

Biblical Integration in Business: A Proposed Model

Sharon G. Johnson, Editor
Cedarville College

Dr. Johnson brings to our attention insights on biblical integration from a book published over a century ago. He also shares lessons he has learned as editor of the JBIB and presents a model of the approach to biblical integration that JBIB seems to be taking.

Biblical Integration in 1886

Not very long ago, I came across a copy of a book entitled, *The Business Guide or Safe Methods of Business*, authored by J. L. Nichols (J. L. Nichols Co., Naperville, Illinois, 1921). The copy I purchased was a 1921 “revised edition” of a book published in 1886, and the copyright page proudly proclaimed, “More than three million copies sold.” The book was especially interesting to me because of its strong mix of moral and biblical admonitions. Concerning the path to prosperity, the text noted:

Let a man in business be thoroughly fitted for the position he occupies, alert to every opportunity and embracing it to its fullest possibility, and he is a success.

Lay a good foundation of

business principles and practices. Do a legitimate business. Aim to have a home of your own early in life. Be strictly honest; work hard; be earnest; seek to be an intelligent citizen. Marry a good, healthy, loving girl; keep a clear conscience; fear God and work righteousness; and life’s sun will set in tints of gold and splendor (19).

In another section focusing on the theme, “Talent, Will, and Purpose,” I read:

Success depends more upon ability adapted to work than upon any superior intellectual power. . . .The blaming of circumstances, the shifting of responsibility, is as old as Adam. He blamed the woman.

“ . . . keep a clear conscience; fear God and work righteousness”

J.L. Nichols

When Moses chided Aaron for making the golden calf, he blamed the people and the circumstances. . . .God means man to be the sole proprietor of himself. . . .As Samson broke the green withes which bound him, so man by indomitable courage and will may break down the barriers of circumstances that would hinder him. . . .David Livingston proved that, instead of circumstances shaping the man, one heaven-endowed man can absolutely create a new social and spiritual climate for a whole continentDo not wait for nor dream of talent not in your possession. Use the talent you have. God meant for you to be a success (33-36).

Mr. Nichols seemed committed to a thorough integration of biblical truth (as he understood it) with the practical pursuit of business as a profession. While we may not agree with his conclusions, we can agree that for him the Bible spoke clearly and forcefully to the issues of business and personal success.

Lessons Learned as an Editor

Serving as editor for the *Journal of Biblical Integration in*

Business, I have had the opportunity to review the work of a variety of authors. Regardless of whether we were able to ultimately publish their works, their approaches to biblical integration in business have challenged me to both broaden and sharpen my views concerning the process of integration. Herewith are some lessons learned:

Inductive approaches are stronger than deductive approaches.

Induction is the flow of reasoning from specifics to generalities; deduction is the flow of reasoning from generalities to specifics. In biblical integration, induction is the flow of argument from scriptural passages, parables, and proverbs to general principles of business. Fundamentally the author asks, "Putting aside what other conclusions I have already reached about a particular business issue, what conclusions would I reach if I allowed the Bible itself to speak to this issue?" An inductive approach helps avoid our tendency to use scripture to back conclusions we have already reached. Deductive approaches to biblical integration tend to begin with a set of already formulated general

principles and then seek biblical confirmation of these principles. ***It is as normal for the Bible to challenge established business practices as it is to confirm them.***

The passages from *The Business Guide or Safe Methods of Business* show a clear tendency to use biblical material to back a particular view of competition, success, and entrepreneurship. What the author of the book does not do is accurately reflect the fact that the Bible warns more about the dangers of wealth than the advantages of it, and that success in the Bible is rarely if ever mentioned in connection with personal career success.

Christians should approach business seeking to bring to bear the mind of Christ and “not conform[ing] any longer to the pattern of this world, but be[ing] 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 NIV). As Christians seek to gain a perspective on the work world, they should expect that they will often be engaged in “demolish[ing] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,

and . . . tak[ing] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). One of the advantages of a biblical perspective is that it holds forth the promise of genuinely new perspectives grounded in the unique truth of God’s Word.

Biblical integration is both a delightfully imaginative and a demandingly intensive process.

