

FAITH AS INTERPERSONAL

Virgil Warren, PhD

Faith belongs to the interpersonal circumstance because it is something one person puts in another person. Faith trusts in another. Scripture applies the faith principle to two areas: salvation (consequences) and knowledge (information). In both applications a second person stands in the gap (a) between the doer and the result and (b) between the learner and what's learned. Habakkuk 2:4 serves as the gateway into the whole Christian system: "*The just will live by faith/trust.*"

(a) In the act-result application, believers rely on others to give what they do not themselves produce. Faith does not eliminate action on the part of the believer; faith itself is an act. Faith simply acknowledges that one's own acts do not cause the consequence. "Not caused by one's own acts" could mean trusting the other person simply to give the consequence. However, "not caused by one's own acts" can also mean trusting the other person to give what one's own acts are merely conditions for receiving. The character of such acts shifts from causes to conditions—conditions for the input of the other party to give result completely (monergism as in justification) or conditions for making up the difference between our own efforts and the full expectancy (synergism as in sanctification; see "Salvation"). Faith is trust in another, it is active relationship, and it is a degree matter (2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 10:14b-15a) in keeping with the fact that interpersonalism itself is subject to degrees and can grow with time through experience.

(b) In the knowledge application, the learner relies on another person for knowing things the learner has not directly witnessed (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Hebrews 1:1), whether of the past (Hebrews 11:3), the future (Hebrews 11:7), the invisible (Hebrews 11:27), or the present that lies outside our direct experience. Sometimes faith is even preferable to personal observation; we trust the perception or interpretation of someone more competent to describe and evaluate what we are watching as in relying on a referee's call in a basketball game we are watching—or even playing in!

Faith stands in contrast to sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Consequently, it does not stand in contrast to knowledge as if the faith were relative uncertainty and knowledge were certainty. Rather, faith is the interpersonal vs. the personal way of knowing. Faith (trust) and sight (science) are two ways to know. The certainty factor does not vary with this set, because certainty depends on the trustworthiness of the other person in the one case and the accuracy of personal perception in the other. So faith is not uncertainty, a blind leap into the dark, gullibility,

or living by impulse. Faith involves relative certainty as all other finite knowledge does. (cp. the document “Epistemology”)

Faith comes from response to personal influence; it is not a divine deposit in a passive soul. That would make the act of God a person-to-thing act. Instead, faith comes by influence rather than miracle. Having faith is not something done to us but with us. In its interpersonal context, having faith involves actions taking place between persons so that trust can grow by degrees over time through the give and take of that association. When the Bible speaks of giving faith it means giving those experiences that we can react to in faith or giving the opportunity to have faith. When the disciples asked for faith, Jesus responded with the mustard seed image (Luke 17:5-10). If we start with what we have, it will become by degrees what in the end can move mountains. That means we must be doing; we must be responding to the divine initiative that has already expressed itself toward us. Faith is not born full grown. To develop it, we start doing something with someone, begin trusting trustworthy persons. We trust a little that we may learn to trust more because we find out in so doing that we are not betrayed. Talking to a young lady leads to courtship, which leads to marriage, which leads to a whole life or trust together.

Furthermore, faith is not mind over matter. Faith is not believing something strongly enough to make it happen. Faith as mind over matter reduces faith from an interpersonal act to something done wholly by the self.

Everyone lives by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). It is not that Christians live by faith and others do not; the only question is who we trust. We are all hopelessly interpersonal, un-omniscient, and un-omnipotent; and we are so because of the very essence of what makes us in the image of God—the interpersonal capacity in people who die. Faith allows us to access the resources in others, the resources from the future, and even our own resources more efficiently. We might not even try to do what we can do if it were not for the encouragement of others who may not even be helping us succeed. We must live by faith because the structure of our existence requires it: we cannot even buy gas without trusting the company (to provide proper fuel) and the company’s trusting us (to pay for it).