

Assessment: Cursed from Below, Blessed from Above

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ABSTRACT

We know assessment is cursed from below, but is it also blessed from above? Recognizing that assessment is the current dirty word in higher education, this paper explores whether assessment has Biblical foundations. Seven key principles that emerge from best practices in assessment are outlined and their foundations in Scriptural truths and texts are explored using an intensive study of topics from the *Leadership Bible*. This paper finds that the seven key elements of assessment do have a basis in scripture—assessment is indeed as blessed from above, as it is cursed from below!

Introduction

Assessment is undoubtedly the current dirty word in higher education. A recent speaker invited to Point Loma Nazarene University to discuss general education from a Wesleyan perspective, called assessment the “F-word” in higher education. He’s right! This is how most of us view the pressure from our regional accreditation organizations to “assess” our programs in higher education. You think you’re good, but how do you know? *Prove it.*

Some of us thought we would just wait for this latest fad in higher education to blow over, but instead it has intensified, and the expectations have only increased steadily over the last ten to fifteen years. As a member of a School of Business with voluntary professional accreditation above and beyond the regional accreditation of our university, I have grown to appreciate the value of measuring the learning outcomes of our educational programs. And as *the one* recruited by our provost to chair the university assessment committee, I have seen more and more of our departments and programs grow to appreciate this value as well. However, at a recent conference on assessment at California Baptist University, I was inspired to think about the value of assessment from a Christian perspective. In a devotional led by Dr. John Shoup, Assistant Dean, California Baptist University School of Education, I was asked to see assessment as Scriptural!

Is this idea outrageous or omnipotent? Is it blasphemous or blessed?

This paper looks at these questions. ***We know for sure that assessment is cursed from below, but is it also blessed from above?*** Do the guiding concepts behind the practice of assessment have foundations in Scripture? **This paper will consider several key concepts in assessment practice and whether those concepts are founded in Biblical principles.**

This paper contends that seven key elements of assessment practice have a basis in Scripture.

First, the case for assessment will be evaluated. Does it have a meaningful place in Christian business schools today, or does it deserve its current scorn and bad reputation for being a waste of human resources? Second, seven key principles in the practice of assessment will be considered: evaluation, outcomes, standards, judgment, discovery, development, and community. These seven principles will be discussed in terms of good assessment practice, and it will be shown that when taken together, these provide a comprehensive quality assessment program. Third, each of the seven key principles will be discussed in the context of underlying Biblical truths. It will be shown that an excellent assessment program contains key elements that are fundamentally tied to scripture. Finally, the question of whether there is “Christian assessment” will be considered. In other words, is there a way to conduct assessment as Christians, and in a Christian university context, that is distinct and calls us to ask certain questions in our assessment practices *because* we are Christians?

It will be shown that assessment is indeed as blessed from above, as it is cursed from below!

The Case for Assessment: The “Why” Question

As stated in the introductory remarks of this paper, assessment is the current dirty word in higher education. But is there any legitimate reason to submit to the scrutiny of assessment practices? And do assessment practices have particular value for those of us in Christian higher education?

This paper contends that there are both secular and sacred reasons to submit to the scrutiny of assessment practices. Purely secular motivations include the desire to remain competitive, stay in business, and/or win profits, since increasingly sophisticated assessment programs are required to maintain regional accreditation and to achieve specialized professional accreditation. The more honorable, or sacred, motivations involve the desire to truly serve the interests of students, to care about what they’re learning, to submit to quality assurance processes in order to achieve excellence, and to be accountable to a higher level of authority through acknowledging the existence of nationally accepted standards of quality in higher education.

Schools with the distinct mission to educate and shape students for Christ have a reason to practice assessment that fits with our theology. We are committed to excellence in the quality of the knowledge and skills students acquire in our programs, but we also want to know about their attitudes, values, and Christian practices. Are our students being shaped so that they will influence society for Christ? While the practice of assessment certainly has shortcomings, it is a system with the potential to answer these important questions about what we want to know – indeed, what we are *called to do* as Christian business educators.

Good assessment practice requires that we be mission-centered, purpose-driven educators. It requires that we know what we want our students to be learning, that we communicate those goals to them, and that we measure our success in achieving those goals. Practicing good assessment techniques fits the profile of a Christian business educator who is other-centered and committed to doing excellent work as our service to the Lord.

