# Knowledge of the heart is primary

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*Reflections on Colossians 2:1-8*

Evaluation (including monitoring) is the business of making informed judgments about the value of something, where those judgments are supported by various kinds of knowledge. For the Christian evaluator there are three primary kinds of knowledge.

First, there is knowledge of the heart, which is based on loving God and neighbor. As one grows in this love, as one allows his or her decisions and actions to be directed toward strengthening selfless relationships with others, one makes more informed judgments about value. Without knowing how precious each person is as a creature of God, without knowing the wonders of ecological balance through the eons, how can one make informed judgments of value about community development? This knowledge comes through concentrated study of God's word revealed in scripture, deep listening to God's direction through prayer, and interior examination of one's feelings in the presence of neighbors.

Second, there is the knowledge of sin, which is based on personal experience of failure to do what one knows is good, and failure to not do what one knows is bad. Sin pervades our lives, warring against the bonds of love. The value of community development must be determined by assessing how both love for God and neighbor and the human sinful nature are at work. This knowledge comes through deep listening to God in prayer, and the expressed feelings of those who are in the situation. Evaluators will be deceived about the outcomes of community development if they have shallow knowledge about sin and grace.

Third, there is empirical knowledge of God's world, tested by the critical skepticism that is the foundation of the scientific worldview. Why did drinking the water from the unprotected well make people ill? This knowledge comes through careful observation and sound reasoning about relationships among the contents of those observations. All qualified evaluators are skilled in discovering and applying this type of knowledge.

Christian evaluators need to be just as skilled in discovering and applying the knowledge that comes only through concentrated study of scripture and regular communing with God in Christ, both in solitude and in fellowship with the body of Christ. They also need to heed Paul's warning to avoid becoming a victim of hollow and deceptive philosophy (v. 8). Scholars believe that Paul was referring to Gnosticism, which regarded knowledge beyond faith in Christ as the ultimate reality.

In evaluation work the Christian must struggle again and again against becoming a captive of the principles of science. For example, one touted principle is that only things that can be measured should be included in an evaluation design or a monitoring system. (A corollary is that program design should include only measurable objectives.) How can meaningful numbers be obtained for changes in social relationships that are more just in a community, taking into account its culture? If such measures can be obtained, how can they be divided into the portion caused by program activities and the portion caused by other things? If I cannot do this according to principles of science, where only empirical evidence is valid, then I cannot evaluate social relationships, no matter how important they are to my development paradigm.

Such reasoning is hollow and deceptive, not only from a Christian perspective, but for many social scientists. Verifiable empirical information, rigorous analysis, and willingness to subject both to critical scrutiny by qualified persons are essential for evaluating or monitoring -- measurement that yields "hard numbers" is not. But knowledge of the heart, knowledge of the abundance of sin and the even greater abundance of grace, are foundational for evaluating and monitoring what matters most.