

# CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AND NAZARENE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Scripture: I am reading selected verses from  
Old Testament: Proverbs 1:7a; 2:3-6  
New Testament: Matthew 22:34-40; John 16:12-13, 8:32

The doctrine of Christian perfection scripturally understood is the **integrating truth** of the message we believe God has entrusted to the Church of the Nazarene.

If this is true, Nazarene higher education exists to help inculcate and implement this truth and experience in the thought and life of the church so that it may carry out its God-assigned mission.

In summarizing the Law--God's requirement of His people-- Jesus linked together two texts from the Torah--the Shema, Israel's creed found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and a verse from the Holiness Code, Leviticus 19:18:

"HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE;  
AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR  
HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR  
MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' THE SECOND IS  
THIS, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" (Mark 12:29-31, RSV).

To be enabled to keep these two commandments is to be scripturally perfect. John Wesley, who restored this truth to its merited position in a Protestant understanding of the gospel, defined Christian perfection as "loving God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength" and one's neighbor as oneself. "This implies," he explained, "that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul." "It is perfect love, . . . love excluding sin, taking up the whole capacity of the soul and governing both heart and life. How strongly does this imply being saved from all sin. For where love fills up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?"

In Dr. Phineas Bresee's 1898 Manual the article on sanctification is entitled "Christian Perfection" and then defined in Wesley's terms as "the pure love of God filling a clean heart."

Understood in this way, Christian perfection is not merely one doctrine among many, it is the very essence of Bible religion.

To say with some that we must discard the words "perfect" and "perfection" because they suggest an impossible ideal is to betray an ignorance of the New Testament meaning of perfection.

In the commonly accepted sense of the words so translated persons or things are perfect, not if they are in a static or fixed state of sinlessness or flawlessness but if they are "fitted for purpose"--"conformed to the end" for which they were made.

The example I use is of my fountain pen. My pen is not perfect in the sense of being without flaw, for its barrel has become scarred through the years. BUT it is perfect in the functional sense of "fulfilling its purpose" and being "conformed to the end" for which it was designed and manufactured. It writes satisfactorily--as long as I keep it filled with ink!

New Testament perfection is thus functional, dynamic. As persons created in the image of God, you and I are perfect, not if we are infallible--free from the limitations of finiteness and the residual effects of the Fall; BUT if, having been saved from sin's guilt and dominion and restored to God's favor by being pardoned and born of God, we have--through a deeper appropriation of God's provision in Christ--been freed from the inner bias of sin which corrupts our love--AND, filled with the Spirit, are "pressing on" toward the goal of perfect Christlikeness. This is to be "conformed to the end" for which God created us and Christ redeemed us! This is to be perfect in the New Testament sense.

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Now, the enterprise of Nazarene higher education has one master objective and mission: to help prepare for life and service to God, the Church and the world, young persons whose hearts are perfect--clean and filled with pure love to God and their fellows.

The love of Christ which floods the heart through the infilling of the Holy Spirit is holistic. It embraces and activates the whole being: "soul," the affections and emotions; "mind," the intellect and understanding; and "strength," all the powers of redeemed personality.

This week at Point Loma Nazarene College in nearby San Diego a great host of our Nazarene educators met in conference--the second such gathering in the past few years--to explore in depth the ways and means of fostering the holistic love of God in the thought and experience of our youth, integrating faith, learning and living as this relates to all the academic disciplines and programs of our schools.

## I

Without apology, our Nazarene schools are totally committed to the moral and spiritual values of our Wesleyan heritage. This means that they seek to create and maintain on each campus a spiritual climate in which young persons are encouraged to yield to the claims of Christ and come to terms with His Lordship.

At the period of their lives when they are beginning to seriously examine their faith, Bible and theology classes taught by Spirit-filled teachers help our youth to appropriate for themselves the faith of the church. In chapel services and regularly scheduled revival meetings, this process of spiritual formation is watered and nourished in the warmth of public worship.

This spiritual ministry of our schools is not a thing foreign to their mission; it is understood as integral to the flowering of Christian personhood and therefore constitutes a basic element of their institutional purpose. Some of the most spiritually sensitive and influential faculty members have no formal relationship to the department of religion. They see themselves as professors of chemistry or history or English literature who are first of all servants of Jesus Christ. Many of you here tonight can attest to the powerful influence such persons have exerted in your lives.

