

EVALUATION

by Tom Bloomer

with input from Howard Malmstadt, Helen Garrity and Mike Sheldon

Grading students in U of N schools is not an easy job. Particularly with our YWAM teachings concerning acceptance, not finding our value in what we do, not being judgmental, etc., it is difficult to assign grades when we see just about every student trying to do their best, with the end goal of serving the Lord better. Some have asked, "Why do we have grades in the U of N? Why don't we just all learn together, and just forget grading? Is it even Christian?"

Is it Biblical?

Of course, that is the essential question. Even if something is not easy, if it is clearly Biblical we are called to carry it out. Let's look at what Jesus said about the subject in the Gospel of Matthew:

Jesus evaluates:

The suitability of those who would be part of the Twelve (Mat 4:18-21), the great faith of the centurion (Mat 8:10), the readiness of two enthusiastic disciples to get serious about following Him (Mat 8:19-22), the little faith of his disciples (Mat 8:26; 17:19-20), the faith of the paralytic which seems to be related to repentance (Mat 9:2), the spiritual state of the scribes (Mat 9:4) and of the Pharisees (Mat 9:12-13; 12:2-45; 15:3-9; 16:1-6; 21:23-46; 22:1-15; 23:1-35), the faith of the woman with a hemorrhage (Mat 9:22) and of the Canaanite woman (Mat 15:21-28) and of the two blind men (Mat 9:28-30; 20:29-34), the faith of Peter to be able to walk on the water (Mat 14:27-31). He evaluates and warns the cities of Chorazin, Tyre, Sidon, and Capernaum (Mat 11:20-24), and also the present generation in Israel (Mat 12:39-45; 13:10-17; 17:17). He rejoices that God's standards are not what the world supposes (Mat 11:25-7). The disciples are given an oral exam to see if they grasped the lesson of the first feeding of the multitude (Mat 15:32-33); they did not, and the Master was not happy with them (Mat 16:8-12). He evaluates the Temple moneychangers, and gives them a failing grade (Mat 21:12-13), as he did the fig tree (Mat 21:18-22). Mary of Bethany was given a very high grade indeed, and a commensurate reward (Mat 26:12-13).

Jesus warns:

About the Evaluation to come (Mat 10:28; 18:6-9), which begins now, in exhortations about keeping our saltiness salty (Mat 5:13), in not putting on a false front (Mat 6:1-7, 16-18; 23:2-3), about the spirit in which we are to evaluate others (Mat 7:1-5), about looking at fruit and not just words (Mat 7:15-23), and about what will happen if we are content just to listen to truth but not to practice it (Mat 7:24-7). He warns the Pharisees that their standards of evaluation are seriously flawed (Mat 12:11-12), so much so that they are in danger of mistaking the acts of God for those of Satan (Mat 12:24-32).

He teaches that the outward things we do and say are but reflections of the heart (Mat 12:34-5; 15:10-20). He evaluates Peter's revelation as not coming from his intelligence, but rather as a revelation from the Father (Mat 16:16-19); but also evaluates his discouraging remarks as coming from Satan (Mat 16:21-3). Peter's state of mind at the end was also well evaluated (Mat 26:33-34).

The standards of evaluation are given in the Beatitudes (Mat 5:1-11) and in the elaboration of the Law (Mat 5:17-7:27), specifically that the standard we use to judge others is the one that will be used to judge us (Mat 7:2, 12), and that we will be judged by our own words (Mat 12:36-7). He gives John's disciples the Messianic standard by which John should judge who He is (Mat 11:4-6), and gives doing His will as the way of knowing who are His true brothers and sisters (Mat 12:47-50). The model of evaluation in the Kingdom is a little child (Mat 18:3-4; 19:14; 21:16), and treatment of the poor and needy (Mat 25:31-46). The goal of the preparation of the Twelve is that they would judge in the coming Kingdom (Mat 19:28; 25:21, 23). The leadership standards of the Kingdom are diametrically opposed to the ones we are used to in the world (Mat 20:20-28).

The method of evaluation, and the remedy for a moral problem, is not just individual but community-based (Mat 18:15-20). The remedy begins with the one who was wronged (Mat 18:34-5), with forgiveness and not justice.

But should we evaluate?

Yes, because Jesus did not just say not to judge, but to judge rightly (Joh 7:24). He tells his disciples to evaluate the place in which they stay (Mat 10:13-16). Paul prays that his followers would be able to discern in love (Php 1:9-11), and tells them that they are responsible to know what the gospel really is (Col 2:8), so that even if he goes off the track, they will be able to hold fast (Gal 1:8). He rebukes the Corinthians because they have not evaluated and judged each other sufficiently (1Co 5:1-6:11). Elders and deacons are to be carefully evaluated before they are named (1Ti 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9).

“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col 1:28-29).

The responsibility of leadership before the Lord is encompassed in two words: humility and prayer. Leaders are to be keenly aware of the conditions of their flock and responsibility to the Lord; for this awareness precedes any attempt to righteously judge and/or evaluate student performance.

Principles to remember about evaluation

1. God is Judge, above all and after all.
2. We are to begin by judging ourselves (Gal 6.4; 1Co 11.28).
3. When we evaluate others, it should never be to judge heart motivation (which is what Jesus forbade), but rather to edify them.
4. We are called to judge character (fruit), learning performance, and skill learning; stewardship of gifts from God is called faithfulness, and our faithfulness can and must be evaluated by others (Rom 15:4; 2Ti 2:15).
5. This evaluation should be for the purpose of:
 - a. discovering hidden talents and strengths, so as to develop them
 - b. discovering hidden areas of weakness, so as to build them up.
 - c. monitoring growth in these areas
 - d. giving goals to motivate the student to do better
 - e. helping the school leader see which teaching strategies are effective and which are not working so well.
6. The evaluation should never balk at personality or cultural differences (for example, outspokenness in women is viewed as quite positively in some cultures, and quite negatively in others).
7. Examinations should be exciting and challenging for both the student and the teacher. They should be seen as an important part of the training experience. To this end, examinations should be designed so that they are more than just a rehash of information. Application, analysis and integration issues should be included in examinations.
8. The evaluation should never be competitive with other students (1Co 10:12), and should always take into account the distance the student has come. In other words, grading “on the curve,” a system in which a pre-established percentage of students obtain high passing grades, medium passing grades, and failing grades, is NOT right. There is no minimum number of good grades or bad grades in a U of N course.
9. Love and grace should shine through (remember the Golden Rule, Mat 7:12, and the Love Chapter, 1Co 13)!
10. The staff should lead out in vulnerability and transparency, and ask the students to evaluate them and the school first of all.

As we seek to teach and model accountability as one of the keys to true discipleship, Christlike evaluation, whether oral, written, or in any other way, will be one of the main engines of spiritual and practical growth toward maturity.

Practical points:

1. *“Perfect love drives out fear”* (1Jn 4:18): make sure your students are healed of educational wounding before discussing exams and grades.
2. The evaluation should begin early in the school term, and never wait until the end, when the student can do nothing more to improve. The standards of evaluation should also be shared with the students ahead of time, so that they know upon what they are being graded.
3. Ensure ample time to take a test in a non-stressful test environment.
4. Review test results with students. Encourage them, and find out why certain areas were not learned. Help reinforce the learning process.
5. Instructors should be certain that students understand that their value before the Lord does not lay in a performance statistic, but that the student's heart motivation should be pure, to offer himself for God's service by a desire to be a disciplined learner -- called to excellence in order “to know God and to make Him known.”