

# INTERPERSONALISM AS A CRITERION FOR FELLOWSHIP, ORTHODOXY, AND RELATIVE CENTRALITY

Virgil Warren, PhD

Interpersonalism serves as a general criterion for deciding what is part of the faith. It is the touchstone for distinguishing “gospel from culture” and truth from preference.

Interpersonalism serves as a criterion for arranging things from central to less central within what is actually true about the Christian faith. The value of this observation lies in helping us decide what to emphasize in introducing someone to Christ (evangelism) and in arranging the sequence of virtues and duties in the process of sanctification.

Interpersonalism serves as a guide for knowing how concerned to be about various doctrinal errors, personal practices, and other difficulties that can exist among believers. The point here is related to what we mean when we talk about “picking our battles” (pastoral ministry). From a practical standpoint there are often too many things wrong or inadequate to address them all. If we try to address them all—at least now, we establish a counterproductive, negative atmosphere. To put it conversely, interpersonalism shows us what positive sparks to fan in the real life of the church. Of course, there are other factors that guide us in choosing how to approach an individual with the gospel or what problem to deal with in the living ministry of the church: the other person’s readiness, the issues that circumstance may kick up that may then serve as an entree into the presentation of the gospel or the discipleship of a believer.

Interpersonalism serves as a hermeneutical criterion for distinguishing between love, wisdom, and service. To put it differently, interpersonalism serves as a guide to distinguish the various values of command forms (note imperatival intent). If the nature and purpose of the faith are interpersonal (induction), we have the context for clarifying texts and sorting through interpretations of them (deduction).

christir.org