

## What are our assumptions about education standards? About mutual commitment?

1 [Billy Graham on **what he would change if he could start over**] Speaking in 1979 to about 600 pastors in London, he said that if he had his ministry all over again, he would make two changes. The atmosphere was electric. What changes would he make? First, he continued, he would study 3 times as much as he had done. "I've preached too much," he said, "and studied too little." Second, he would pray more. In saying this, he must have had in mind the two apostolic priorities ... "we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). [John Stott, *The Living Church*, p 107]

2 [on Acts 20:17-38] We note immediately 2 characteristics of the oversight of the local church which Paul **assumes**. First, Christian oversight is pastoral oversight. The Greek verb in Acts 20:28 (poimaino) means to do the work of a shepherd or to tend a flock, especially by feeding it. So pastors are called essentially to a teaching ministry. Whether we are preaching to a congregation, training a group or counseling individuals, ours is a pastoral ministry, a ministry of the word. But how do the shepherds feed their sheep? The answer is that they don't. To be sure, if a lamb is sick, a shepherd may bottle-feed it. But usually he leads his sheep into good pastures where they feed themselves. Second, Christian oversight is plural oversight. In Miletus the apostle sent for the "elders" (plural) of the Ephesian church. There is no biblical warrant for the so-called one-man band, in which a single pastor, like a single musician, plays all the instruments. On the contrary, from the first missionary journey onwards Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders for them in each church" (Acts 14:23), and later Paul instructed Titus to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). We need, therefore, to recover the concept of the pastoral team in the leadership of the local church. It might consist of full-time and part-time pastors, salaried and voluntary, ordained and lay, younger and older. [John Stott, *The Living Church*, 2007, p 77, emphasis added]

3 [Howard Snyder on **against the grain discipleship**] The implication here for the modern church seems obvious: the recovery of some functional equivalent of the class meeting with its intimacy, mutual care and support, and discipline is essential. Such a rigorous structure naturally goes against the grain in our lax, individualistic, live-and-let-live society. But this is **precisely why it is needed**. Talk of discipline, discipleship and responsible Christian lifestyle seldom gets beyond mere talk until folks make the kind of **serious covenant commitment** to each other which provides the structure for space-time follow-through on professed beliefs and shows that believers are willing to ratify their commitment to Christ by **commitment to his body**. Only thus do we begin to understand in practice the truth that "we are members of each other." [Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, p 149]

4 [Howard Snyder on **meaningless Scriptures**] While such groups are not prescribed in Scripture, a level of Christian lifestyle is prescribed which fails to materialize without some form of small group structure. Some of the Scriptures which are particularly pointed in this connection, and which **have become meaningless** to much of the contemporary church, are James 5:16; Hebrews 3:12-13 and 10:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Colossians 3:16; Romans 12:15; and Matthew 18:15-18. ... Wesley would not tolerate incompetence.

He worked hard at training his helpers and traveling preachers. He practiced theological education by extension two centuries before anyone thought up the name. Preachers carried books and pamphlets for themselves and for others. They were expected constantly to "improve the time" by up to 6 hours daily in study. [Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, pp 162-163]

5 ... if we serve everything up on a plate (precooked and ready to eat), we condemn our congregation to **perpetual immaturity**. Is this not why Jesus forbade his disciples to call anybody their father or teacher on earth (Matthew 23:8-10)? That is, we must not adopt toward anybody on earth, or require anybody to adopt towards us, the **dependent relationship of children to their parents** or disciples to their guru. There are to be no gurus in the Christian community – only pastors (shepherds). [John Stott, *The Living Church*, p 102, emphasis added]

6 [on small groups as koinonia] There is always something unnatural and **subhuman** about large crowds. They tend to be **aggregations** rather than congregations – aggregations of unrelated persons. ... The value of the small group is that it can become a community of related persons; and in it the benefit of personal relatedness cannot be missed, **nor its challenge evaded**. This is true of the human family. Our growth into maturity, according to the purpose of God, takes place in the context of a family group. It is the complex pattern of relationships between parents, children, brothers and sisters which, more than anything else, governs our development into adult stature. [John Stott, *The Living Church*, p. 87, emphasis added]

7 [Methodist leader Henry Fish, in an early manual – on **TRUE fellowship**] It is clear as daylight that that kind of communion [experienced in Wesley's class meetings] has the express warrant of Holy Scripture; and that something more than Church communion in the sacrament of the Lord's supper was enjoyed by the primitive Christians. They had "fellowship" as well as "breaking of bread." How, for instance, could they exhort one another daily? How could they comfort and edify one another? How could they provoke one another to love and good works? How could they confess their faults to one another, and pray for one another? How teach and admonish one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs? How bear one another's burdens? How weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice, if they never meet together for the purpose of conversing on experimental religion, and **the state of each other's souls**? Whatever persons may say to the contrary, those churches, the members of which do not observe, or in which they have not the opportunity of observing, the foregoing precepts which are enjoined in the New Testament Scriptures, are not based on the model of the apostolic Churches. [Henry Fish, *Manual for Class-leaders*, pp 20-21, quoted in Snyder, p 56]

