

BASES FOR INTERPERSONALISM

Virgil Warren, PhD

I. What Is Most Original (the [inter]personal character of ultimate reality)

A. God created the universe out of nothing.

God's creatorship means that the material, inorganic, impersonal universe is secondary to the (inter)personal creator. God spoke the universe into existence (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29; Hebrews 11:3; 2 Peter 3:5). Its origin came from an act of the will (Acts 17:22-31), not from determinism through physical cause-effect. It was created (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:14-20), not out of God, but by him from nothing else.

B. The Creator possesses interpersonal characteristics.

Trinitarianism places interpersonalism in the ultimate frame of reference and before the material universe existed. John 14:16 shows that Son and Father differ sufficiently for the Son to pray to the Father. The Father and the Spirit differ sufficiently for the Father to send the Spirit. The Spirit and the Son differ sufficiently for the Spirit to be "another." God is interpersonal, not just in bent, but in objective nature.

II. What Is Most Central (*vs.* what is secondary, foreign, and contradictory to Christian understanding)

A. The First and Second Great Commandments are about love.

Making love both the First and Second Great Commandments accentuates the interpersonal center of biblical religion. Love is central, not just to Christianity, but also to Mosaism because the first two commandments—vertical and horizontal love—provide the context that the rest of the Mosaic Law stands within. The First and Second Great Commandments and the Golden Rule (which restates the Second Great Commandment) fulfill the Law and the prophets (Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-15; Matthew 7:11). James connects the Royal Law with the same context where he says, "*Pure and undefiled religion . . . is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world*" (2:8-9 + 1:27; 2:14-16). Paul says, "*The end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience with faith unfeigned*" (1 Timothy 1:5).

B. Matters less central than interpersonal concerns

1. Love is more central than supernatural spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 13:13; 14:5; Luke 10:17).

Paul used love as the middle chapter in his three-chapter corrective on misusing spiritual gifts. By going back to basics, he put the charismata in interpersonal perspective. Operating through love, relationships set the manner and purpose of using the gifts (1 Corinthians 14:5). By contextualizing them in love, the apostle sought to eradicate excesses that had arisen in Corinth. The practitioners were using gifts in self-centered ways to gain attention. They needed to become outward-directed, as love requires people to be.

2. Salvation is more important than the ability to perform exorcisms (Luke 10:17).

Jesus told those returning from the Mission of the Seventy to rejoice, not so much that demons were subject to them, but that their names were written in heaven. “*Written in heaven*” means saved, which refers to being in fellowship with God.

3. Proclamation of the message is more important than who performs baptisms (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Another interpretation of Paul’s point might be the relative centrality of the message over formal observances involved in it. Either way, interpersonal proclamation is more basic or more central.

4. What we eat does not commend us to God (1 Corinthians 8:8; Mark 7:19; Romans 2:4, 6; 14:17; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:8-10). The whole category of ceremonial uncleanness/taboo/defilement has become immaterial (Romans 14:14, 20). As respects conscience, they cannot give a sense of moral purity (Hebrews 9:8-10). Life is more than food and clothes (Matthew 6:25; Luke 12:23).

5. Christianity set aside the Jewish festival cycle (Colossians 2:16-17).

6. The New Testament contains many statements about the gospel and the Christian experience in personalized terms. It speaks of

- a. preaching Christ: Acts 8:35; 11:20; 17:18; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 4:5; Philippians 1:15-18 (cp. Acts 5:42); yet note “preaching Moses” in Acts 15:2; hence, some of this may reflect Hebraism.

- b. receiving Christ: Colossians 2:6

- c. earning Christ: Ephesians 4:20

- d. putting on Christ: Romans 13:12-14

- e. knowing nothing but Christ: 1 Corinthians 2:2

- f. Christ as the foundation: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

- g. Christ as our peace: Ephesians 2:14

- h. presenting Christ: Galatians 3:1

- i. Christ as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of God: 1 Corinthians 1:30

j. in/into the name of Christ: Acts 10:43; Colossians 1:27 (“*Christ in you the hope of glory*”); Matthew 28:20; and so on (being “*baptized into Christ*”)

k. the indwelling of Christ: Colossians 1:27

l. judgment in terms of Christ: Acts 17:30-31 (“*God has appointed a day when he will judge the world in righteousness in [ἐν] that man whom he has appointed.*”)

m. the church is called “Christ”: 1 Corinthians 12:12 (“*As the body is one with many members, so is Christ.*”)

n. “For me to live is Christ”: Philippians 1:21

o. the “I am” statements of Jesus: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6; cp. Romans 5:2); “*I am the light of the world*” (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46); “*I am the door*” (John 10:7, 9); “*I am the good shepherd*” (John 10:11); “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6:35).

