

Gospel-Centered Professionalism Standards for Christian Business Programs

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ABSTRACT: Christian business programs exist not just to educate but to help students see their work and professional skills as forms of worship unto the Lord and witnessing to the world. This article demonstrates the need for Gospel-centered professionalism and puts forward five Gospel-centered professionalism standards along with professionalism assignment examples. These standards and assignments help train students in needed business and professional skills but more deeply, point students back to Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

Micah 6:8 (ESV) states, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This Bible verse serves as one of many reminders in Scripture that God calls all his sons and daughters to act justly towards others; be kind in word, action, and deed; and walk in humility within our relationships with others. None of these things happen in anyone’s life, though, unless the Grace of God in Jesus Christ grips and changes the heart to live for and to obey God and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to live for Jesus’ Kingdom and glory instead of self. When (through the Grace of God) these heart changes start to happen in someone’s life, the overflow of justice, kindness, humility, and so many other fruits of the Holy Spirit can spill over in a beautiful way into all areas of life, including vocation.

When Christian men and women start to spend more time with Jesus, the motivation behind these actions changes as well, thus triggering justice, service, kindness, humility, love, and mercy, not just because one has to but because one gets to as a form of loving obedience to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This kind of heart change related to the Gospel breaking into one’s heart and life changes relationships, conversation, and even one’s work.

The ideals of being professional, polite, respectful, cordial, friendly, and even a good teammate are all helpful things in the business world and in one’s vocation, but what are the deepest motivations for a Christian to embody these things in and around their workplace? The answer is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Keller (2010) articulated this well when he wrote how all Christians are called to bring the Gospel into their workplace and how all Christians are called to allow the Gospel to shape how they work in their workplace. Brown (2015) built upon these thoughts when he wrote how proper business educational training for business students is not sufficient to understand how to live out the Gospel in one’s workplace; rather all areas of business education must be integrated into the Gospel of Jesus Christ and rooted in the Holy Word of God.

When the ideals of being professional, polite, respectful, cordial, friendly, team-focused, etc. are rooted in biblical examples from Micah 6:8 and numerous other biblical passages, it helps students understand on a heart level (not just theoretically) that Christians have deeper motivations for loving and serving others and deeper Kingdom implications for exemplifying professionalism. As Keller (2012) wrote, the Gospel reminds every Christian that God cares about their work and everything they do, and the Gospel gives meaning to their work. Keller (2012) goes on to write, “In fact, the very definition of a Christian is someone who not

only admires Jesus, emulates Jesus, and obeys Jesus, but who rests in the finished work of Christ instead of his or her own" (p. 247).

When Christian workers are being changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, their desires start to change, and they see being professional in their workplace as something that is not just a good idea but a privilege as an ambassador of God's Kingdom. Christian workers start to understand more that they can love and serve others in a professional manner, not for people's approval but out of already having God's perfect love and approval found through a heart relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus succeeded already through his perfect life, death, and resurrection. Thus Christian business men and women can excel as excellent professionals in their vocations with great freedom knowing their words, actions, attitudes, and the quality of their work do not define them but instead flow from hearts that have already rested in Jesus and his glory. In essence, true professionalism, rooted in the Gospel, stems from a heart that has been changed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and lives out passages like Micah 6:8 while also believing that the freedom possessed in Jesus is designed to love and serve others. The Apostle Paul illustrated this well in Galatians 5:13-14 (ESV) when he wrote, "For you were called to freedom brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Gospel-centered professionalism in the world of business and on the ground in the workplace stems from love, love that is not of this world but love that is given freely through a heart-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible, God's Holy Word, embodies and teaches this love, and it is this love in Jesus Christ that can truly transform ideas of professionalism from "good advice or business practice" to intentional, liberating ways for the Christian to work and operate in his or her place of business.

In Christian higher education and specifically in business programs at these institutions, we believe a better job can be done by administrators, faculty, and staff in helping students understand the value of being professional unto God's glory and the motivations as a Christian for being professional. There is not one perfect way to help students understand these deeper Gospel implications in relation to professionalism and their vocation. However, we believe having Gospel-centered professionalism standards as the foundation for business programs and even requiring biblically rooted professionalism assignments that reinforce these standards can serve as some helpful and effective ways in leading intentionally for God's Kingdom in these areas of student development, mentorship, and career preparation.