8 [John Wesley on **bearing one another's burdens** in house fellowships] It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens' and naturally to "care for one another." ... And "speaking the truth in love, they grew up into him in all things who is the Head, even Christ." [John Wesley, *Plain Account of the People called Methodists*]

9 [John Stott on need for **deep AND broad Christians**] Evangelicals are biblical but not contemporary, while liberals are contemporary but not biblical. Comparatively few are building bridges. But authentic Christian preaching is a

bridge-building operation. ... In order to build bridges that are solid, we have to study on both sides of the canyon. It goes without saying that we must study Scripture until we are really familiar with it. But we must study the world in which we live. Nothing has helped me do this more than belonging to a reading group which began in 1972. We met every few weeks, having read an agreed non-Christian book, to discuss its challenge to our Christian worldview. I call this "double listening," listening to the word of God and listening to the voices of the modern world, its cries of anger, pain and despair. [John Stott, *The Living Church*, p 100]

10 [John Calvin on the **pastor as scholar**] ... no one will ever be a good minister of the Word of God unless he is first of all a scholar. [John Calvin on Deuteronomy 5:23]

11 [Howard Snyder on Wesley's **small groups as NECESSITY**] Through the small group structure of the class meeting, biblical descriptions of what should happen in the church sprang to life. Without this intimate form of community, believers were not, in fact, bearing one another's burdens; encouraging and exhorting one another; really coming to know each other; speaking the truth in love. The growth of the body was merely an abstract idea, as in so much contemporary Christianity (evangelical and otherwise). [Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, p 37]

12 [Matthew 13 – sowing, watering, reaping: How John Wesley **organized to beat the devil**] Wesley, the master organizer, never built a great evangelistic organization. He simply went everywhere preaching, and he sent out other preachers in similar pattern. Wesley's gift for organization was bent toward the one objective of forming a genuine people of God within the institutional church. He concentrated not on the efforts leading up to decision but on the time after decision. His system had little to do with publicity or public image but everything to do with building the community of God's people. From the beginning of Wesley's great ministry in 1738, the secret of his radicality lay in his forming little bands of God-seekers who joined together in the earnest quest to be Jesus' disciples. He "organized to beat the devil" – not to make converts but to turn converts into saints. Wesley would have nothing of "solitary religion," secret Christians or faith without works. [Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, p 2]

13 [on Wesley's workers' **daily schedules** and the need for **deep & wide reading**] These trail-breakers, like Wesley, rose every morning at four, and preached most mornings at five. They refrained from all intoxicants, lived lives of marked abstemiousness, and commonly divided each day into three parts – 8 hours for sleeping and eating, 8 hours for study and meditation, 8 for preaching, visitation and social labors.... Wesley not only supervised the education of his preachers, but insisted that they in turn become mediums of education among the people. "Preach expressly on education," he insisted; and to anyone who objected: "But I have no gift for this," his reply was peremptory. "Gift or no gift, you are to do it, else you are not called to be a Methodist preacher. Do it as you can, till you can do it as you would. Pray earnestly for the gift, and use the means for it." Wesley enjoined upon all his preachers the necessity of spending "at least 5 hours in 24 in reading the most useful books." He warned them that one could "never be a deep preacher" without extensive reading, "any more than a thorough Christian." ... "No man in the 18<sup>th</sup> century," says the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of Wesley, "did so much to create a taste for good reading, and to supply it with books at the lowest prices." ... Every home deeply affected by the Revival, had its collection of much-pondered books, and most converts helped

to distribute the printed message. Most publications were sold at a sold price, and for those too poor to buy, funds were forthcoming. [John Wesley Bready, *This Freedom Whence*, pp 134-136, 182]

14 [James Stalker on **Paul's expectation of disciples**] ... his success in the churches lying all around Ephesus which St. John addressed a few years afterwards in the Apocalypse; for they were probably the indirect fruit of Paul's labors. But we have a far more astonishing monument of it in the Epistles to the Ephesians. This is perhaps the profoundest book in existence; yet its author evidently expected the Ephesians to understand it. If the orations of Demosthenes, with their closely packed arguments, between whose articulations even a knife cannot thrust, be a monument of the intellectual greatness of the Greece which listened to them with pleasure; if the plays of Shakespeare, with their deep views of life and their obscure and complex language, be a testimony to the strength of mind of the Elizabethan Age, which could enjoy such solid fare in a place of entertainment; then the Epistle to the Ephesians, which sounds the lowest depths of Christian experience, is a testimony to the proficiency which Paul's converts had attained under his preaching in Ephesus. [James Stalker, *Life of St. Paul* p 102]

15 [Douglass Bebb on Wesley's **church discipline**] The Methodist church discipline of the 18<sup>th</sup> century has no parallel in modern English ecclesiastical history. ... [It] would be regarded as intolerable by almost all members of any Christian communion in this country today. [E. Douglass Bebb, *Wesley: A Man with a Concern*, p 123, quoted in Snyder, p 53]