In keeping with that emphasis, it has been customary to say things like “no creed but Christ.” Christianity is not a set of doctrines to be believed but a relationship of persons to be lived. It is not a creed, but a “*being in Christ.*” The name for the believers is not derived from a form of government or the form of an ordinance, but from the person of Jesus the Messiah—Christians. The idea is to put Christ back into Christian.

Other terms like “life,” “truth,” “knowledge” often have an interpersonal thrust, as in the statement “*You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.*” Knowledge is experiential, truth is personal, and freedom is relational; that all makes especially fine sense in an interpersonal setting.

C. Matters considered non-germane to Christian concerns

1. Dietary regulations

In several passages, Paul sets aside vegetarianism vs. eating meat: Romans 14:2-3, 6b, 17, 20-21, 23; 1 Corinthians 8:8. The guiding principle is that “. . . *the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 14:17). In 1 Corinthians 8:8 Paul comments, “*Food will not commend us to God: neither if we do not eat are we the worse, nor if we eat are we the better.*” Our hearts are established by grace (interpersonal) rather than meats (dietary regulations; Hebrews 13:9). Eating one thing rather than another has no relevance to relationships. The only time food becomes a concern is when it might cause a weaker brother to stumble, that is, when it might affect relationships. Misbehavior affects relationships (a) by destroying a person’s ability to operate interpersonally (as in substance abuse), (b) by causing a weaker brother to stumble because of one’s misleading

example, and (c) by acting in ways unbefitting the relationship, including amoral actions not acceptable to the person's preferences or culture.

2. Physical appearance

In choosing a king to replace the Saulite dynasty, God told Samuel not to look at countenance or stature because "*Yahveh does not see like people see; people look at the outward appearance, but Yahveh looks at the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7), a particularly interesting comment since Saul was head and shoulders taller than the other people (1 Samuel 9:2).

3. Material wealth

When John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah, the Lord marked his Messiahship by saying that even the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matthew 11:5).

4. Special days (Romans 14:5-6a; Colossians 2:16-17)

5. Marital status

Whether a person is married is immaterial to the Christian calling (1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, 24, 26-40). Marriage has interpersonal character, in fact, the most intense such relationship; but it is not a required state because other states of personal relationship exist. There is neither male nor female in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

6. Societal status

Whether bond or free is immaterial to a Christian's worth (1 Corinthians 7:17, 20-24). There is neither bond nor free in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Christianity is not an elitist religion.

7. National identity (Galatians 3:28; Matthew 28:19-20)

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, barbarian nor Scythian in Christ. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but keeping God's commandments (1 Corinthians 7:17, 19-20). In contrast to faith, love, and a good conscience, some heretics concerned themselves with myths and genealogies (1 Timothy 1:35).

8. It is not what we know or say (1 Corinthians 4:20) or believe (James 2), but what we do and the power we have in our lives.

The antidote to all these irrelevant distinctions is that we are all one in Christ.

D. Observations on the patriarchal and Mosaic periods

Not all things equally true are equally important. The Law was true down to the last jot and tittle (Matthew 5:17-20); yet there were weightier matters among features of the Law (Matthew 23:23-24).

1. Animal sacrifices were not so important as obedience, kindness, and humility, which are interpersonal traits (Micah 6:6-8; Hosea 6:6; Deuteronomy 10:12-13; 1 Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 7:22-23; cp. Psalm 40:6-9). Performing ritual sacrifice of animals, libations of oil, or the sacrifice of children has no value in correcting personal relations: “*Will I give the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*” (Micah 6:1). Animal sacrifice is artificial to interpersonal problems—except as expressions of the heart and attitude of the worshiper. The provision does not correspond to the need. Micah 6:8 shows that interpersonal problems call for interpersonal solutions: doing justly, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. That formula held sway even during the Mosaic Law because the interpersonal precedes the legal both in logic and time (patriarchal period).

