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## **CONSERVING HOLINESS STANDARDS**

**By Lyle Prescott**

Ezekiel 44:23 "And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and  
profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean."

No Printed Book Date

(Internal evidence suggests that this booklet was written during or near the year 1959.)

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## **01 -- A PLEA FOR HOLINESS STANDARDS AMONG NAZARENES IN ABOUT 1959**

This booklet consists of the pleas and arguments of a concerned Nazarene missionary in  
about 1959. Much of what he brings forth is very valid. His reasoning is better than his poetry.  
Looking 40 years into the past and comparing it with conditions in the present, readers today, in

1999, can assess for themselves the validity of his pleas and the soundness of his proposals. --  
DVM

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## 02 -- A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THIS BOOKLET

This year [1959?] a touching thing happened in one of our San Juan [Nazarene] churches. During a Sunday morning service a member of the church asked permission to testify. She rose to her feet and began to weep. She raised her arms high and said, "Do you see these rings that adorn my fingers and these bracelets that adorn my arm? The Holy Spirit has been speaking to me and has shown me that I ought not to be wearing them! I have decided this morning to take them all off." With that she stripped off several rings and a good number of bracelets. "How happy I am! I want my life to be the right example before the church, and especially before the young people!" Her lips have been cleaned of lipstick since that time, and her personality has truly glowed with a radiance and joy, that she never manifested before.

I am convinced that what we need basically is a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit that will purify negatively and infill positively the hearts of all our church members. Someone has said, "Conversion will take you out of the world, but sanctification will take the world out of you." I heard a prominent leader in the Southern Baptist Church speak at the dedication of their new seminary in Havana, Cuba. Speaking to a large congregation of Baptists, he exclaimed, "The problem with you is that you have the Holy Spirit, but He does not have you?" What we Nazarenes need is that holy baptism that will fill yielded hearts and make them, as in the case of the Nazarene lady in Puerto Rico, joyful in walking in the light of the Holy Spirit. We need that infilling of dynamic love of God, fearless, unselfish, compassionate, which is the secret of that zeal that will enable us to win men from the sordidness, the ugliness, the unfairness, the cruelty, the ruinousness of sin! Such a baptism will transform and beautify with the beauty of holiness, fitting us here for the sinlessness of heaven hereafter!"

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## 03 -- INTRODUCTION

At the risk of seeming conceited, I should like to make a few introductory remarks. I confess at the outset that I am a conservative Nazarene. I don't suppose I'll find very many people in complete agreement with all I'm going to say, but I do thank you for taking time to consider this material. My radical friends will feel I'm too liberal. My liberal friends will think I'm too radical. But I have observed something very interesting: I have found some of my most radical acquaintances, to be shockingly liberal on some points, and I have discovered amazing points of conservatism in some of my most liberal friends.

I am not by means of this tract trying to "get even" with anybody, either in office or in opposition to my viewpoint. I do not deny that I am criticizing -- but not nagging or harping crossly. Well-meant and well-founded criticism should be healthful for our church. It will alert the church to its needs, and spiritual, intelligent, energetic people will do something practical about it.

In the April 11, 1959, Saturday Evening Post, my attention was caught by an article entitled "Don't Stop Criticizing Us Teachers," written by a prominent American educator, Earl H. Hanson. I thought of the increasingly widespread tracts and articles throughout our church on holiness standards when I read this comment: "Probably never before in history has castigation of the schools been so widespread -- and so vocal -- as it is in America today. And I'm all for it." After a paragraph on the painfulness of criticism and the reactions to be expected, he said: "Nevertheless, I still firmly believe that criticism of the schools is a fine thing. In the first place, criticism is a hair shirt. It makes us scratch, keeps us from relaxing too comfortably on our laurels." I liked Mr. Hanson's conclusion: "There are, after all, two impulses to improvement -- one is the harsh goad of criticism; the other is the benign pull of encouragement -- and of the two, encouragement is in the long run the most useful." I believe he is correct, and that is why we seek to get a loving Heavenly Father down upon the Nazarene scene to help us solve our problems! Talk is cheap: we want a revival!

I pray that this exposition of my reflections on holiness standards will prove a blessing to all my friends. And I trust it will make a better Nazarene of me.

Lyle Prescott  
Calle Bucare 117  
Santurce, Puerto Rico

\* \* \* \* \*

#### 04 -- CONSERVING HOLINESS STANDARDS

I want to make it plain that I love the Church of the Nazarene! I am committed to the cause of holiness. I wish to express my gratitude to all those fine ministers and laymen who, hearts made holy and eyes made clear with evangelistic vision, have striven to help our church fulfill its holiness mission. I am indebted to all those factors in our organization which promote true holiness. I have been a Nazarene for thirty-seven years. I have received a great many blessings and benefits through the channel, of our church during this time. I was sanctified in the Church of the Nazarene. I confess my gratitude.