This article puts forward one example of Gospel-centered professionalism standards that can be used in business programs within Christian higher educational institutions. In addition, this article lays out some helpful professionalism-based assignments that can be rooted in the Gospel and used within the classroom to help reinforce the overarching themes of Gospel-centered professionalism. Specifically, this article starts by addressing the need for greater professionalism in business programs. Second, the importance of Gospel-centered professionalism standards in Christian business programs is laid out. Third, the reality of witnessing for Jesus Christ through one's professionalism and quality of work is explained. Fourth, the categories for the Gospel-centered professionalism standards (punctuality, anticipation of problems, professionally appropriate emails and communication, modest attire, and humility) are unpacked in greater detail. Finally, this article concludes with some examples of professionalism assignments that can be used in the classroom and are grounded in God's Word. The Gospel-centered professionalism standards and/or assignments exemplified in this article have been used in an academic program and business classes at a Christian university in the Southeast since the spring of 2016 and have continued to be adapted for improvement.

The Need for Greater Professionalism in Business Programs

Professionalism often is lacking amongst professionals in business, education, health care, and countless other vocational areas (Moran, 2009; Wilkinson, Wade, & Knock, 2009). In the current time and marketplace, the lack of professionalism can often be noticed amongst young professionals who make up the future of the workforce as well as within numerous corporations that employ these younger workers. Wiersma (2011) articulated this well when he wrote how the business world needs better professionals because a lack of professionalism is what is ailing business today. He goes on to write that business students, upon graduation, have credentials that say they are ready to be professionals, but they lack the understanding of how to live this occupational reality out. Suddaby, Gendron, and Lam (2009) stated they believe core professional values are most lacking in traditional work contexts, and Anderson and Bolt (2016) believed it is essential for college students to communicate and work in a professional manner if economic conditions in America were to improve. Maister, Galford, and Green (2012) wrote how they believed professionalism is less about competency and more about an attitude and a sense of responsibility. Strom and Long (2012) built upon this idea when they wrote how traditional business schools

teach students about profit, wealth accumulation, and personal finance but lack the educational focus on professionalism being a lifelong process rooted in maturity and communication.

The Center for Professional Excellence based out of York College in Pennsylvania (2015) completed a professionalism survey a few years ago of young professionals who recently graduated college. In this survey, a little more than 500 graduates were asked various questions related to professionalism. Almost one-fourth (23.9%) indicated having challenges transitioning from the classroom to the office (CPE-York College, 2015). Almost two-thirds of participants (62.2%) believed they had the necessary professional skills needed to succeed in the workplace, and almost three-quarters (71.1%) believed that professionalism differs across generational lines (CPE-York College, 2015). The study concluded with stating that even though young professionals believe they have many professional skills needed to succeed in the workplace, these same participants also believe they still lack in areas of needed professionalism (CPE-York College, 2015). Thus, there seems to be a self-awareness disconnect between what many young professionals and recent college graduates think they possess (in terms of professionalism) compared to what they actually embody every day in the workforce.

Businesspeople may agree that many of these same young professionals often lack attributes of professionalism that are needed as they start and move their way through their careers. Maister, Galford, and Green (2012) believed many employees work below their full potential and lack passion for their work. Strom and Long (2012) articulated how college graduates from business programs do not get true professionalism training; thus, these young professionals may look at professionalism as something to be achieved quickly and then forgotten over the long haul. Wiersma (2011) agreed that business schools are not producing better professionals for the workforce and do not view professionalism as a lifelong occupational mindset. As a result, undergraduates from business programs may have learned practical business knowledge and appropriate business theory but most likely often lack a deeper understanding and habitual motivation of how to be professional in their workplaces. Business programs can do better as it relates to instilling professionalism into their students. Specifically, Christian business programs have the wonderful opportunity to fill a practical need in the business world (professionalism training) while grounding this training in God's Word to provide heart motivation for why one works and serves as a professional.

The Importance of Gospel-Centered Professionalism Standards

In Christian higher education, Christian business faculty have the great privilege to teach students that all content comes from the mind of God (1 Kings 4:29, 1 Kings 10:24) and God is the one who gets the credit for all wisdom and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, Proverbs 1:7). Thus, all business content and focused areas derive from God's creation and wisdom and need to be rooted in His Word if truly brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Brown (2015) articulated this well when he wrote

As 21st century Christian business faculty, our call to prepare students for the marketplace is no small task....Where will we look for answers? What is our blueprint to make sense of human action and purpose?.. Here business acumen alone is not sufficient to answer these questions. (p. 87)

Secular business programs can have professionalism standards that impact students positively and change outward behavior but, short of being rooted in God's Word, lack the Gospel power to truly change the heart. This is where Christian higher education and their own business programs have an incredibly powerful opportunity to create professionalism standards that do lead to behavior modification but start with heart level issues that only God's Word can truly penetrate and change. Thus, we believe there is not only a need for Gospel-centered professionalism standards in Christian business programs but an importance to take this need seriously and create or adapt higher standards for administrators, faculty, staff, and students while pointing towards God's Word in answering the question of "why be professional?"