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV)

Staying focused on the purposes of God (right mission), being centered on others (the learning of our students), being diligent laborers to build God’s kingdom (seeking wisdom and effectiveness), and striving to continuously improve (closing the loop), help us win God’s approval as teachers and administrators. Truly caring about what our students learn, knowing if they are learning it,

and changing our programs to make needed corrections, are all key elements of an effective assessment plan, but more importantly, provide a means to be worthy of God's calling in our work as Christian educators.

Seven Key Principles in Assessment Practice: The "How" Question

This paper selects seven key principles or concepts that emerge from good assessment practice: evaluation, outcomes, standards, judgment, discovery, development and community. A general discussion of best practices and a sample model of program assessment will be briefly outlined before the seven principles are discussed.

A good assessment program identifies a few key selected student learning outcomes linked to its mission, sets up a structure to continually measure them through a reliable data collection system, carefully interprets the data collected, and then uses the results to make improvements in program quality, in an on-going systematic cycle.

But how can such a system be set up that provides flexibility and enough simplicity to be workable? One excellent model of good assessment practice that is simple and effective is the Nichols Five-Column Model, outlined by Jim Nichols in ***A Practitioner's Handbook for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Outcomes Assessment Implementation***, 1995.

The Nichols Five-Column Model

The Nichols model is a simple, effective means of doing assessment that allows each educational unit to devise their own three to five program objectives and creatively apply them to program quality improvement. This method links program mission to student learning outcomes, and focuses on the holistic impact of a program on student learning, the importance of interpreting and analyzing data with program objectives in mind, and using these findings to make changes in the program.

Column 1: Program Mission

Column 1 links the program mission to the institutional mission, and explains how student learning outcome objectives come out of the program mission.

Column 2: Intended Educational Outcomes

Column 2 identifies three to five desired educational objectives for each major program and degree, or co-curricular program. These outcomes identify what the program will contribute to student learning. The program objectives are measurable, and written in terms of what students will know, think or do.

Column 3: Means of Assessment & Criteria for Success

Column 3 identifies how evidence will be collected regarding whether the three to five educational objectives have been achieved. Student performance is measured in relation to the established goals and desired outcomes. An attempt is made to find multiple lines of evidence, direct evidence, and evidence that is externally valid.

The success criterion is established before data collection, and provides a framework to know whether student performance is acceptable.

Column 4: Summary of Data Collected

Column 4 contains a summary of data collected on the three to five educational objectives specified in the assessment plan. Results are interpreted for groups of students and overall program performance. Data collection is selective, systematic and continuous. Trends and comparisons are used whenever possible.

Column 5: Use of Results

Column 5 explains how the results of the findings from data collection and analysis will be used to improve the program.

The five-column cycle is repeated annually for the purpose of achieving continuous quality improvement.

Implementing the Model

Each academic and co-curricular unit at the university files an assessment plan report annually (template) with attachments: survey instruments, data collected and displayed. Plans and reports are also filed annually for general education and broad institutional educational outcomes.

Assessment Plan

<i>Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose</i>	<i>Program Intended Educational Outcomes</i>	<i>Means of Program Assessment and Criteria for Success</i>	<i>Summary of Data Collected</i>	<i>Use of Results</i>
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From the preceding discussion of best practices in program assessment, several key concepts emerge. This paper will consider seven of these key concepts or principles in the practice of assessment: evaluation, outcomes, standards, judgment, discovery, development and community.

1. Evaluation.

Assessment is about evaluation of programs in a holistic context, which requires big picture thinking about our programs. Are our students learning what we claim they are? How do we know? What evidence do we use to find out?

2. Outcomes.

Student learning outcomes are the heart of assessment practice. We need to develop learning goals and objectives for our programs, and then find ways to measure whether students are achieving the desired learning objectives.

3. Standards.

In legitimate, externally valid assessment programs, the central or ultimate standard against which a program is evaluated, is a critical element in the implementation. For schools of business there are well-established national standards of quality. See standards from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) or the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), which are the two specialized business professional accreditation associations recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).¹

4. Judgment.

Assessment requires making judgments against a set of nationally accepted standards of quality. An assessment program provides a system of data collection and accountability to meet those standards. Data that is collected to measure whether standards have been met must be carefully analyzed and interpreted. Critical judgment is a necessary element in drawing conclusions about how well a program meets quality standards, and what changes should be made.