Because I love my church, I went to defend it. There is within our church, in my opinion, a strong trend toward lowering holiness standards. We must fight this trend and win. We must conserve holiness standards. The problem is not new; it will always be current, but it dare not become dominant.\*

[\*The last clause of the above paragraph had been better worded: "but we dare not allow it to become dominant." -- DVM]

In my youthful days I heard such religious hearsay as "California is worldly," "Texas is weak on standards," "Colorado is strict," "Indiana is ideal," or "New England is conservative." I do not quote these remarks to refute them or to agree with them, but merely to illustrate that the church has long faced the problem of standards.

But the problem is more far-reaching than the bounds of our own denomination. Missionaries of sister denominations in Puerto Rico and Cuba have remarked seriously upon the gravity of the problem in their churches too. The trend toward looseness of standards is general.

Recently I met a young soldier in a San Juan radio station who told me his chaplain had appointed him to offer a course on moral standards for the army. He quoted his chaplain as stating that fifteen years ago the men entered military service with a fairly clear idea of what was right and wrong, whether or not they lived up to their concepts. But nowadays, he said, the boys seem to have no idea at all about what is right or wrong.

During my, last missionary furlough in the States, it was not the apparent worldliness of the current crop of youngsters in the church or the greenness of new converts that caused me concern. It was the obvious change of standards among older Nazarenes -- older in age and older in service within the church. There was, to mention only a few surface features of the problem, a definite trend among our women folk toward very short hair, painted lips, use of beads, necklaces, bracelets, earrings and finger rings. To use a somewhat exaggerated -- but not too exaggerated -- figure, it looked as if some of the "mothers in Israel" were trying to organize a "Daughters of Jezebel" club within the church! Increasing numbers of our men were wearing rings of all kinds. My reaction? I felt heartsick. I thought: Do I go out to the foreign field to be a representative of these people?"

My intention is to defend my church during my generation. Pulling out will not solve my church's problem. What is needed is a revival of old-fashioned holiness with a joy in modesty. It is self-discipline within the church that is needed, and, not bitter criticism from without.\*

[\*The author, Lyle Prescott, makes many valid points in this booklet. Here he seems to allude to those who pulled out of the Nazarene Church in 1956 to form the Bible Missionary Church. If so, I believe he misjudged the motives of most of those good people. Their reason for leaving the Church of the Nazarene was not so that they could fling criticisms at it from without. It was, rather, to restore and retain for themselves and their children a place of worship where old-fashioned holiness standards were "in style" and not disdained, mocked, and ignored. They felt at that time that it was most unlikely that there would ever be a return to old-fashioned, holiness standards within the Nazarene Church, and that the only way left to them to restore and maintain a true holiness with Biblical standards was to leave the Nazarene Church. I think they were right, and I think that although the motives and intentions of the author seem very pure, any effort, if there was one, to promote a return to the "old paths" within the Nazarene Church utterly failed. Indeed, some years later there was a second severance from the Church of the Nazarene which arose, in part at least, because of a continuation of trends in the Nazarene Church deemed to be quite worldly by those who comprised this second pull-out. -- DVM]

You might say that such tracts or discussions as this represent a "grass roots" movement, toward revival within our church. I am grateful for every effort from the "top" to lead our Zion to a revival, but in emergency situations the ordinary fellow needs to make his contribution too. Part of my contribution must be made poetically. Even my friends will concede that it is not very good

poetry, but poetry, like music, has the advantage that you don't sit and argue with it quite as much as with prose.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 05 -- HIGH STYLE

[\*Christian Dior, who is mentioned in the second line of the poem below was -- as I recall -- one of the designers of women's clothes who began creating above-the-knee, leg-revealing dresses and skirts about this time. -- DVM]

Where do you, find commandments  
To obey Mr. Christian Dior?\*

Why is it well nigh imperative  
To ape vain Paris attire?

A dress to be successful,  
By rule of popular style,  
Must evidence something seductive,  
Must show some lowest wile.

Then we to the New Jerusalem  
Will look for standards of dress,  
For our hearts have chosen holiness  
And a style that God can bless.

I sense that there is, in our preaching and teaching ministry, a trend away from the negative approach. So much emphasis has been placed on the positive that folk are now ashamed of any negative emphasis. Thereby we are losing a certain definiteness. We are sacrificing a valuable means of attack on sin and wrong.

I believe that the negative and positive approach are complementary to each other. Neither is to be lost. The negative is like surgery, sometimes required to remove a diseased or too severely damaged organ of the body. The positive is like normal healing, growth and adjustment that follow. Both are necessary.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 06 -- PRAYER FOR THE PULPIT

Make us perceiving, Thou Spirit of Truth,  
As holiness heralds in age or youth,  
As Thou wouldst have us, Lord, to be.  
Make us discerning 'twixt right and wrong,  
Whether in doctrine, dress or song;  
Reveal in us Thy sanctity.