McMahon (2014) built upon this importance for greater Gospel-centered business education and professionalism by articulating an importance to reach past traditional business skills and pour deeper (biblically rooted) skills into students that will help them be successful in life even more than business. These greater life skills, for the Christian, would be anything that is spoken out of the mouth of God or articulated in the inspired Word of God, the Bible (Matthew 4:4). The best service, gift, and act of love Christian business faculty can give to students as they prepare them well in their field is to show on a deeper level how their professionalism and preparation in the business world can be used to love and serve God first, and their neighbor second (Windes, White, Harkema, Hamilton, & Samudio, 2017). This is why Gospel-centered professionalism standards are so important; when professional skills are grounded in God's Word and explained through a biblical lens (Mark 12:31), students' hearts can have the opportu-

nity to be deeply impacted and motivations can be changed. Once exposed to Gospel-centered professionalism standards, business students can see that their future career goals can be about more than just financial gain and occupational success. Rather, the quality of how they go about their daily work can be the goal and be seen as a form of worship unto the Lord and a witness to the world around them.

Dulaney et al. (2015) articulated this well when they wrote that integrating the Christian faith into all forms of Christian higher education and business curriculum is a crucial part of the Christian university's purpose and helps lead to wholeness for the student when thinking about how they should live, work, and act as a Christian. Esqueda (2014) added that the integration of the Christian faith and learning should be the main distinctive of Christian higher education, and Wick (2018) believed that teaching students to live out a biblical worldview in their different business roles could be risky, but it is a risk worth taking for God's glory and Kingdom advancement. Students in Christian higher education and within business programs at these institutions often lack detailed biblical knowledge or the ability to articulate their Christian faith as it relates to their work pursuits (Wrenn & Cafferky, 2015). Gospel-centered professionalism standards, when implemented within Christian business programs, can be one helpful and significant tool in aiding students by providing them a framework *and* purpose for truly living as a professional for Jesus Christ in their workplace (see Appendix A).

WITNESSING FOR JESUS CHRIST THROUGH PROFESSIONALISM

The power of professional, high-quality work is that it not only accomplishes tasks and improves efficiency and production, but it also provides a blueprint for others on how to work and what to follow. In essence, any business person's work can be so much more than the duties they are paid to perform if brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Thus, when Gospel-centered professionalism standards are implemented into Christian business programs within higher education, it allows faculty, staff, administrators, and students to have conversations not only centered on the benefits of professionalism but on how professional work done unto to the Lord Jesus Christ can actually point people to Jesus. Keller (2010) reminded all Christians when he wrote how the workplace is supposed to be a place for Christians to share the Gospel. This sharing of the Gospel can definitely be accomplished in direct, tangible, and spoken ways (Romans 10:15), but so often in the business

world (and in any other vocation), workers can be incredible witnesses for Jesus Christ through the quality of their work and how they treat others around them. Thus, when professionalism is connected to the heart of the Christian mission (Matthew 28:19), professional work moves from just what is needed in order for the business to thrive and instead takes on intentional, love-driven witnessing representing Jesus Christ to others.

Babyak (2017) stated that Christians in the workplace must have a clear and intentional understanding regarding the Kingdom purposes behind their work. Grimes and Bennett (2017) built on this intentional motivation when they wrote how Christian workers have a different motivation behind their work and undergirding their professionalism. These are impactful and important connections that Christian business faculty must help undergraduate and graduate students make if Christian business programs intend for their graduates to see their work as more than occupational duties and income opportunities. Instead, Christian business faculty can help their students see that their work can be a huge and sometimes better platform for witnessing for Jesus Christ because coworkers often notice attitudes, words, demeanors, and motivations more so than output or production. Gospel-centered professionalism standards can be used by business faculty to help students see that the heart motivation for being punctual, problem-solving, communicative, modest, and humble comes not from oneself but from the holy and inspired Word of God. Thus, as God teaches through his Word, hearts can be changed and students can see that as Christians, their work and professionalism can truly be used by God to be worship unto him and a witness to the world.

Sauerwein (2013) wrote that Christian higher education should be in the business of heart transformation not just intellectual growth. Herrity (2015) detailed though how Christian college and university graduates struggle to live out their Christian faith in their workplace. Thus there seems to be a gap between what Christian higher education institutions are striving for and what students are actually able to do upon graduation. Based on the literature and business world realities, it seems there is an incredible opportunity for Christian colleges and universities and their respective business programs to enhance their efforts in helping business students (and all students) understand how to see their work, coworkers, supervisors, customers, etc. through the lens of a biblical worldview (Liang, 2018). In doing this and as God works in students' hearts, students will start to see that their work matters to God; their professionalism, work ethic, and approaches to work impact others around them; and all of these things can be used in

the business community to advance the Kingdom of God (McMahone, Locke, & Roller, 2015).