5. Discovery.

Assessment is about discerning the truth about our programs. The data collection and interpretation role in the practice of assessment allows us to reveal weaknesses in our programs so that we can make improvements. This discovery process leads to program improvement and the satisfaction of knowing we are doing our best to provide an excellent education for our students.

6. Development.

Assessment is a continuous quality improvement process, that repeats over and over again as we attempt to “close the loop” and use information we have gained from assessment activities to improve our programs. Through each cycle of selecting outcomes, measuring them, and analyzing the data collected, the system itself develops and improves. We learn from repeating the cycle, both in the quality of the programs we offer, and in improvements in the assessment system itself.

7. Community.

The practice of assessment must be done in community, because it starts with a common program mission and purpose, and it depends on the establishment of shared learning outcomes. Broad discussion and discourse should be fundamental to a good assessment system, so as to generate consensus on goals, outcomes, the interpretation of findings, and the nature of improvements.

¹ For AACSB standards, see www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards.asp. For ACBSP standards, see www.acbsp.org/baccalaureatestandards.html. For information on CHEA, see www.chea.org.

Underlying Biblical Truths in the Practice of Assessment

The Biblical foundations underlying each of the seven key principles that emerged from best practices in assessment in the previous section will be discussed in this section. An extensive review of relevant topics pertaining to each of the seven principles was conducted by an intensive study of those topics from the *Leadership Bible*. This section of the paper will explain how basic Biblical topics and texts provide a strong foundation to the seven principles in the practice of assessment.

1. Evaluation.

Evaluation is a central element in all assessment programs. Outcomes must be measured and data evaluated or analyzed in order to make program improvements. We need to find measurement tools and data gathering systems to shed light on whether our students are learning what we claim they are. The evidence collected must be critically evaluated and decisions made accordingly about program changes. All of these activities require decision-making, discernment and wisdom. Setting up an evaluation system also requires being purposeful, setting priorities, and visioning.

The broad gamut of topics mentioned – evaluation, decision-making, discernment, wisdom, having purpose, setting priorities and visioning – are all topics that are deeply rooted in Biblical truth and texts.

God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, evaluated his creation, and saw that it was good.

“And God saw that the light was good.” (Genesis 1:4) “And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good.” (Genesis 1:10) The same phrase is repeated seven times in the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis. In the last verse of the creation account, again we are told, “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

Evaluation has its foundation in the first works of God, in the work of His creation. God of judgment and of grace, evaluated the fruits of his creation, and decided that it was good!

The importance of making good decisions is fundamental to God’s truth as reflected in the Scriptures. Nehemiah, the one who led the Israelites in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, was an effective decision-maker, as reflected by his actions in Nehemiah 1:1-11. He studied the situation carefully (v. 2-3), empathized with those that were hurting (v. 4), humbled himself before God (v. 4) and prayed (v. 5). The way we make decisions is extremely important because it reveals who we are, our values and our intelligence. If we live according to the teaching in the Scriptures, all of our decisions demand obedience to God, dependence on God and wisdom (*Leadership Bible* 557).

Proverbs has much to say about wise decision-making, planning and outcomes. God is ultimately in charge; wisdom is required to interpret data; and a wise decision-maker seeks the counsel of others. “Good decisions require accurately processed information. ...a sharp mind must still apply solid logic to that information in order to make a good decision.” (*Leadership Bible* 728) Being teachable, seeking accurate information and advice, and conducting a careful analysis of the information, are all necessary steps to making good decisions.

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” (Proverbs 16:3)

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” (Proverbs 19:21)

“The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.” (Proverbs 12:15)

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.” (Proverbs 15:22)

Wisdom is an important theme throughout the Bible, and it is reflected as a characteristic of God that we are to seek and emulate. The Scriptures reveal how wisdom is achieved and how utterly precious it is. They make it clear that wisdom is attained through seeking, knowing and following God, the source of all wisdom.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

“But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. ...the price of wisdom is beyond rubies...it cannot be bought with pure gold. God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it. And he said to man, ‘The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.’” (Job 28:12-28)

“Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.” (Proverbs 8:10-11)

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)

“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17)

Another important element in evaluation and decision-making is to know where you’re going. Visioning is a significant concept throughout the Bible. Christians are to be driven by what God has called them to do, and have a sense of purpose that is eternal. We are to have passion for what God deems important, which is motivating and energizing because it gives us confidence that we are heading in the right direction.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

Setting priorities, or outcome goals, is an important element in an assessment plan, and the need to prioritize is fundamental to Biblical truth. Specifically, we are to prioritize things eternal rather than things of the earth. The study of Scriptures reveals that assessment itself is healthy, but having the right goals is essential. Heading in the right direction is everything.