Negative truth too many loathe:  
It has its place in character growth,  
If the pulpit be true and clear;  
But balance, Lord, our clarity  
With ample grace of charity  
For all who our message hear.

Earlier generations have been criticized as being prudish because of their keen moral scruples. A swing set in to "liberate" the American public. The results have been lewdness in the entertainment world, crassness and vulgarity in the field of literature, and a shocking wave of juvenile delinquency. Now even secular sources are crying for a return to decency and old-fashioned modesty. It is heart-rending that in some of our churches, instead of becoming increasingly conscious of modesty, we are becoming increasingly indifferent toward the subject. Instead of setting before the poor lost world a beautiful example of that modesty for which secular leaders are asking, we are carried away on the careless tide of worldliness. The world ought to be able to expect something better of holiness churches!

Modesty needs no apology. Modesty is in itself beautiful. Since when did beauty need an apology. Modesty is as lovely as any other virtue. It ranks with kindness, generosity, sweetness, patience, love. It is the twin sister of purity.

This year [1959?] a touching thing happened in one of our San Juan churches. During a Sunday morning service a member of the church asked permission to testify. She rose to her feet and began to weep. She raised her arms high and said, "Do you see these rings that adorn my fingers and these bracelets that adorn my arm? The Holy Spirit has been speaking to me and has shown me that I ought not to be wearing them! I have decided this morning to take them all off." With that she stripped off several rings and a good number of bracelets. "How happy I am! I want my life to be the right example before the church, and especially before the young people!" Her lips have been cleaned of lipstick since that time, and her personality has truly glowed with a radiance and joy, that she never manifested before.

I am convinced that what we need basically is a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit that will purify negatively and infill positively the hearts of all our church members. Someone has said, "Conversion will take you out of the world, but sanctification will take the world out of you." I heard a prominent leader in the Southern Baptist Church speak at the dedication of their new seminary in Havana, Cuba. Speaking to a large congregation of Baptists, he exclaimed, "The problem with you is that you have the Holy Spirit, but He does not have you?" What we Nazarenes need is that holy baptism that will fill yielded hearts and make them, as in the case of the Nazarene lady in Puerto Rico, joyful in walking in the light of the Holy Spirit. We need that infilling of dynamic love of God, fearless, unselfish, compassionate, which is the secret of that zeal that will enable us to win men from the sordidness, the ugliness, the unfairness, the cruelty, the ruinousness of sin! Such a baptism will transform and beautify with the beauty of holiness, fitting us here for the sinlessness of heaven hereafter!"

Part of the genius of the Church of the Nazarene has been its ability to unite groups or individuals of differing views on the details of how to express holiness standards of dress and conduct by maintaining the bond of Christian charity, allowing individual freedom, guided by the Holy Spirit, within the scope of the Bible and our agreed church manual. It is increasingly noticeable, however, that some would abuse the technicality that since certain details, lipstick for example, are not mentioned specifically in the Bible or in the Manual, we are perfectly free to accept or reject the general, unwritten judgment of the church on such things. But I would like to point out that there was always in our district assemblies a committee appointed to study and report on moral standards for the church. I thank God that these committees on the state of the church always submitted a strong recommendation for conservative holiness standards. And I thank God that these reports were always accepted. But are we now changing? Shall we expect such assembly reports to become watered-down expressions of moral indefiniteness?

[Below, the writer presents what I believe is a legitimate argument in favor of some written guidelines for a Holiness church Manual -- a justification for the need of certain wise prohibitions within the membership of a Holiness body. He feared "legislation" less than "degeneration" that would lead from "liberty" into the "license" of worldly practices. -- DVM]

It seems to me that our real problem is not a likelihood that we will legislate away our personal liberties of conscience, but rather that we will, through gradual lowering of the standards in actual practice, allow our precious liberty to degenerate to license. Nay we not lose our sense of right and wrong! May we not lose that moral perception that enables us to discern from what source practices spring and to what moral or immoral end they tend! If the church becomes timid and inarticulate, then who or what, pray tell, will condemn wrong? The rugged prophet Ezekiel declared of the priests of Jehovah: "They shall teach, my people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek. 44:23).

There are roughly three possible stages of moral gradation before us: (1) liberty, (2) laxity, and (3) license. There are individuals within our church who exemplify each of these stages, but my present concern is with the state of the church as a whole. I fear that we are more endangered by the state of moral laxity than we wish to admit. I am fearful for our church. This is why I have undertaken to write this tract. Nobody outside the church will save us. We the members, by the enabling, reviving grace of God, must make our church what it ought to be!