Every year in the classrooms, chapels, dormitories and athletic fields of our Nazarene schools literally hundreds of our youth are redeemed from their sins, reclaimed from their rebellion and sanctified wholly--filled with the pure love of God and fitted for the Master's service.

As an erstwhile Nazarene educator I can testify that the most powerful and far-reaching revivals of religion I have witnessed, revivals which profoundly influenced my own life and ministry, occurred on the campus of the college and the seminary where I spent so many happy years.

To graduate from a Nazarene college without Christ, a student must swim against the tide for four years and repudiate the finest gift our teachers yearn to impart to the youth whom the church has entrusted to their care. To guide young lives into a living relationship to Christ and a loving servanthood to the church, His Body, is foundational to everything else our schools were established to do. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your . . . soul."

## II

It is noteworthy that when Jesus quoted the Shema from Deuteronomy he added to the first commandment the injunction

that we love the Lord our God with all our mind--our intellect and understanding.

Loving the Lord with the mind means the willingness to have our minds changed into harmony with His mind, to give up our settled ways, to surrender our cherished prejudices. It also means the joy of intellectual apprehension, for in Christ are "hid all the treasures of both wisdom and knowledge."

Muslims, on entering a mosque, must remove their shoes and leave them outside. Many Christians, on entering the church, remove their brains and leave them outside!

While our church has not been free from this tendency, the Church of the Nazarene has never subscribed to such anti-intellectualism. Many of our founding fathers were men of great intellect. Witness the fact that Dr. Phineas F. Bresee was at one time chairman of the Board of Trustees of the College of Liberal Arts of University of Southern California. It is a fact of experience that when the Spirit of God quickens our moral and spiritual nature He also awakens our intellectual powers. The Spirit of holiness is also the Spirit of truth, and a thirst for knowledge is an authentic fruit of the Spirit whom Christ sent to guide us into all the truth. Accordingly, the same impulse which gave birth to our church as a witness to scriptural holiness or Christian perfection moved our founding fathers to establish institutions of learning.

Several of our original schools were actually called universities. Intuitively our fathers understood that all truth is God's truth and therefore one, whether revealed in nature and history or in the sacred Book. The articles of incorporation of Illinois Holiness University, 1909, (now Olivet Nazarene College) are most instructive: "The object for which [this university] is formed is to encourage, promote, maintain and support Christian education in all its branches, such as ancient and modern languages, science, art, music, philosophy, mathematics, history, including all subjects in colleges and universities, also Bible study and theology, especially the doctrine of entire sanctification as a work of Divine Grace . . . cleansing the heart from all sin and filling it with the pure love of God." It would be difficult to improve on this as a statement of mission for any one of our colleges today.

The universities of ancient Greece and medieval Europe were founded on the conviction that truth is universal, that our world is not a chaos but a cosmos, a uni-verse. The preincarnate Logos who illuminated the ancient Greek thinkers, in the fullness of time "was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Illuminated and inspired by this glorious revelation of God in Christ, the founders of Freiburg University in Europe framed as their motto, "The Truth shall set you free," quoting Jesus himself. "For Christ and the Church" proclaims Harvard University in its motto. The founders of the great European and American universities saw their institutions as a means of glorifying God and serving mankind through the pursuit of truth in submission to Jesus Christ, the Truth.

Dr. Charles Malik is one of the most eloquent contemporary proponents of this view of the university. In his recently published Christian Critique of the University, he writes:

"If Jesus Christ is, as he himself says and as the Christian believes, 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life'; if he is, as St. John affirms and as the Christian believes, the Eternal Logos; if in Christ, as St. Paul affirms and the Christian believes, 'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' and in him 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;' and if Jesus Christ is, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares and as Christians believe, 'the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person;' **then all truth, governed as it must needs be, by the eternal Logos is sacred, and no truth, whatever be its content or order, falls outside its province**" (p. 34).

This, and nothing short of this, is the **credo** of Nazarene higher education. We believe that the God who has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ is the God who through His Son created the universe and upholds all things. It is therefore a maxim of Nazarene higher education that Scripture and nature are dual forms of divine revelation, and that Christ is the Key to both. Thus we believe that all truth is God's truth, to be sought and taught--in the science laboratory, the classroom, the planetarium--under the lordship of Jesus Christ, for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom.