Gospel-centered professionalism standards can be one tool used in Christian business programs to help hearts, habits, and minds be changed for both God's glory and students' good. When students' hearts are changed to see their work, conduct, words, and actions through the lens of the Gospel, they start to see that everything they do can have Kingdom impact and point people to Jesus (Keller, 2012). In addition, these same students as they grow into business professionals develop both a biblical worldview toward their vocation as a whole, as well as a sense of personal accountability that God has placed them in a particular role for specific reasons so they can be the aroma of Jesus Christ in people's lives (Black, Smith, & Keels, 2014; 2 Corinthians 2:15). Thus, one believes Gospel-centered professionalism standards can serve as a helpful and encouraging directional beacon for students in Christian business programs by showing them how to carry themselves and how their work can be used by God to show others Jesus' grace, truth, and love found only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Punctuality

The first Gospel-centered professionalism standard put forth (see Appendix A) starts with punctuality, or the ability to be early to whatever is required. As Christians, we are called to take all things and submit them under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, including the way we manage our time and responsibilities (Windes, White, Harkema, Hamilton, & Samudio, 2017). Many people think of punctuality as just a nice thing to practice or a helpful habit to possess so one does not miss anything or be late to something important. These ideas can definitely be true and helpful to any individual or worker in the business world specifically; however, there is a Gospel-centered reality that can undergird punctuality when one's heart is changed. This reality is awareness of selfishness—the sinful nature everyone possesses in which one puts his or her own needs, desires, actions, and even time ahead of someone else. Thus, the professional skill of punctuality, when rooted in the Gospel, can be taught to business students from the viewpoint of not wanting sinful selfishness to stand in the way of loving, serving, and respecting others.

The Apostle Paul illustrated this well in Philippians 2:3 when he wrote, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” This verse is key to helping students understand how the Gospel impacts and fuels the professional nature of punctuality. By God's Grace, as a student's heart is changed, they can then start to see that being late is not

just disruptive or rude, it can often come across as selfish in that they might have valued something else more than giving enough time or preparation to be early to a class, a meeting, a seminar, etc. This type of deeper self-awareness, fueled by God's Spirit working in a changed heart, can lead to not just a habit of punctuality but a desire to be punctual. In other words, when business students (and anyone else) start to see that being late can be connected to a deeper root of their own selfishness, they can also see being punctual as a humble and considerate way of actually loving and serving others. This type of Gospel-driven punctuality is not only professional, but it is focused on love for another and is what proclaims and propels God's Kingdom.

Anticipation of Problems

Only God knows the future, and only God has already laid out a perfect plan for the future according to his perfect will (Ephesians 1:11). No human can see the future, but by God's Grace and through his wisdom, men and women (and professionals in the workforce) can learn to seek God's guidance, direction, and knowledge on how to think ahead and anticipate potential problems they may encounter. In Christian higher education and in business programs, it would be extremely helpful if students were not only taught self-awareness regarding their words and actions, but also how their words and actions could have ripple effects over time. The idea of anticipating problems is not the same as knowing what the future holds. Rather it is a professional skill built on wisdom that helps men and women see that their choices, habits, attitudes, and decisions matter and impact others around them. Thus, this skill is the second Gospel-centered professionalism standard put forth in this article.

When the concept of anticipating problems is taught from a Gospel-centered perspective, it is rooted in the biblical truth that all wisdom comes from God. Humans do not inherently possess wisdom, and apart from God graciously giving wisdom, knowledge, and discernment, humans would not make any good decisions. But, thankfully the Bible does not stop at these facts. Rather God speaks to his people in his word that he will graciously give wisdom to anybody who seeks and asks for it in faith. James 1:5 illustrates this well: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”

Within Christian higher education and specifically business programs, students need to hear in the classroom and all over campus that God is the only true source of wisdom. Christian faculty need to not teach that students

should be dependent on their own judgement and thinking as their sole source of decision making; rather, faculty need to model and teach that all Christians need to cast themselves on the wisdom, knowledge, guidance, and direction of God through his spirit and word. When this Gospel path of seeking God's wisdom and knowledge is modeled and taught, and as God works in students' lives, hearts can be changed to start to see the necessity for God's wisdom and how that impacts the way students' think about potential actions, words, and decisions before they are said or done. This also allows students to understand their sin and potential consequences more because they will be thinking more clearly how their decisions have potentially positive or negative impacts. This Gospel-driven anticipation of problems not only models great professionalism in the workforce by showing maturity, humility, forethought, and understanding that everything has a consequence, but it also allows for God's word to be sought, digested, and transformed in the hearts of students who are future Christian business men, women, and leaders (Babyak, 2018).