Other passages indicate that animal sacrifice, though divinely instituted, was secondary and ineffective: Hosea 6:6 cited by Jesus in Matthew 9:13; 12:7; compare Mark 12:32-33. Jesus said to leave the gift beside the altar and go work out differences with other people before offering gifts (Matthew 6:23-24). The admonition implies the greater urgency of personal relationship over religious observances.

2. Jesus considered justice, mercy, and faith weightier matters of the Law than tithing regulations (Matthew 23:23-24). “*You should have done these and not to let the other undone*” is Jesus’ way of describing relative importance. The whole Law was true, but interpersonal matters were weightier truths.

The Pharisees had lost perspective by becoming legalistic. The legal mentality absolutizes everything that is true so everything in the Law is equal in its being there. Unqualified legal thinking does not distinguish between equally true and equally important. Legalistic thought does not allow practical considerations to dictate the lawful use of law. The Pharisees, especially, had not prioritized the value and needs of persons as qualifying factors on the application of legal provisions.

3. The welfare of people pre-empted tabernacle regulations when David and his men were famished and ate the showbread lawful for only priests to eat (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5; 1 Samuel 21:1-6).

4. Hezekiah prayed for some pilgrims who had not had opportunity to meet properly the ceremonial cleansing requirements for observing the Passover, and God hearkened to the king’s request to let them observe it anyway (2 Chronicles 30:13-22). Jesus often disregarded the traditions of the elders on these ceremonial cleansings (Matthew 15:1-20 = Mark 7:1-23; Luke 11:37-41).

5. Jesus promised the thief on the cross a place in Paradise with Jesus even

though he could not fulfill any relevant ritual for his sin (Luke 23:39-43; there really were no Mosaic sacrifices for capital crimes anyway even if the insurrectionist on the cross could have come down and offered one.)

6. Jesus' treatment of the woman caught in adultery shows the priority of repentance over the legal requirement for capital punishment for mortal sin (John 7:53-8:11).

7. The gospel accounts show the priority of personal needs over Sabbath regulations, especially as interpreted and practiced by the Pharisees via the tradition of the elders. "*The Sabbath was made for people,*" not *vice versa* (Mark 2:27; cp. Exodus 23:12d; Deuteronomy 5:14c). The worth of persons takes precedence over the forms of religion. Personal concerns precede ritual observances and the positive commandments that establish them. Person precedes law; personal transcends legal.

8. Even while Mosaic legislation was in effect, faith was the real basis for anyone's relationship with God (Habakkuk 2:3-4 < Galatians 3:8-14; Romans 1:17-8:39).

9. Abraham's friendship with God rested on faith before circumcision had even been instituted as the national Jewish covenant sign (Romans 4:6-15).

Paul comments quite boldly about righteous Gentiles by saying, "*If the Uncircumcision keeps the ordinance of the Law, their uncircumcision will be regarded as circumcision, won't it? And won't the Uncircumcision, which is natural, if it fulfills the Law, judge you who with the letter and circumcision transgress the Law?*" (Romans 2:26-27).

10. Jesus told the woman of Sychar that although salvation was from the Jews, where people worshiped would soon no be longer relevant because worship must be in spirit and truth (John 4:19-26).

The divorce law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 recognized divorce for any cause, whereas Genesis 2 implies that marriage is permanent. The harmonization comes from recognizing that Deuteronomy 24 was civil legislation whereas the implications of Genesis 2 were natural and moral considerations. The interpersonal identity in marriage transcends the lower legal standard that sought to alleviate some of the yet more extreme abuses of women in ancient society.

11. Interpersonalism harmonizes certain antinomies in the Old Testament Law.

Habakkuk 2:4 declares that God's righteous one will have life on the basis of faith. Faith, however, is not what operates in law. Perfection is the requirement and faith in another is not involved in becoming righteous after sinning (Deuteronomy 27:26; Leviticus 18:5; Galatians 3:10-14). The harmonization comes from recognizing that the Law was not intended to be a basis for righteousness and relationship to God, but a definition of what God wanted in the relationship. The basis for human-divine relationship has always been faith—interpersonal

process. Antinomy comes from reading the Law as final rather than provisional and secondary to interpersonal process.