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:1-3)

"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:17)

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Luke 12:34)

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Philippians 3:10)

"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Revelation 22:13)

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes." (Job 19:25-26)

Evaluation, decision-making, discernment, wisdom, having purpose, setting priorities and visioning – elements of the practice of assessment – are all topics that are deeply rooted in Biblical truth and texts.

2. Outcomes.

The outcomes of an assessment plan are the learning goals we desire for our students. What do we want our students to learn – to know, do or think? Our program should shape students so that they achieve specific educational objectives. The Bible calls this fruit. If this is not happening, we want to know about it, and correct the problem.

The idea of bearing fruit from living a life transformed by Christ is a significant theme in the New Testament. In fact, whether someone bears fruit reflects his/her inner character, and how connected to Christ, the vine.

Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:16) He added, "every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit." (Matthew 7:17)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:1-5)

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

A wise leader plans, and stays true to his/her vision as he/she maps out expected outcomes. But "woe to the organization whose leaders don't project into the future, don't set goals, fail to anticipate opportunities and obstacles, and neglect to design today's strategy based upon tomorrow's anticipated outcomes. There is one essential step leaders can take as they consider the future...they can—and must—ask themselves and their team members whether the values, the vision, the mission, the strategic action plan, the projected outcomes are consistent with what God has revealed in his Word about ethics and justice." (*Leadership Bible* 823)

3. Standards.

Assessment systems evaluate program mission, planning, design, and evidence about goal achievement against a set of nationally reputable quality standards. The concept of an absolute standard of good or right is predominant in Scripture. The Bible contains the concept of ultimate virtue, above which there is no higher law. In addition, the Bible speaks of excellence not only in thought and word, but in deed as well.

God's law given to Moses in Exodus 20:1-17, the Ten Commandments, represents basic Biblical standards, or a behavioral code of conduct that the Israelites were to live by. In the fullness of time, when God sent the Messiah, Jesus Christ fulfilled God's law and revealed the essence of God's behavioral standards to the disciples in his teachings about the greatest commandment: love.

Illustrative of God's ultimate value of love and becoming citizens of heaven, are David's words in the Psalms, Jesus' words in Matthew, and Paul's words in Philippians. The law of the Lord as outlined in the Psalms by David, is revealed anew in the greatest commandment given by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, and reinforced by Paul's utter focus on things eternal in Philippians.

"Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways." (Psalm 119:1-3)

The disciples asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)

"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14)

"Love is the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:10)

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Ephesians 5:13-14)

God's ultimate standard for excellence and goodness is his Son, Jesus Christ. "Godly leaders seek to live by God's eternal values of truth, beauty, goodness, love and justice, set forth in the Biblical record." (*Leadership Bible* 1082)

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving." (Colossians 3:23-24)

"But in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:2-3)

"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21)

"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Philippians 3:7-9)

Seeking God, walking in his ways, knowing him, and carrying Christ's cross reveal core values and demand living according to behaviors aligned with those values.

God demands and exhibits excellence. Leadership must reflect consistency of words and deeds. "High standards of quality will not be sustained on the floor if they aren't practiced in the office. Leaders must lead with skillful hands. But hearts guide hands. ...The primary focus of leaders who want quality in their organizations has to be what is going on in their own hearts." (*Leadership Bible* 679)

"And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them." (Psalm 78:72)

The fact that God has standards, and that he expects us to live by a code of conduct no less that that exemplified by Jesus Christ, are spelled out clearly in the Bible. Having a core of value and character like Christ should lead us to living lives of integrity, humility and self-discipline.

"Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." (Philippians 1:27)

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8)

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5)

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)

Reuben Welch translates “think about such things” in Philippians 4:8, as “take account of such things.” As in the practice of accounting, Paul tells us to record these things. Make a point of keeping track of them. I add – and evaluate them. Record, evaluate and assess them. (Reuben Welch, Sunday school class lesson, September 19, 2004).