Professionally Appropriate Emails

In the current age of email, texting, and indirect digital communication, countless business students (as well as many people in the workforce) rarely practice professionally geared face-to-face communication or communication over the phone. Conversely, since many students text, email, and use social media for their main communication methods, often their habits for communicating are casual, grammatically incorrect, and even sometimes inappropriate. These same students within business programs often carry over casual texting or email language into professional emails to professors, internship coordinators, or future employers. Thus, one believes the third Gospel-centered professionalism standard of professional and appropriate emails is a crucial one for current business students to understand and work toward given the frequent lack of this form of communication within higher education—and the importance professional emails (along with other professional forms of communication) carry in hiring decisions (Hammond, 2017).

Christian business faculty within business programs at Christian institutions have a wonderful opportunity to help their students become more professional, grateful, and welcoming in how they come across by teaching them professional communication within their emails. Students need to learn that they represent Jesus Christ in all they do, including their most frequent form of professional communication—email. With this type of Gospel-centered professionalism standard, Christian business faculty can model Gospel-driving kindness, hospitality, and warmth within

the emails they send to students and classes as a whole (Cassell & Merkel, 2018). In return, these same faculty members can also lovingly hold students to these standards so they can learn better how to come across in an email in a way that honors the Lord and represents Jesus to others.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this type of welcome in Romans 15:7 when he said, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." Students in Christian business programs need to hear that Jesus has welcomed them to his side through his life, death, and resurrection. Therefore as ransomed, saved, welcomed children of God, Christians are called in return to communicate in a way that is kind, inviting, and loving toward others. This type of Gospel-centered communication includes professional (and casual) emails, where God still holds men and women responsible for how they communicate and what is said. If students in Christians business programs can start to understand how to write emails that are both professional and honoring to the Lord, it will not only help them with their relational and career pursuits since it conveys respect, humility, and kindness, it will also bring God glory and stand out in a positive way for Jesus' sake.

Modest Attire

The fourth Gospel-centered professionalism standard put forward in this article, modesty, has deep biblical roots grounded in Gospel-centered concepts of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and good work unto the Lord. The Apostle Paul wrote about these things in Colossians 1:9-10:

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him; bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

The biblical view of modesty, in terms of dress and physical appearance, can be connected to many things that touch the professional workplace setting, including temptation, selfishness, idolatry, self-absorption, gossip, brotherly love, self-sacrifice, etc. In this specific context, the Gospel-centered professionalism standard of teaching modesty in the workplace takes all of these things into account and simply tries to first model to students (by what faculty wear in professional settings) and then teach students that understanding what is professionally modest and appropriate to wear comes from seeking God's knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. These traits, when given by God graciously through the Holy Spirit, produce self-awareness, humility, and a desire to serve others by not creating temptation, distraction, or the opportunity for gossip or slander to flourish.

When students see Christian business faculty dress in professionally appropriate and modest ways, and when this type of Gospel-centered understanding moves in students from their minds to their hearts, these same students will start to dress modestly out of love for God, not culture. In other words, the Bible and what God says will start to shape these same students and future professionals instead of the world, and when this happens, modest and professional dress becomes habit and practice due to God's wisdom, knowledge, and understanding bearing fruit in their lives. It is important to note that there is freedom in the Gospel for dress, and modesty does not take only one form; however a discerning Christian seeking Gospel growth will hopefully be able to discern what is modest and professionally acceptable and what is tempting, distracting, or too revealing.

Christian business faculty have a huge opportunity in this regard by not only modeling this type of professional and biblical concern for attire but by lovingly holding students (in appropriate ways) to standards of modesty, professional dress, and care for how they present themselves physically. This type of modeling and teaching will help students within Christian business programs practically by teaching them during their educational years what will most likely be required of them in the business world in terms of attire (CPE, 2015). But, this Gospel-centered intention will also train their hearts to care more about what God wants and says than the world or even themselves. There is also a variety of moments for a student where biblical and professional modesty would serve them well. These biblically grounded standards can be held to daily in the classroom, during student presentations, when guest speakers enter the classroom, when students are working in internships, and on student experiential learning trips. Thus, biblical and professional modesty is something students need to learn, something that covers a variety of business and work settings, and is something God requires for his children to consider and think about as representatives of his kingdom and Truth (Liang, 2018).

Humility

The biblical virtue mentioned previously in Micah 6:8, humility, runs right through the concept of professionalism and is the last Gospel-centered professionalism standard in this article. Often young professionals in today's marketplace lack the humility to ask questions, be taught, or admit they are wrong. Maister (2000) argued that professionals agree to be coached and work under the guidance of agreed-upon standards for action, work ethic, results, etc. Yet this does not often translate to young professionals' experiences given the frequency in how many of these workers do not

follow advice, pedagogy, or helpful instruction in the workplace (Windes, White, Harkema, Hamilton, & Samudio, 2017). Jesus said in Luke 14:11, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Peter echoed this same biblical sentiment when he wrote in 1 Peter 5:5b-6: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." It is imperative for students within Christian business programs to understand how the professional nature of humility can not only help them learn, listen, and grow occupationally, but it can also draw people into their lives and allow for witnessing opportunities for Jesus Christ.