In a measure at least, this we believe is what it means to love the Lord your God "with all [your] **mind**."

### III

Finally, Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your . . . strength . . . and . . . your neighbor as yourself." Love always issues in **service** to God and others.

What I am endeavoring to say here tonight was beautifully worded in the 1909 catalog of Oklahoma Holiness College (now Bethany Nazarene College) as its stated objective: ". . . to cultivate heart, head, and hand to honor Him who created our wonderful triune nature."

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In a day when only a small percentage of the American public went beyond high school to pursue a college education Dr. Bresee wrote prophetically: "Higher education is of such a nature that the church which turns such work over to the state and to others will soon find itself robbed of its best inheritance."

It was such a conviction that moved our early leaders to found schools of higher education where our youth might develop their talents to serve Christ and the church as Spirit-filled pastors, missionaries, evangelists, teachers and involved laymen in their several vocations.

And so it was that those intrepid pioneers established Bible schools, colleges, even seminaries and universities as institutions of learning and training--14 of them at one time--to serve the church in its mission to spread scriptural holiness to the ends of the earth.

These institutions have developed through the years into fully accredited schools offering undergraduate, graduate and professional programs of highest quality. From these schools have come the overwhelming majority of our present denominational leadership, both lay and ecclesiastical. **One wonders what the Church of the Nazarene would be today without its institutions of higher education.**

During the past five years the General Board commissioned 106 missionary candidates to serve the international church. Practically all of these candidates received their education and training in Nazarene colleges and Nazarene Theological Seminary. Our Nazarene college graduates have better than 95 percent acceptance into medical colleges and graduate universities. Over 1,000 alumni are doctors and nurses, and several thousand are engaged in public education as public school, college and university teachers and administrators. Dr. Mark R. Moore, director of Education Services, reports that during this quinquennium Nazarene college alumni have been elected to top positions in several dozen major corporations and national organizations such as Xerox, Sears, Gillette, Hallmark, Delta Airlines and the American Red Cross. Many are in government and social services. Some of you could add to this impressive list.

It has been the basic assumption of our denomination that education and evangelism are two aspects of one enterprise. Vital piety and academic excellence have from the beginning been twin goals of the church; **Christian perfection demands both!**

This education service tonight in the General Assembly is clear witness to the conviction of Nazarenes that the denomination and its institutions of higher education are organically

and institutionally interrelated. Other denominations may have "church-related" colleges and seminaries; ours are the Church of the Nazarene engaged in higher education.

Most denominations could make such a claim in their early history. In the course of the years, however, the strong tendency has been for the denominations and their schools to drift apart. Whether the schools have left their churches or the churches their schools is difficult to decide. Probably as often as colleges have asserted their independence of the churches the sponsoring denominations have contributed to this tendency by failing to maintain a solid base of financial support and therefore of control.

The Church of the Nazarene has taken special care--consciously, prayerfully and deliberately--to insure a strong bonding between itself and its institutions of higher education--in the selection of trustees and regents, in the election of presidents and faculty members and in the endeavor to provide through budgets, financial campaigns and special grants significant financial support for both the capital and operational needs of the schools it sponsors and loves. This must ever be so!

Although, like the church itself, our colleges and seminaries exist and serve in a hedonistic, secular culture, I can assure you tonight that I have seen again this week in the Educational Conference what I knew to be so during the 30 years I was involved in Nazarene higher education, that the Spirit of God is still powerfully at work in the hearts and ministry of our educators who not only seek to understand what holistic education means but who also are dedicated servants of Jesus Christ and His Church.

When the apostle Paul summed up his statement of mission he did so in one unforgettable sentence: "that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). And as he related his ministry to that of his fellow apostles he wrote, "We are workers together, with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

So it is today. Our mission as a church of Jesus Christ is to labor that we may present every believer under our care "perfect in Christ." And in this apostolic endeavor the Church of the Nazarene and its colleges and seminaries, like Paul and his fellow apostles, are "workers together, with God." And with Paul we can add with assurance, "To this end [we] toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within [us]."