Those who would engage in the integration devote their efforts to both imagining how a biblical passage, precept, or parable might be applied to specific business issues and contexts and developing those connections in written form. Moving from an idea to its concrete expression in writing, we must carefully select words, construct paragraphs, develop arguments, and document sources. If we are seeking to have that writing accepted in some published form, then we must spend time working with editors and reviewers who may struggle with our writing or even disagree with our conclusions. Writing is a challenging, time-consuming process. Its rewards are great, but it carries a substantial cost.

Biblical integration deepens our appreciation of Scripture as it develops our business insight.

Two very great things happen when we ask, "How does this scriptural perspective or principle apply to the workplace?" First, our understanding of business, as viewed from God's perspective, is enriched and sharpened—we begin to question both the ends and means of business in fresh ways. Secondly, our understanding of Scripture is enriched and deepened as we begin to encounter people and events in the Bible in terms of the circumstances and choices they faced—we begin to view Scripture as the story of real people facing real problems and prospects, often in marketplace situations.

A Proposed Model

As we continue to work with authors committed to sharing their perspectives on biblical integration let me offer a model of the approach to biblical integration that is, I feel, most productive for the *JBIB*.

The flow of reasoning proposed in this model is primarily directed from left to right as Scripture is applied to business issues to generate the perspectives, principles, preferences, and practices that will help us respond to the business issues in godly ways.

But the flow also is interactive in the sense that as we study and apply Scripture and develop insights, we may be led to clarify our thinking about the issues we are facing, and we may be led to gain an enriched sense of the content and context of our original study of Scripture.

Articles in This Issue

The articles presented in this second volume of the *JBIB* are excellent examples of authors engaging in a process similar to the one described in the model on page 5. They offer to the serious reader a unique opportunity to study creative applications of Scripture that help develop valuable (and even surprising) insights into contemporary business issues. As readers engage these articles, they will be encouraged to clarify their own understanding of business issues and to encounter scriptural truth in fresh and enriched ways.

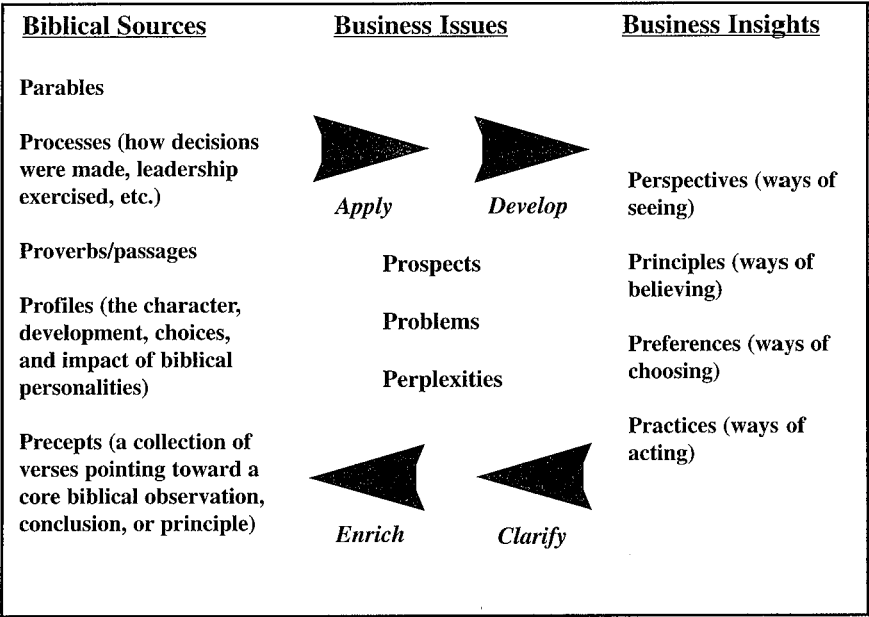
I encourage every reader to allow the material in our second volume to act as a catalyst for his or her own inquiry into the integration of biblical truth and business practice.

Allow me to quote one more time from *The Business Guide or Safe Methods of Business*:

A firm resolution, that barriers shall be surmounted, that difficulties shall be cleared away, goes far toward

achieving success. Let us repeat, success must be won. It never comes uninvited, never without effort (17).

JBIB



Model for Biblical Integration