Christian business faculty can help young professionals learn that practically speaking, success with their coworkers and supervisors and in their careers starts with being teachable, humble, and professional in how they receive instruction (Dorch, 2012). Professionalism also can be fluid in the workplace as core business values for one company may differ from business policies or institutional norms for another company (Evetts, 2011, 2013). Thus, if young professionals act and work with humility, practice the art of asking questions and listening well, and seek to learn from their own mistakes and feedback from others, they will also be more adaptable to the varying professional environments they will encounter in the workforce (Evetts, 2013). More importantly, when practicing the Gospel-centered professionalism standard of humility, these same young professionals (and current students) will be obeying the very words of Jesus and standing in partnership with God's Kingdom work instead of in opposition to what he is teaching both them and others around them.

GOSPEL-CENTERED PROFESSIONALISM ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

To provide opportunities for students to think more about and act on what they have learned about Gospel-centered professionalism, we designed several assignments that expose students to situations they may face while in school as well as in the workplace as Christian professionals. These assignments serve to undergird the Gospel-centered professionalism standards we put forth and make clearer their application in one's life. Four of these assignments are briefly explained below.

So What Are You Saying?

There are many ways one can, without words, send a message that one values oneself above others: leaving

garbage on a table at a fast food restaurant for either an employee or another customer to clean up, parking in a handicap parking space when there is no physical need for the space, not waiting a few seconds to hold a door open for the next person, not slowing down to allow a vehicle on the on ramp to merge in, etc. Through both actions and failures to act, one can send a poor message—a message that is inconsistent with the way God expects us to act toward others (Romans 12:3).

Everyone can think of times when—with the best of intentions—one said something poorly, and one’s true meaning was misconstrued. College students who have less experience in professional settings may be even more inclined to make this mistake. Indeed, in the fast-paced, short-message world in which Generations Y and Z have grown up, many can struggle to convert their normal, casual messaging style to a more professional tone. And to someone who is accustomed to quick replies punctuated with emojis, it may not be natural to spend a few minutes thinking through a response before writing it. In the business world, a poorly thought-out message to a supervisor, colleague, or customer can have devastating consequences.

Accordingly, we designed this assignment to challenge students to find the “secondary message” within a statement or action—the message that was not intended but may, nonetheless, be received. In uncovering that unintended, negative message, we help students think through alternate ways to act or speak that may convey a loving and considerate message with a smaller chance of misinterpretation (Ephesians 4:29).

Assignment Takeaways: Think before you talk/write. Consider the message from the viewpoint of the receiver. Be intentional in conveying respect to the receiver. In the

left column of the table below, we provide some of the statements we use in this assignment. Students read 10-12 statements like these and are instructed to come up with a negative potential “message received” that they then write on the right column of the table. For demonstration purposes for this manuscript, we included in the right column potential negative messages that may serve as examples of appropriate student responses.

Once students have written their “messages received” (on the right side column of the table) the instructor begins a group discussion of the student responses and takeaways, as well as Gospel implications of how to be a light for Jesus through our words (Matthew 5:16).

Discussing Real-World, Gospel-Based Professionalism

While many business schools around the world will incorporate ethics modules into their courses—or even an entire course on ethics or managerial values, ethics through the lens of the Gospel is a distinctive approach to ethics and one to which we want to expose our students. As such, we arrange for Christian professionals to visit our classrooms and speak specifically to how their Christian principles are at work in their business lives—from times those values have been tested to opportunities they have had to share their faith, whether by word or action, with others (Colossians 3:17).

Rather than end such a class visit with the hopes that some words of wisdom have resonated with the students, our class engages in an online forum immediately following the visit of a Christian professional. We prefer online discussion (or the addition of online discussion to supplement classroom discussion) because it provides students time to think more deeply then write more formally about

Table 1: So What Are You Saying Assignment

What Was Said/Done	What May Have Been Heard
“Taylor, I missed class yesterday because I was too exhausted to get up. Can I make a copy of your class notes?”	“Taylor, would you mind working harder so that I don’t have to?” “Taylor, since your time is less valuable than mine, I’ll skip class and expect you to be there to take notes for me.”
“I’m at risk of running late to class. I’ll just park in this visitor parking spot right here in front of the building.”	“I’m more important than visitors to campus.” “Better for a visitor to have to walk a few blocks than for me to do so.”
“I know we were supposed to meet at 2:00 today, but something has come up. Can we reschedule for next week?”	“You probably aren’t as busy as I am, so it should be easy for you to reschedule.” “Your schedule is not as important as mine, so I’m going to put you off to another time.”

their takeaways from the speaker's visit. Additionally, in this format, students are less likely to just repeat the verbal contribution already made by another student (see full explanation in the next paragraph). As such, our criteria (and grading standards) for the online discussion posts are more rigorous than what might be acceptable in the form of an impromptu in-class reaction to the speaker.