16 [Alexander Maclaren on Acts 20, how we must **take heed to ourselves – and the flock**] We are all apt to get into grooves of favourite thoughts, and to teach but part of the whole Gospel. If we do not seek to widen our minds to take in, and our utterances to give forth, all the will of God as seen by us, our limitations and repetitions will repel some from the truth, who might have been won by a completer presentation of it, and their blood will be required at our hands. None of us can reach to the apprehension, in its full extent and due proportion of its parts, of that great gospel; but we may at least seek to come nearer the ideal completeness of a teacher, and try to remember that we are pure from the blood of all men,' only when we have not shrunk from declaring all God's counsel.' We are not required to know it completely, but we are required not to shrink from declaring it as far as we know it. ... Take heed to yourselves.' The care of one's own soul comes first. He will be of little use to the Church whose own personal religion is not kept warm and deep. All preachers and teachers and men who influence their fellows need to lay to heart this exhortation, especially in these days when calls to outward service are so multiplied. The neglect of it undermines all real usefulness, and is a worm gnawing at the roots of the vines. [Alexander Maclaren *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Acts*]

[John Stott on house church pitfall – **lack of historic sense**] One of the weaknesses of the house-church movement is that it has little sense of history, little sense of continuity with the past. [John Stott on why he remains in the Church of England, The Living Church, p 156]

[John Wesley on Acts 2:44, they had all things in common] 'How came they came to act thus, to have all things in common, seeing we do not read of any positive command to do this?' I answer, There needed no outward command: the command was written on their hearts. It naturally and necessarily resulted from the degree of love which they enjoyed ... And wheresoever the same cause shall prevail, the same effect will naturally follow. [John Wesley, Works, V1 p 240]

[John Stott on **modesty** and NOT creating **dependent disciples**] ... Peter confessed that there were some things in Paul's letters which he found hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). If one apostle could not always understand another apostle, it would hardly be modest for us to claim that we can! So I would like to see in the pulpit, alongside the authority which belongs to God's infallible revelation, the due humility and diffidence which belong to its fallible human interpreters. Commenting on Romans 10:14-17, Calvin wrote: "I shall state my own view freely, but each must form his own judgment."

[on Wesley's **impact on urban, industrial England**] Migration to the cities had produced a new class of urban poor in Wesley's day. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing, fired by coal. When Wesley preached to the Kingswood colliers he was touching those most cruelly victimized by industrialization. Yet his response among the coal miners was phenomenal, and Wesley worked tirelessly for their **spiritual and material welfare**. Among other things, he opened free dispensaries, set up a kind of credit union, and established schools and orphanages. His ministry branched out to include lead miners, iron smelters, brass and copper workers, quarrymen, shipyard workers, farm laborers, prisoners and women industrial workers. To all this people – the victims of society – Wesley offered the Good News of Jesus Christ. But he did more. He formed them into close-knit fellowships where they could be shepherded **and where leaders could be developed**, and he worked to reform the conditions under which they lived. His efforts went beyond welfare to include creative economic alternatives. Through his pointed and prolific writings he agitated for major reforms. He was convinced that "the making an open stand against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness which overspreads our land as a flood, is one of the noblest ways of confessing Christ in the face of His enemies." [Howard Snyder, The Radical Wesley, pp 86-87, quoting Wesley, Works, V1, 145]

[on Paul's **thoroughness**] His goal had been not only to teach the whole purpose of God but also to reach the whole population of Ephesus. He wanted to teach everything to everybody! [Stott, The Living Church, p 79]

[Philip Hughes on Hebrews 3:13, **our responsibility to admonish constantly**] An important means for withstanding the enticement to apostasy is that of mutual exhortation of admonition. Christians have a corporate as well as an individual responsibility. Personal concern that is merely introspective and introverted is both selfish and unhealthy. In practice as well as in theory, the truth should not be overlooked that "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). Mutual concern and encouragement are of constant value in the church, not least in repelling the menace of false teaching; hence the writer's desire that his readers should exhort one another not just occasionally, or in one particular situation, but every day. **Philip Edgcumbe Hughes** A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews p. 147

[R.W. Dale on Wesley's **Class-meeting**] Never, so far as I know, in any church had there been so near an approach to the ideal of pastoral oversight as the Class-meeting, in its perfect form, provides. [R.W. Dale quoted by J.S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, in Stott, The Living Church, p 90]

C [John Stott on **balance** in presenting 'whole counsel of God'] The devil is the enemy of all balance and moderation. One of his favorite hobbies is to tip Christians off balance. If he cannot get us to deny Christ, he tries to make us distort Christ. Instead, we need to develop "BBC" (balanced, biblical Christianity) by combining truths which complement one another and not separating what God has joined. For it is in these unresolved paradoxes that authentic Christian preaching is to be found. [John Stott, The Living Church, p 110]