12. Jesus continually conflicted with the religious leaders over the tradition of the elders, particularly over Sabbath regulations. Interpersonal expression makes us wonder what Jesus meant in Luke 6:5 (= Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28), “*The Son/son of Man/man is Lord/lord even/also of the Sabbath.*” Did he mean that he was above Sabbath regulations or had the right to change them, or did he mean that the needs of any human person trumps Sabbath regulations? Person precedes law and form. The two ideas may connect: Jesus highlighted himself as God’s ideal man. Other examples of setting aside traditional Sabbath regulations appear in Matthew 12:1-4 (= Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 6:1-11); Luke 13:10-17; John 5:9-18; 7:19-24; 9:1-41.

13. Lineage had no value for anything but temporal blessings during the Mosaic dispensation. John the Baptist told his contemporaries not to say to themselves, “*‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*”

Rather than concentrate on person-to-person behavior, we find ourselves concentrating on formal and procedural matters because they require less effort. Personal relationship is the most difficult activity because it is the most complex; we look for what we can do more easily (knowing things, *e.g.*) or be proud of without effort (genealogy, IQ, athletic ability, good looks). We prefer to do anything rather than change: lie, blame someone else, use authority to shut people up who point out our weaknesses. The rich look down on the poor while they themselves are rich only by inheritance. Nobility looks down on commoners when they themselves were only born into status. The intelligent look down on the slow-of-mind though they themselves have been given their good minds. The educated ridicule the ignorant who lack opportunity for education. Secondary true things become false when made primary.

E. All the great summaries of the Judaeo-Christian faith are interpersonal.

1. The First Great Commandment: “*Love the LORD your God.*”
2. The Second Great commandment: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”
3. The Golden Rule: “*Treat others the way you would have others treat you.*”
4. James 1:27: “*Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*”
5. Habakkuk 2:4: “*The just will live by faith.*”
6. Micah 6:8: “*What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?*”

Likewise, Deuteronomy 10:12-13 said earlier: “*What does Yahveh your God require of you but to fear him, to walk in all his ways, and to love him and to serve him with all*

your heart and with all your soul, to keep his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today for your good?"

7. Hosea 4:1: *"There should be truth, goodness, and knowledge of God in the land."*

8. Matthew 25:31-46: The judgment at the end of time rests on how people treated other people in this life.

III. What Is Most Enduring

Paul stresses love as greatest (1 Corinthians 13:13) because love applies to the "*now*" and the "*then*," "*seeing through a glass darkly*" and "*seeing face to face*." Since love applies to personal relationships wherever and whenever, it is more eternal than material-political systems of this world. Love relates to the next life as well as this one.

IV. What Is Ultimate

A. Love surpasses knowledge.

Love carries out the interpersonal pattern of association. Paul declares, "*That you might know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge*" (Ephesians 3:19). Knowledge is not the ultimate consideration, not meaning that it is separate, but that love surpasses it. Not only is knowledge not enough, but love—the higher plane of reference—can overlook ignorance and error if love (attitude) is present. Paul declares that he received forgiveness because he persecuted the church in ignorance and disbelief (1 Timothy 1:13; cp. Acts 3:17; Luke 23:34; Acts 17:30 + 23; see also Acts 13:27; 26:9; Ephesians 4:17?; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Hebrews 5:2; 9:7 as well as Numbers 15:24-29 = Leviticus 4:2, 22, 27; 5:15, 18; 1 Peter 1:14; James 4:17). "*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Love is not (1) contrary to knowledge; so education does not eliminate spirituality. It is not simply (2) more than knowledge. It (3) makes up for lack in knowledge. It always (4) transforms knowledge by putting it in the larger interpersonal context and putting it into motion.

The goal of knowledge is appropriate behavior summarized in love. Paul encouraged Titus to speak things fitting to sound doctrine (knowledge) that "*older men may be . . . sound in . . . love . . . that older women . . . may teach the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children.*" Departing from that format leads to unfitting discussions about "*foolish questionings, genealogies . . . and wrangling about the Law*" (3:9; cp. 1 Timothy 1:35).

Romans 2:12 offers a lengthy statement that it is not knowledge (*i.e.*, having the Law through which the knowledge of God and his will comes), but behavior that has to do with not perishing.