This assignment requires at least two discussion posts from each student. The first post is the student's thorough evaluation of the speaker's time in the class, including discussion of major takeaways. We format the online forum so that students must make their initial posts before they can see the initial posts of their classmates, thereby reducing the likelihood of a student simply repeating another student's takeaway. The second post is a substantive reply to the initial post of a classmate.

Assignment takeaways: Gospel-based professionalism and ethics have real-world application.

Valuing the Time of Others

To emphasize the importance of valuing the time of other professionals, we developed a mini-case that features a hypothetical scenario in which a salesperson makes a series of errors—unprofessional actions that indicate a failure to value the time of others. For instance, the salesperson arrives to his appointment late—and without attempting to notify the prospect. Further, the salesperson monologues about himself rather than getting to know the prospect.

After reading the case, students are placed into groups of two or three students to discuss their takeaways and how they would have handled the situations differently. Then we discuss as a class the students' observations and how one could better represent Jesus in this type of scenario (Colossians 3:23-24). The case is intended to double-down on the topics of personal integrity and respect for others and provides a lively discussion with great content for the consideration of both the small and large ways our actions as Christian professionals impact those around us.

Assignment takeaways: It is important that we value and show respect for the time of others. Failure to do so can actually have negative business consequences.

Being Responsive

This assignment provides students the opportunity to put into words and actions their Gospel-centered professionalism. Students read three short vignettes in which employees poorly handle different business situations. In each vignette, the mode of communication from the customer is different: a voicemail, an email, and a text message. We use different communication methods so students can practice responding using these different modes of communicating.

For example, in one scenario, an employee receives a voicemail from a customer who is upset that her order was incomplete when it arrived. Rather than apologizing and ensuring the customer that error will be rectified, the employee calls the customer and blames the Fulfillment Department, making little effort to make the situation right. The student is charged with developing a more Gospel-centered response and delivering it in the same method in which it was received. To facilitate this, we instruct students to call the instructor's office after business hours so that they go to voicemail. Likewise, students email and text the instructor in the other two vignettes. Rather than using the instructor's personal mobile phone number, there are two alternatives we build into the assignment. First, students can be instructed to email the instructor for assignment purposes, but to do so as if it were a text message. Second, Google Voice (voice.google.com) offers a free phone number that can be used for this assignment.

In another scenario, an employee receives a text message stating, "This is the second time I've tried to contact you to arrange the employee training session you promised." In each of the scenarios, students are placed in an uncomfortable situation and are tasked with using a sincere, Gospel-centered, professional tone in apologizing, sympathizing, and making up for a past failure. In doing this, students are trained to show humility and ask for forgiveness, thus modeling biblically based repentance in the workplace (Mark 1:15, James 4:6).

Assignment takeaways: Everyone is a sinner and makes mistakes. Thus, let's lead with asking for forgiveness and extending grace to others. Take responsibility for one's mistakes, be genuine in one's remorse, and ask God for the grace to make up for mistakes and missteps (2 Corinthians 9:8).

CONCLUSION

Gospel-centered professionalism standards are not to be confused with the Bible itself. On the contrary, when these standards are created and implemented well, they should be helpful and practical, but should always point administrators, faculty, staff, and students back to God's Holy, inspired, and infallible Word, the Bible. In Christian higher education, the only thing that should have the utmost importance is the very Word of God, and everything done (academically, professionally, relationally, financially, etc.) should be done in accordance with what is laid out in the Word of God (Matthew 4:4). With that in mind, the Gospel-centered professionalism standards and assignment examples put forward in this article aim to accomplish three primary things:

First, these standards and assignments seek to point all people within Christian business programs, and specifically students, to God's Word and the biblical worldview of vocation and work (Black, Smith, & Keels, 2014; Cassell & Merkel, 2018). These standards were created so students could develop professional skills that are needed in the workplace and in various business settings, but in addition to this practical application, these standards were created so students could be changed on a heart level to value professional work and professionalism because God values work and how the work is done (Keller, 2012; Liang, 2018). In fact, work is God's idea because he created work to be done before sin ever entered the world and corrupted man's work, desires, and production (Genesis 1-2). Thus, when these Gospel-centered professionalism standards are modeled, implemented, and held to, Christian business faculty are helping students see that their work, work ethic, attitude, demeanor, and interactions matter to God and are used by God to build his Kingdom (Keller, 2010).