God’s ultimate value and standard for us is clearly the cross of Christ. God calls us to live sacrificially, in service to others. How does this apply to assessment? We have an opportunity to cast a vision for standards of excellence and integrity, humility and service in our programs and in our students. As faculty and administrators of business programs, can we live Christianly in this regard? I think so! We must care about standards of excellence, integrity and service not only in the structure and content of those programs, but also in how we administer and assess them.

“The Biblical virtue of integrity points to a consistency between what is inside and outside, between belief and behavior, our words and our ways, our attitudes and our actions, our values and our practice.” (*Leadership Bible* 320)

Against these absolute virtues humanity will be measured and judged.

4. Judgment.

Assessment systems involve making judgments against standards. Effective leaders submit themselves to structures of accountability, and they use the same standards of accountability for themselves as they do for others. The wise leader provides a structure for “360^o accountability,” or fishbowl accountability. “Wise leaders don’t wait for a crisis to establish accountability. They establish structures and relationships that harness their sin and unleash their potential.” (*Leadership Bible* 363)

Judgment is a concept that is common throughout in the Bible in a variety of contexts: discernment and wisdom in decision-making, submission to authority, and the final judgment of God in Christ to determine whether we will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Paul prayed a prayer for the followers of Christ to grow in discernment: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11)

As good stewards of the work entrusted to us by God, our power and influence should be sacrificial, other-centered and service oriented. Should we submit to the authority of regional accreditation willingly? Are we really accountable to that process, or only to God? The scriptures speak favorably of humans submitting to each other, and to forms of higher human authority.

God condones earthly systems of authority that produce order. “Those who say they are accountable only to God fail to realize the spheres of human authority that God has established for our good.” (*Leadership Bible* 434)

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:7-8)

The type of human authority ordained by God involves service, compassion and justice. God in Christ, the ultimate and absolute authority, provides the perfect example of power and influence based on love, service, humility, suffering, compassion, integrity, other-centeredness, self-discipline and justice. We need to submit to and emulate this type of leadership and influence in the work entrusted to us. “Power is a trust, not a prerogative. God never bestows positional and personal power as an end in itself, but always as a trust to be exercised with stewardship for the benefit of others.” (*Leadership Bible* 1016)

“I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3)

“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?” (Isaiah 40:11-12)

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

“I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:7-10)

The Bible tells us that all persons will be accountable to God’s final judgment, and scripture describes God’s judgment based on his definition of ultimate virtue as the final separator of persons at the end of our life on earth.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Jesus’ parable about the weeds and the wheat instructs us in the final judgment. “The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did

this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" (Matthew 13: 24-30)

Jesus also instructs us that the final judgment will be about justice and righteousness.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'" (Matthew 25:31-36)

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" (Isaiah 30:18)

"The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love." (Psalm 33:5)

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you." (Psalm 89:14)

"The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy." (Psalm 111:7)

"Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the Lord that man gets justice." (Proverbs 29:26)

"For I, the Lord, love justice." (Isaiah 61:8)

"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24)

The final judgment of the Lord will be about justice and righteousness, and the true motives of the heart.

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

In Jesus' parable about the stewardship of the servants' talents, the servant who utilizes his talents to the fullest is commended. "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things." (Matthew 25:21)

At the end of his life, Paul takes a personal assessment. "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

We too, must be found faithful. "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2)

5. Discovery.

Discovery is about collecting evidence, and finding out the truth. As administrators of programs, we want to know the truth about our programs. We want to discover the weaknesses and where we are missing the mark, so as to be good stewards, make improvements and provide the most excellent program we possibly can for our students.

Biblical themes pertaining to discovery involve truth seeking, learning, courage or risk-taking, and embracing change. As we read through these themes in the Bible, we see that discovery is about dependence on God and reliance on his strength, not our own. It is about deeply held convictions and principles at our core that guide us to seek truth and be willing to learn.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Courage is required to seek out the truth, even when that truth reveals unpleasant facts about us (or our programs). "Great convictions about great truth breeds great courage." (*Leadership Bible* 982) But in confronting the truth, we are never alone.

