responsibility to set godly examples.

Striving for holiness may invite scorn from the ungodly, but Brooks’ counsel is that it is not logical for a Christian to be deterred from holiness by the ignorant laughter of fools.⁶⁴ How much one allows unsavory characters to intimidate is a matter of faith. Is man more able to harm than God to defend?⁶⁵

One who would be holy must take precaution against falling prey to scandalous sin which would trump the record of one’s past holiness regarding reputation and thus creates a poor testimony before the wicked. Such sin can serve to give license to sinners to indulge in their own sins, not to mention that it crucifies Christ again and shames His Name. To keep far away from scandal, one should realize the worth of holiness and develop a habit of gratitude for such a gift. He elaborates that one drop or spark of holiness is worth more than heaven and earth. This is because it is a special work of the Holy Spirit, a part of the divine nature, fruit of God’s love and intentional favor, a pledge of greater holiness to come, and opens the door to eternal happiness.⁶⁶ Without holiness the experience of mercy and blessing is diminished. Holiness transforms what is bitter into sweetness, and what is sweet becomes sweeter. “Next to a holy Christ, holiness is the greatest gift that God can give.”⁶⁷

Beware that the kind of holiness that fails to persevere is not true holiness. Diligent application must be made to develop and seek after holiness. As the ambitious person pursues honors, as the sensual person pursues pleasure, as

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 300-303.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 304.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 307, 311.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 312-313.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 318.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 323.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 429-431.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 324-326.

some pursue money or alcohol, with even greater passion must Christians apply themselves to acquiring holiness.⁶⁸

In delivering motives to pursue greater holiness, Brooks helps the reader understand how immaturity in holiness is common to us all. When trifles and vanities of this world are the most prized treasures, holiness is weak. When fear rules life, holiness is weak in that just as a weak body will faint, so a weak and sickly soul that is deprived of holiness will show faintness. When God ordains deprivation, is there still the ability to think and speak and act well toward God? Holiness enables a person to do so and rescues her from instability. “Where holiness is weak, there men stand and fall as second causes work, but where holiness is eminent, there men will live upon the first cause.”⁶⁹

Yet for all human striving for holiness, it is God who develops it in believers in stages until it reaches completion (Isaiah 46:3-4; Proverbs 4:18; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-14; Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 5:10). Therefore it is appropriate to pray for holiness (Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9; 4:12).⁷⁰ In sections such as this in Brooks grace shines more clearly than in many passages written by Evagrius. No power but that which raised Christ from the dead can subdue the sinful passions resident within God’s people.⁷¹

There are times it may strike the reader that the context of Evagrius may have afforded a higher priority to the life and work of the church with its sacraments in contrast to the more subjective-oriented teaching of the Puritans who often focused on God’s work in an individual. Yet Brooks speaks of spiritual gifts as being granted by God as a contributing factor in developing holiness – not just personally but for the entire church. He also mentions the significance of the Lord’s Supper in the process of growing toward perfected holiness, although there is not a great deal of elaboration on the topic.⁷²

Continuing in the consideration of motives to progress in holiness, Brooks encourages diligent application to the process because the more one grows in holiness the greater his delight in God will be,⁷³ and the more God will delight in him. The more holy a person is, the more like God he is, and God delights in Himself and His own attributes. This love of God for a holy believer is not related to election as if holiness were a prerequisite for salvation. All saints are called and redeemed without merit on their part. The weakest saint is as justified and pardoned as the strongest.⁷⁴ In another of his works Brooks explained that “a

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 327.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 334-339.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 341-343.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 405.

⁷² Ibid., p. 346.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 416.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 347-348.

little faith is faith, as a spark of fire is fire, a drop of water is water.”⁷⁵ (This Biblical teaching of justification by faith is not as profoundly highlighted in the writings of Evagrius.) A part of God’s delight in a holy person is that He will reveal Himself, His mind and His will increasingly to be known and enjoyed. Brooks relates that holiness prepares a person for the fullest and highest manifestations of God who is the Author of holiness.⁷⁶ Regarding man’s delight in God, only a holy person has the heart, spirit, anointing and principles resident in him to enable true delight in God.⁷⁷

Among the directives Brooks leaves with his readers concerning practical steps that can be taken by those wishing to progress in holiness are included the following: take careful inventory of personal deficiencies; be conscious of being always in God’s presence; select a pastor wisely (avoid the ministry of one who spends all his time condemning others, immersing himself in controversy, rehashing the basics of the faith, promoting tradition above Scripture, or grasping for large numbers of converts who never are shepherded in the path of holiness); develop strong bonds with those who are successfully growing in holiness; be devoted to secret prayer; wage vehement war against corrupting lusts by meditating on Christ’s crucifixion; and meditate on God’s own holiness.⁷⁸

Pursuit of holiness is motivated by more than personal reward. It is driven by an expectation of the ruin of antichrist, the conversion of the Jews, worldwide evangelization, the new Jerusalem’s arrival, and a coming extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ Yet there is a very personal motivation that is appropriate when searching for holiness in oneself – it grants assurance of salvation, of being one of God’s elect in whom He is graciously at work.⁸⁰

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⁷⁵ Brooks, Thomas. *Heaven on Earth*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, vol. 2 of *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001, rpt.), p. 461.

⁷⁶ *Crown and Glory*, pp. 354-356.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 384-392. Beginning on page 392 there is a descriptive section covering God’s holiness which may launch the reader into a proper contemplation of God’s holiness.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

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