I take the liberty to express in verse certain reflections on the subject of church music, a subject dear to my heart. The problem of "jazzing up" church music is not typical, fortunately, but it is certainly prevalent enough to merit attention and correction. More than one saint is careless with his or her style of playing [a musical instrument], not realizing what it does to the atmosphere of the house of the Lord. By my remarks I certainly would not want to rob from any church musician that special joy and liberty in his playing that adds to the characteristic brightness and gladness of Nazarene music, but I do not believe that any thoughtful musician would contend that joy and jazziness are the same thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Consider the music some Christians create  
To fit this modern age:  
You have to admit it's got rhythm and snap  
And some of it gets on the stage.

Our pianists often fail to develop  
A richly devotional style.  
Rather, they imitate popular tricks  
And aim at a wink and a smile.

Church organists when aping the theater  
On that instrument, of all the king,  
Cheapen their musical ministry,  
Great beauty fail to bring.

The devotional worth of the modern trend  
You may question while you sing:  
Do you raise your hand in holy praise,  
Or tap your foot and swing?

Where are we going on this musical tide?  
Will it carry us toward holiness goals?  
If it sounds and feels like the stuff of the world,  
What will it do to our souls?

An earlier tendency in the church was to state some such thing as this, in relation to standards: "Leave the new converts alone. Don't force standards upon them. Live the life before them and pray for them. As they walk in the light and mind the leadings of the Holy Spirit, they will conform to normal Christian standards."

It seems that a developing tendency is the following: "Leave the new converts alone. Don't mention standards, because they don't matter. They have no real moral importance for our times."

As a result we now see Nazarenes bedecked with jewels and the women painted, testifying to entire sanctification, if you please! In a few places such are observed "shouting the glory down" along with the old-timers. We see women evangelists entering the pulpit with bobbed hair, preaching the message that standards are no longer of much importance in our times, that holiness concerns only the heart -- inferring that to mention standards is being an extremist or legalist, or at best, in very poor taste.

I do not believe that this attitude represents the general condition nor the general feeling of the Church of the Nazarene. But I fear that it is an increasing trend of thought and feeling in our church. And in some influential sectors it is already a quite generally accepted attitude. It must be firmly opposed and vanquished, or it will eventually produce a radical and fatal change in the character and purpose of the Church of the Nazarene! As Dr. W. T. Purkiser says in the May, 1959,

Bible School Journal, speaking of the fall of Solomon: "The first steps away from God might not be large ones, but the direction is wrong and disaster follows."

What a thrill I felt as I sat in Puerto Rico and watched the film-strip review called "Fifty Golden Years," showing the growth of the Church of the Nazarene! The accompanying sound record added beauty and depth to the study. I could not help but weep for joy and exclaim in my heart, "What God hath wrought!"

Brethren, I want the Church of the Nazarene to last well past another fifty years, if Jesus tarries, and I want this next half century to be even more glorious! But we will have to stand guard against the encroachments of sin. We will have to stand up and fight for holiness: a holy warfare accomplished by much prayer, much love, much holiness preaching and above all, much holy living. We will have to drive on aggressively for the Kingdom of God. There must be vigilance within and valor without.

At our 100th church anniversary I will be ninety-five years old, if the Lord permits me to be present. I want to have the consciousness then that I have been faithful to my church and to the cause of holiness. That is why I have written these pages. Brethren, let us keep the fire burning? May God help the Church of the Nazarene to be true to its glorious holiness mission? To this end let us work together to conserve holiness standards!

\* \* \* \* \*

## 08 -- THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

A small thing it was, it seemed like a chance  
That brought me the Church of the Nazarene;  
But when I look back I see at a glance  
It was the greatest advance I've seen!

The Church watched over me through early years  
And taught me of holiness truth;  
Its ministers and teachers for me shed their tears,  
And gave a church home in my youth.

The Church built a school by sacrificial means  
And gave me a place to prepare;  
When years of study were passed, like dreams,  
The Church kindly said, "Serve there."

All that I am and all that I own  
Are mine through the Nazarenes;  
They've been my people while years have flown--  
Could I ever forget these scenes?

Now when I see grave dangers encroach

And threaten the life of our Zion,  
It arouses my soul to resist their approach  
As if they were serpent or lion!

The deadliest assailant, the most subtle foe  
Is strangely a saboteur within;  
His color's not foreign but a blackness we know:  
Carnality, or inbred sin.

Our hope forever is revival power  
And old-fashioned preaching of the Word!  
Our Church will be safe in any hour  
While Scriptural holiness is heard!

God bless the Church of the Nazarene  
God bless it forever, I pray!  
May it be led by the First Nazarene  
Till the break of eternity's day!

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END