When God commanded Joshua to lead the Israelites after Moses' death, God told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

There is a certain freedom that comes with being unafraid of criticism, and confronting truth as a learning opportunity instead of an ego-buster. It is a freedom from shame, fear, defensiveness and self-centeredness.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

The proper response to God's word and teachings is submission and obedience. "All human knowledge of God comprises merely the faintest scratch on the surface of what there is to be known." (*Leadership Bible* 856) We commit our will and our way to the ultimate goal to know God and to know him better; and we translate that knowledge into action and allow our lives to be transformed by what we learn. But for all this seeking and effort on our part, what really matters is that it is God who reveals himself to us. This is his perfect will—to call us to himself in intimate knowledge and relationship.

"Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." (Proverbs 9:9)

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." (Proverbs 13:20)

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:6-11)

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11:33)

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:9-10)

Paul taught the Colossians to “learn-on-the-run.” In Colossians 1:9-10, Paul describes the elements of the learning process that the Colossians experienced, which included: standards (v. 9)—knowledge of God’s will; instruction (v. 9)—the significance of wisdom and understanding; practice (v. 10)—experience living a life of growth; feedback (v. 10)—fruit borne by applying new learning; and release (v. 10)—sophistication and confidence to ask new questions and guide further learning. (*Leadership Bible* 1397)

Structures in the effective organization should be set up to stimulate learning and promote change. “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” (George Santayana, *Leadership Bible* 322) “Continuous improvement requires continuous learning. Only the learning organization will, over the long haul, continue to grow.” (*Leadership Bible* 273)

6. Development.

Assessment is a dynamic process that promotes new knowledge, growth, development and change. Innovation, growth, development, exhortation and change are all common themes in the Scriptures. Jesus was an innovator. Jesus did not come to patch up an old system, but he brought a whole new system.

“I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5)

John the Baptist testified to Jesus Christ by saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only [Jesus], who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:15-18)

God is the source of creativity, change and innovation—the creation, flood, call of Abraham, ten commandments, new covenant, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, Pentecost, second advent, new heavens and earth—are all innovations of God moving toward one purpose, to redeem and save. (*Leadership Bible* 1238)

Personal growth and development and Christian maturity are significant themes in Biblical texts.

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (1 Peter 2:2-3)

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death.” (Hebrews 6:1)

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

The creative tension between pushing for progress while holding firm to core values is a feature of effective organizations. Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in their book, *Built to Last*, say “while keeping their core ideologies tightly fixed, visionary companies display a powerful desire for progress that enables them to change and adapt without compromising their cherished core ideals.” (*Leadership Bible* 1302)

A theme closely related to development that is found throughout the Bible is exhortation. The Bible is full of exhorters, those who spur others on to higher levels of achievement. Scriptures tell us that God disciplines those he loves.

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.” (Revelation 3:19)

“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.” (Proverbs 3:11-12)

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” (Hebrews 12:5-6)

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Openness and willingness to respond to correction is character building. Lowering our defenses when we are criticized or corrected in order to grow in wisdom is what God has in mind for his children whom he loves.

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” (Luke 17:3)

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:14-16)

“He who listens to life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding. The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” (Proverbs 15:31-33)

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” (Proverbs 27:5-6)

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions.” (Galatians 6:1-4)

In his exhortation to the Galatians, Paul outlines good exhortation practice through his example. He makes it clear that the purpose of exhortation is to restore, that an exhorter should proceed gently, have an attitude of service, act in obedience to Christ, act in humility, and seek counsel. (*Leadership Bible* 1376)

Paul also exhorts Timothy to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:2)

Assessment is a transformational process, just as God’s saving grace to those of us who submit ourselves as a living sacrifice to him, becomes a healing, renewing, transformational force in our development as organizations, and as Christians.

7. Community.

The assessment of programs in higher education is best performed in dialogue and community, by crafting a shared vision and mutual goals, collecting evidence, examining and interpreting results by communicating widely. Biblical texts are deeply rooted in the interconnectedness of people to each other and to God in a community of faith. The Scriptures speak of the body of Christ, our dependence on each other and on God, and the desire God has for unity, structure, beauty, harmony and order.