B. Faith takes precedence over knowledge (2 Corinthians 5:7).

It is not so much what we know but who we trust that makes us able to conduct life as we ought. If we can trust God, we do not have to know so much.

C. Personal behavior ranks higher than purely doctrinal matters.

Titus 2:1ff shows that the purpose of sound doctrine is proper behavior toward other persons. Doctrine is fruitless if it does not produce behavioral correlates; doctrine is fruitless if it does not bear fruit. Jesus would not allow the woman of Sychar to shift attention from her personal life and redirect it to the doctrinal issue of where people should worship. Not everyone that says, “*Lord, Lord,*” but the one that does the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21) will enter the eternal kingdom (James 2).

D. There is a peace that “*passes understanding*” (Philippians 4:7).

The statement could mean a peace we cannot explain to non-Christians, a peace others cannot see the reason for, or a peace we feel but cannot ourselves understand. It may be a peace that does not come from knowledge, but from trust, an interpersonal circumstance. It is a peace we have, not because we understand what is happening and why, but because we trust that God controls what is happening and why, even though the situation looks chaotic and destructive.

E. Love surpasses behavior (James 5:20; 1 Peter 4:8; Luke 7:36-47-50; Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; cp. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Attitude is more important than acts.

Love covers a multitude of sins in that other people are more willing to overlook and forgive the sins of loving people. Love covers the sins of the loving person (Luke 7:47).

Another understanding says that loving people are more prone to overlook other people’s faults. Love causes us to overlook faults in others because we want the best for them and want to accentuate the positive in them. We focus on their strengths because that is what we can work with to help them get better yet. Love does not criticize because it does not focus on faults. Love covers the sins of the loved person.

Yet another understanding says that love covers sins by loving people keeping their own sins out of the picture in the first place. Love for other people overrides self-centered impulses. People who out of love want to convert other people watch their own behavior closely so it does not thwart their evangelistic efforts. The sins covered are by the loving persons who themselves prevent their own sins.

F. The New Testament tends to speak of good and bad in terms of their ultimate inspiring source, their final frame of reference, which are personal references/.

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" he calls "a messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). "Satan thwarted" Paul's desire to see the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Disciplining the sinful man in Corinth Paul speak of as "delivering to Satan" (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20).

On the positive side, Paul talks about doing everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17) and obeying masters as "respecting the Lord" (Colossians 3:22).

V. The Way Christianity Is Defended

Christian apologetics in the New Testament draws heavily on personal and interpersonal matters (cp. Acts 5:33-42). (For details, see the interpersonalism document on "Apologetics.")

A. Regarding Jesus' resurrection, Gamaliel in effect argues from what it means to be Messiah—an eternal king of a person-centered system.

His argument for the resurrection turns on Christianity as a person-centered system. When the person is removed from the center of such a system, the system collapses. That is what happened in the cases of Theudas and Judas, who were evidently Messianic claimants as well. When they were killed their movements disintegrated because, as John's gospel says, "*Messiah abides forever*" (John 12:34). If Messiah leads a universal, eternal kingdom, there can be only one Messiah, and he cannot be overthrown.

Such an approach to Messiah and his kingdom contrasts with an ideology-centered system. Ideas and viewpoints may pass from person to person; the death of a founder does not destroy the movement. A prophet testifies about some message he claims to have received from God. The Messiah did not just prophesy; he personally led his people.

B. Paul's argument for Jesus' resurrection turns on a presupposition about human nature.

Paul's argument for Christ's resurrection comes down to a behavioral observation: we will not give our lives for what we know is false. If Paul and his companions had been false witnesses, while knowingly claiming that Christ resurrected, they would have had no reason to endure deprivation, prison, torture, and the prospect of death for what they had preached.

C. The power of presenting the Christian message is greater when presented by persons who care about the ones they evangelize.

D. Much of the power in the Christian message itself derives from its desire to answer the needs people the most: meaningfulness, innocence, security, and love.

VI. The Central Vocabulary of the Christian Faith

- A. Love
- B. Other fruit-of-the-spirit terms like “joy,” “peace,” “patience” (Galatians 5:22-23)
- C. Faith/Trust

All interpersonal processes require faith/trust for them even to occur. Natural, legal, and logical processes are one-directional; they normally have the pattern of a straight-line causal series.