Second, these Gospel-centered professionalism standards and assignments, when modeled, taught, and held to intentionally by Christian business faculty, help students see they actually are worshipping God through how they go about their work. Students actually worship God and bring him glory when they seek his wisdom, knowledge, discernment, humility, kindness, respectfulness, and then by God's Grace implement and show these things to others in their business work settings (as well as their personal and family lives). Students need to see that these ideas, even grounded as they are in Scripture, are not just nuggets of "good advice" or better ways to live. Rather these things when done for God's Kingdom and unto his glory can be mechanisms of worship, thankfulness, and gratitude for all that God in Jesus Christ has done for sinners. The key to seeing these realities is having these standards grounded in the Gospel itself (McMahon, 2014). When God's Word is the foundation for any professional skill, and when students can see and learn that acting in these ways is actually a way they can love, obey, and worship God for all that he has done through Jesus, then hearts and businesses will be changed (Wick, 2018; Windes, White, Harkema, Hamilton, & Samudio, 2017).

Finally, these Gospel-centered professionalism standards and assignments help administrators, faculty, staff, and specifically students see that professional and Gospel-driven work actually serves as both an encouragement to fellow believers and a witness to non-believers. By God's Grace, as professionals become more punctual, humble, modest, communicative, and problem-solving, coworkers and people in their spheres of influence notice. These

professional characteristics, when rooted in God's Word and driven by what Jesus has first done for sinners out of love, mercy, and sacrifice, will actually serve as the aroma of Christ in peoples' lives (2 Corinthians 2:15). The workplace is supposed to be a mission field for Christians, and as God graciously gives these gifts of professionalism to his children, the office or business setting becomes so much more than a place of employment or where a paycheck is earned (Keller, 2010). Rather, it becomes a place where Jesus can be worshipped, glorified, and represented as high-quality work is accomplished in professional, biblical ways (Babyak, 2017).

The beauty of the Gospel is that it is all about Jesus from beginning to end (2 Corinthians 1:20). Thus, when one's work is focused on Jesus' glory, and when one's conduct is rooted in Gospel-centered professional characteristics, others will notice an attractive difference and desire to know the deeper motivations behind these actions, words, and demeanors. The Gospel is good news for sinners—that Jesus came to make all things new, to forgive, to save, to redeem, and to return to gather his people one day (Luke 4:18). Christians are called to live expectantly in light of these wonderful realities, and Christian business programs can greatly help its students by proclaiming these Gospel realities in preparing students to live for Jesus now, professionally and biblically as ambassadors of King Jesus (Luke 12:40). Gospel-centered professionalism standards and Gospel-centered assignments can serve as helpful resources for accomplishing these noble and biblical goals and can also help students think about their own hearts and where they stand with Jesus. May these standards and assignments be used as resources to share and show Jesus' love and to point students back to the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their hearts, lives, and business professions (1 Corinthians 10:31).

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**APPENDIX A:
GOSPEL-CENTERED PROFESSIONALISM STANDARDS FOR BUSINESS PROGRAMS**

Professionalism – n. – the skill, good judgment, and polite behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well.

A primary purpose of the _____ program is to prepare students to work as professionals in the _____ industry representing Jesus Christ in all they do. Thus, it is imperative that students learn to conduct themselves in a professional manner as they connect their Christian faith with their vocation. Students are expected to display a certain level of professionalism as outlined by these standards and grounded in God’s Word. If a student is not meeting the appropriate level of professionalism, an initial meeting with the instructor will be scheduled to address the issue. If this problem persists, as much as 10% may be deducted from the student’s final grade in the course. The adherence to these professionalism standards stems from a heart of love that wants to point students to Jesus Christ and prepare them well to live for him in their vocation. (**Romans 15: 17-18; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:23**).

1. Punctuality

- We expect all students to arrive to class early. “If you are early, you are on time. If you are on time, you are late, and if you are late, it can often be due to selfishness.” (**Philippians 2:3**)
- We expect students to put away their cell phones, headphones/earbuds, hats, and laptops/tablets before class starts (unless specifically told otherwise by a professor).
- Assignments/submissions/communications need to be completed and/or submitted prior to specific deadlines. Late submissions for assignments will receive an automatic 50% deduction.
- Students are expected to arrive to class with all required materials (textbooks, pen/pencil, etc.)

2. Anticipation of Problems

- Students are expected to notify professors ahead of time (via email or in person) regarding any anticipated absence or tardy (excused or unexcused) if at all possible. (**James 1:5**)

3. Professionally Appropriate Emails

- Subject line, greeting or salutation, closing, non-texting language/ grammatically correct...respectful & appropriate tone, self-aware, polite and grateful. (**Romans 15:7**)

4. Modest Attire

- Students are expected to dress in a way that shows biblical and appropriate modesty. If a student’s attire is deemed inappropriate or causes distraction, then it will be addressed by the instructor on a case-by-case basis. (**Colossians 1:9-10**)

5. Humility

- Students are asked to receive teaching, instruction, and feedback with humility and to display this same humility in their dealings with others on campus and in related work environments. (**Luke 14:11; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-6**)