“It was he who gave some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:12)

God desires his children be in community with each other, and with him. Jesus prays for all of his followers through the ages to be in community with him and one with each other.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23)

“I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:20)

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:5-6)

“Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” (Philippians 2:2)

God turns chaos into form, structure and beauty. Order, structure, form, unity, like-mindedness and mutual regard should prevail in a community of believers. (*Leadership Bible* 91, 1354)

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.” (Colossians 1:16-18)

“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33)

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” (Revelation 4:11)

In this section, seven principles emerging from best practices in assessment were matched to Biblical topics and truths, through an intensive study of 35 topics from the *Leadership Bible* that were categorized in one of the seven principle areas. This paper provides evidence that the concepts used in the practice of assessment are founded in Biblical principles, and concludes that assessment is at least as blessed from above, as it is cursed from below!

Is There Such a Thing as “Christian Assessment”?

In the previous section this paper outlines a wide spectrum of Biblical truths and texts that are fundamental to seven key principles in the practice of assessment. Clearly, this paper does not contend that God is telling us to do assessment of our business programs, or that assessment of our programs is a godly thing to do! It merely suggests that the key activities we do when we set up and conduct assessment systems are grounded in Scripture.

This section will attempt to integrate the Scriptural texts from the prior section with a broader question: is there such a thing as “Christian assessment?”

This question might be akin to: is there such a thing as Christian mathematics, or Christian economics? There is the study of a field, such as mathematics or economics. And there is professional practice, such as setting up an assessment program. These disciplines have competencies and generally accepted standards of quality independent of the Christian faith. However, I contend that the connection between the practices and our faith is *who we are*. It is my identity as a follower of Christ that distinguishes my program goals, and motivates me to care about certain questions that others would not consider. It also causes me to ask whether *how* I conduct my assessment activities matters, or is distinct, because of my faith.

This section will attempt to provide a background for framing these integration questions.

Who I am as a Christian, especially my core values, should guide my motivation to do assessment. I believe God calls me to my work and that I am to glorify him in it. I am to honor him by doing good work, worthy of my calling. God has given me the job of administration, and the talent to do that work. I am to use my gift humbly, to serve, not to achieve personal power or recognition. I am not to use my influence or networks to be self-seeking or advance my position, but I am to be other-centered and use my energy, talent, position and influence to serve others.

The review of Scriptures in the last section also reveals that God likes order and structure or form. Setting up an orderly process to assess student learning is part of my responsibility as an

administrator, but it is also a faithful response in submission to God's love of order. Creating the order—system of assessment—and doing it well are both actions that honor God.

The mission and goals of the assessment program should reflect a unique commitment to Christian education, to shaping students of Christ-like character. It is also faithful to the Lord to care about how my students' skills compare to other students against nationally accepted standards of quality. The program goal is to prepare students with excellent skills, as well as godly attitudes and behaviors. Doing excellent work, implementing reputable and reliable measures, conducting careful interpretive analysis of the data, are all ways I worship God through doing good work for his glory.

So far I have been speaking about *what I do* as a Christian administrator of business education programs. There is another layer of Christian response in terms of *how I do* assessment.

As a Christian, I am called to live sacrificially, and carry the cross of Christ. God calls me to be wise, other-centered rather than self-centered, have integrity, humility and be a self-disciplined servant leader. "Self-discipline is a character trait that helps leaders evaluate what they're doing, stop doing what's harmful, and start doing what's constructive." (*Leadership Bible* 745)

As a faithful Christian, I have no option but to be a responsible steward of the program entrusted to my leadership. Setting up structures to assess student learning that provide a means for the improvement of my students' education honors my Christian commitment. Learning about what serves them well, and what needs to improve, honors my service to the students and to God.

The importance of seriously considering the fruits of our work as teachers is discussed in James' letter. "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1)

I don't believe I can separate *who I am* from *what I do*. My commitment to excellent assessment practice is part of my worship to the Lord. My faith also impacts the questions I care about, and how I do my work.

There are some remaining practical questions about implementation, particularly regarding measurement tools, but those are beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion: Blessed from Above

This paper concludes that assessment is blessed from above, as well as cursed from below.

By studying the Scriptural basis for seven key principles in the practice of assessment, deep roots in Biblical truth and texts are found. This paper does not contend that now we have God, as well as WASC, telling us to do assessment! It doesn't even find that assessment should be done because it is a godly practice. What it does suggest, however, is that each and every one of the basic activities in the practice of assessment is firmly rooted in scripture. In addition, who we are as Christians should influence the goals we choose, the kinds of questions we care about, and how we conduct our assessment activities.

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