In its salvation application, “faith” does not mean mere belief of information. We do not have salvation because we believe Christ, but because we believe in Christ. Believing deals with knowledge; believing-in deals with trusting in someone.

All the major “faith” treatments in the New Testament come from Habakkuk 2:4 (Romans 1:16-5:21; Galatians 3; Hebrews 10:37-12:2) or Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4), the call and direction of Abraham.

- D. Grace
- E. Promise
- F. Heart
- G. Preaching
- H. Life
- I. Mercy
- J. Reconciliation
- K. Repentance
- L. Forgiveness
- M. Christ

In some New Testament texts, “*Christ*” seems to be a metonymy a system parallel to the legal, formal system that operated during the Mosaic period. At least those special usages of “*Christ*” seem removed from the individual person Jesus the Christ. We can regard these usages as a term for the interpersonal system of things and the interpersonal approach to life.

1. “‘... and to your seed,’ which is *Christ*” (Galatians 3:16)

Paul observes that the Genesis text says “*seed*,” not “*seeds*,” in the promise that Abraham’s seed would bless all the families of earth; the seed is singular: “*not as of many, but as of one.*” He does not mean many individuals in contrast to One individual—Jesus of Nazareth. Paul means, not *versus* many in number but *versus* one as of kind, not Jesus Christ, but

the Christ kind, the faith kind who are God's friends and children by faith. "*If you are 'of Christ' [Χριστοῦ]*" means descriptive genitive rather than possessive genitive. The faith kind focalizes in Jesus the Messiah. It is not just epitomized by him; it is identified with him. Christ was in full degree what Abraham, Israel, Moses, and so on, were relatively; and we can become that through him. We identify with Jesus Christ that we may become sons of Abraham and sons of God by faith. In identifying with Christ, we identify ourselves with the faith system he embodies, epitomizes, represents.

The expression "*Abraham's seed*" likewise does not speak about the identity of his descendants, but a kind of "descendants": trusting people like "*faithful Abraham*" (Galatians 3:8-9). His physical descendants may not be his seed as John the Baptist observed (Matthew 3:9 = Luke 3:8; cp. John 8:31-44); those who did not descend from him may be his seed (Romans 4:10-17). "*They are not all Israel who are of Israel*" (Romans 9:6). Relationship with God does not rest on physical descent but on personal character.

2. "*That rock was Christ*" (1 Corinthians 10:4).
3. "*The spirit of Christ that was in them*" (1 Peter 1:11).
4. "*Considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt*" (Hebrews 11:26)
5. Previously "*Gentiles were separated from Christ*" (Ephesians 2:12).

In Ephesians 2:11-13 "*Christ*" is contemporaneous with not participating in the commonwealth of Israel with its covenants and promises. Both of these describe a time during the Mosaic dispensation, a time before Christ came as a historical person to embody the "*Christ nature*."

6. "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad*" (John 8:56-58).

Does Jesus imply that he had appeared to Abraham as perhaps the "*angel of the Lord*," or does he mean that the faith approach to divine relationship is what Abraham experienced?

7. The "*gospel*" was preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:8).
8. "*The 'law' of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 9:21; cp. Romans 8:2)

Does "*the 'law' of Christ*" amount to the same thing as the "interpersonal principle"? "*The 'law' of Christ*" could even be translated "*the Christ principle*."

9. Apollos preached accurately the things about Jesus, knowing only John's baptism (Acts 18:24-28).

Acts 18:27-28 notes his effectiveness. Perhaps he was responsible for converting "*the twelve disciples of John*" in Acts 19:1-7. If he knew only John's baptism, how could he be preaching accurately Jesus' things? Does it mean his awareness of what had transpired in Palestine had somehow gone no further than what the situation was during Jesus'

ministry even though Acts **18-19** deals with a time nearly twenty-five years after the resurrection and after Pentecost?

We can make sense of “*accurately about Jesus*” plus “*only the baptism of John*” by supposing that Apollos correctly understood the non-political, pan-ethnic nature of the Messianic kingdom. That becomes another way of saying interpersonal.

10. “*Christ*” is put for the body of those who make “him” up. As one body has many members, that is the way Christ is (1 Corinthians **12:12**). Similarly, the church is often called the “*body of Christ*.”

11. John’s use of the term *antichrist* may relate to this idea as well (1 John **2:18**, **22**; **4:3**, **7**). Every perversion of Christianity has been some sort of departure from its interpersonal character. The Gnosticism of John’s day had the spirit of antichrist because it denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. Politicizing the church into the Roman empire later affords another example.

12. Christ is put for the content of the message: “*preach Christ*” (Galatians **1:16**).

We could be dealing with a cultural way of using language more than with the nature of Christianity. Acts **15:21** says that “*Moses is preached*.” The expression refers to a legal system, yet that way of speaking describes its content. In 1 Corinthians **10:1** Paul says the Israelites “*were baptized to Moses in the cloud and sea*.” Jesus speaks of the abode of the saved as “*the arms of Abraham*” (Luke **16:19-31**). In that same episode, Abraham tells the rich man, “*They have Moses and the prophets*,” meaning the writings and revelation that came through them. Paul uses *Adam* and *Christ* as personal names for categories of people (Romans **5:12-21**; 1 Corinthians **15:21-22**). Patriarchal names like “*Israel*,” “*Jacob*,” “*Esau*” name the political entities (patronymics, Hosea **11:1**). Such illustrations may indicate a Jewish way of speaking that concretizes the intangible by personalizing it in terms of a significant personage or inspiring source.

Although the speech habit could explain the phenomenon, the phenomenon is at least personalization rather than personification, metonymy, or synecdoche. Personification puts personal characteristics on a thing; personalization relates a thing to a person. Jesus is a person with the ideas associated with him. “*Christ*” is not used to “*stand for*” the subject matter. Even if Paul were using “*Christ*” as a metaphor for what he taught, he would still be personalizing the content of that teaching, because it had mainly to do with him. The fact that he so characteristically puts “*Christ*” for the gospel and the church shows how natural it was for him to do so. In a sense, interpersonalism pervades the spiritual aspect of Mosaism as well since law was an added element beyond purely dynamic factors. The expression “*Moses is preached*” does not prove that Mosaism is interpersonal in the sense that we are using similar expressions

about “*Christ*” to argue the interpersonal character of Christianity. Legal process does not preempt the interpersonal in Christianity, nor does it get added theologically to the essence of the faith. Christianity is a matter of being “*in Christ*,” a matter of entering “*into Christ*,” of wearing the “*name of Christ*” (see “Q” below).

N. Spirit

Spirit terminology appears to correspond with personal and interpersonal matters. The common element in the word “*spirit*” is invisible reality. The (a) wind blows, but we can see only its effects, not the thing itself (John 3:8). A person can have a certain mentality, or (b) attitude, as in the statement, “*You do not know what spirit you are of*” (Luke 9:55 marginal text). The term refers to (c) demons. In contrast to location, “*spirit*” refers to (d) mental presence, as when Paul in Ephesus speaks of being present with the Corinthians in spirit though not in body (1 Corinthians 5:3). 1 Corinthians 5:4 may refer to Paul’s (e) approval or encouragement in exercising church discipline on the incestuous man. In contrast to flesh, the (f) spirit of a person refers to the transcendent nature that survives death or at least to the non-material aspect of a person. “*Spirit*” refers to the (g) transcendent lifestyle that persons can live. In distinction to Father and Son, there is the (h) Holy Spirit. Especially in the expression “*filled with the Spirit*,” the term can mean (i) a surge of boldness or concern. In contrast to the letter of the Law, “*spirit*” in Paul seems to mean the (j) intent, or purpose, of law. In this usage the interpersonal integrates with the usage of the word “*spirit*.”

1. Romans 2:28-29 deals with spirit in contrast to physical circumcision, outward man, letter, praise of other people, the Law (2:26). Spirit correlates with circumcision of the heart, inner self, praise of God, the gospel.

2. Romans 7:6 speaks of being discharged through death from the bondage of the Law so people can live by the newness of the spirit vs. the oldness of the letter.

3. The context of 2 Corinthians 3: contrasts law and grace, works and faith, Moses and Christ, the old covenant and the new, the same contrast found in Romans and Colossians where the spirit-letter contrast appears (cp. Galatians 3-4; John 1:17). The spirit gives life whereas the letter kills. “*Kills*” could refer to condemnation, because law operates in terms of works (a person’s own doing) under a perfection requirement. Since no one lives up perfectly to a standard of rules and regulations, everyone under law stands condemned by law to the death penalty. Spirit vs. letter involves spirit as personal, because the “intent” and purpose of the Law override the exact verbal expression used by the Person making the Law.

4. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit

We can speak of “spirit” as referring to the “transmaterial” in contrast to physical, the “transcultural” in contrast to political, the “translocational” in contrast to spatial limitation, and “trans-informational” in going beyond knowledge.

O. Fellowship

P. Blessing

Q. Name

What defines a person is who they belong to, whose name they wear, what people call them. “*Naming the name of Christ*” (2 Timothy 2:19) means confessing whose side people are on, who has their allegiance, whose values they adopt, whose purposes they serve, who their primary Significant Other is. We are baptized into the “name” of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In that frame, “*in the name of*” is not so much “*by the authority of*” as “*in identity with.*” “*In the name of*” deals with identity (interpersonal), not authority (legal).

VII. Jeremiah 31:31-34 and the New “Covenant”

Jeremiah prophesied that God would make a new covenant with Israel, different in identity and kind. In that new covenant, everyone would “*know*” God from least to greatest. It would not be like the covenant Yahveh made with the Israelites after the exodus; it would not be a political, national, or legal covenant. (See introductory comments in the essay “Understanding Christian Ordinances.”)

VIII. Galatians 3:15-29 (as noted earlier)

The interpersonal reality pre-dated the Mosaic Law. When the Law came, it did not annul the prior, more basic truths implied by “*promise*,” an interpersonal term. The Law was a temporary overlay for practical purposes until Christ would personally come into the human scene and really represent the “*seed*” of Abraham. Salvation cannot even come by law, that is, by legal principles; if it could, salvation could have come by the Mosaic Law (Galatians 3:21).

IX. Concluding Observations on Priorities

A. The priority of interpersonal over knowledge

1. Peace that passes understanding: Philippians. 4:7

2. “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (truth is personal). Note also, “*You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (John 8:32).

3. Knowledge puffs up; love builds up. It builds up by stressing relationships, whereas knowledge stresses facts.

4. If anyone thinks he knows anything, he does not yet know what he should know; but if anyone loves God, the same is known by him (1 Corinthians 8:2-3; cp. 3:18).

5. That you might know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (note the word play; Ephesians 3:19)

B. The priority of interpersonal over formal matters

1. The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27; cp. Exodus 23:12d; Deuteronomy 5:14c).

2. “*Today you will be with me in paradise*” (Luke 23:43). No sacrifice was offered or could even be offered by immediate circumstance as well as lack of Mosaic provision for any sacrifice for capital crimes—like insurrection.

3. David and his men ate the showbread legally available only for priests (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5; 1 Samuel 21:6).

4. Jesus told the woman of Sychar that salvation was from the Jews, but God looks for people to worship him anywhere in spirit and truth (John 4:19-26).

5. Hezekiah and the Passover observance by people not prepared after the ceremonial requirements of the Law (2 Chronicles 30:13-22)

6. “*Circumcision profits if you do the Law; but if you transgress the Law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. If then the Uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the Law, shall not their uncircumcision be considered circumcision? and will not the Uncircumcision, which is by nature, if it fulfill the Law, judge you who with the letter and circumcision transgress the Law?” (Romans 2:25-26).*

7. Micah 6:68 shows the priority of personal commitment and behavior over ceremonial observance of animal sacrifices.

8. Abraham’s relationship to God preceded circumcision (Romans 4:6-15, etc.).

X. The Category That Corrects Operational Failures: “*Love covers a multitude of sins,*” whether objectively or in the eyes of the beholder (1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; 1 Corinthians 13:5).

XI. The Fact That Baptism Even Exists (See essay “What the Very Existence of Baptism Shows.”)

XII. Abraham’s Interpersonal Dealings with God Before (the) Law: Paul observes that the Law was added later (Galatians **3:6-19-29**; Romans **4:1-25**; **5:20**). That is the point of using the words “*promise*” and “*faith*” in his discussions.

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