

*The Transformed Life
improves every
relationship.*

THE PERVASIVE NATURE OF CHRISTIANITY (COLOSSIANS 3:18—4:6)

by Coy Roper

Colossians 3:18—4:6 points out that Christianity is not just a way of doing certain things; it is a certain way of doing everything. Christianity is pervasive; it affects and improves every relationship in life. To help us understand that fact and what it should mean to us, let us contrast the wrong understanding of religion with the correct understanding of Christianity.

MANY SEPARATE THEIR RELIGION FROM THE REST OF LIFE

Many people picture the whole of their lives as a pie. That pie is divided into various compartments. One piece of the pie is home or family life; another is work, business or economic life; a third is social life, including friendships; another may be recreational life; if they happen to be students, there may be a compartment for educational life; finally, there may be a compartment for religious life. This compartment involves church attendance, worship, and prayers.

The worst thing about this concept is that each of those compartments is separated, in their minds, by an impregnable partition. Each section of their lives is lived separately without any reference to any other part. So an underworld figure can cheat, rob, and kill to make a living, but at the same time, he can be loving and faithful to his family. Another man can appear to be a loving husband and father at home, but at the same time, in his life outside the home he can have affairs without feeling any qualms of conscience. How many people are mild and law-abiding in most aspects of their lives, but when

they get behind the wheel of a car, they become aggressive, law-breakers, and downright nasty?

The problem becomes acute when it is a Christian who thinks like this. Such a Christian is present every time the church doors open; he sings loudly, prays regularly, and knows his Bible “from cover to cover.” He may even preach, teach, or lead singing. But he has divided his life into neat compartments, and he thinks of his religion only in terms of meeting those obvious responsibilities to the church. His Christianity, therefore, does not affect the rest of his life. Outside the church meetings, he may abuse his wife, neglect his family, deal dishonestly in business, cheat on tests in school, act like a heathen on the playing field or basketball court, or drive like a maniac.

I have heard of men who were known as fine preachers, but all the while they were unfaithful to their wives. I have heard about a successful businessman who made millions and became widely known because he was a faithful Christian. Later it came to light that his business empire was built on fraud. He went to jail. How could it happen?

Perhaps things like this happen because Christians sometimes compartmentalize their lives; Christianity is one part of their lives, but it never affects other compartments. The partition between religion and the rest of their lives is too solid, too water-tight, for their Christianity to make any difference outside the church building.

This kind of Christianity affects only a part

of life, not the whole of life. It denies that Christianity has any real practical value. It says that Christianity is powerless to help you live successfully, that it is of no earthly use. But this kind of Christianity is not New Testament Christianity. True Christianity is pervasive. This becomes evident when we consider how Christ regulates every relationship.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE REST OF LIFE

A biblical view demands that we see Christianity as pervasive, as affecting every aspect of life, every one of our relationships. If you picture your life as broken up into compartments, Christianity is a circle cutting through every compartment. How do we know? By considering the instructions Paul gives in our text. There the pervasive nature of Christianity becomes obvious. Let us think about those instructions.

The Relationship Between Husbands And Wives

There is a mutual requirement: The wife has a responsibility to her husband, and the husband to his wife. To wives, Paul says, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). Wives are to be submissive to their husbands. This can seem rather harsh to many women. But it should also be noted that to husbands, Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them” (Colossians 3:19). This passage does not tell us “how much” the husband should love his wife, but Ephesians 5 does: He should love her as much as he loves his own body, as much as he loves himself, and as much as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25–33). Christ loved the church so much that He died for the church; He put the church before Himself; He thought of the good of the church rather than thinking of His own good. If husbands love their wives like that, wives will not mind submitting to their husbands.

The important thing, for our purposes, is to remember that your Christianity should affect the way you relate to your husband or wife!

The Relationship Between Parents And Children

Again there is a mutual responsibility. To children, Paul says, “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 3:20). Disobedience to parents has always been regarded by God as a sin; indeed it is placed alongside other terrible sins in Romans 1:29–31. Parents have a responsibility to teach their children to obey. When they do, they help assure that their children are more likely to have a long and abundant life. There comes a time in our society when children are not expected to obey their parents; there never comes a time when children are not supposed to respect and honor their parents.

Notice that responsibility for the parent/child relationship is not one-sided; parents are told: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may lose heart” (Colossians 3:21). Parents are to lead, guide, and teach their children, to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). At the same time, parents are not to “provoke their children”—they are not to be unfair, unduly harsh, or make their children angry unnecessarily.

But the main point is that Christianity is to influence the relationship between parents and children. Your Christianity must apply to the way you relate to your parents or to your children! Adding this to the previous requirement, it is obvious that Christianity is not one compartment and the family another. Christ’s religion must affect family relationships, or it is not really Christ’s religion!

The Relationship Between Slaves And Masters

Of course, there are not slaves and masters in America. Therefore, the best way to apply these instructions is to relate them to the relationship between employees and employers.

To slaves (we would say “employees”) Paul says,

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality (Colossians 3:22–25).

The instructions given to Christian employees are: (1) Do what you are told; obey your employers. (2) Christians should not work as a matter of “eyeservice.” They should not just work when the boss is watching and loaf when he is not around. (3) Whatever Christians do, they should work heartily and do their best. The advice “whatever you do, do your best” is biblical. (4) When you work, whatever is your work, whoever is your boss, you should consider Christ Himself as the boss! You should work as if He were watching, as if you had to report to Him, as if He were going to pay you for your work! Christianity should affect the way you work!

But employers also have a responsibility to their employees. To masters (we would apply this advice to employers or to bosses), Paul says, “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a master in heaven” (Colossians 4:1). Not only should employees give “an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay,” but also employers should go out of their way to be fair and honest in their treatment of their employees—for instance, to pay them a fair wage, to be concerned about their welfare, and to be kind to them.

Again the main point is that in the workplace and the marketplace, Christianity must have a place. Whether you are an employee or an employer, Christianity must affect your work or your business if it is to please the Lord.

The Personal Relationship Between Christians and Their God

Paul says,

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak (Colossians 4:2–4).

It is interesting that in a passage which speaks primarily of how Christ affects our relationship to our fellow man, Paul includes this exhortation to pray, thus encouraging us to maintain our relationship with our Father.

Paul also implies something about our relationship with others. He says, “Pray for us.” *This speaks of our relationship with other Christians*—a relationship which requires that we regularly

pray for one another. Missionaries or preachers especially need our prayers. *Paul also refers to our relationship to the lost.* Paul wants the Colossians to pray for him that he might have the opportunity to preach the Word and that he might make the message clear. This suggests that Christians should be concerned about the lost of the world; we should pray that preachers might find the opportunity and the right words to convert them to Christ.

Our Relationship With the People Of the World

He writes: “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.”

We all have friends and neighbors outside the church. We might think of those friends existing in our social world or in our business or recreational world. How should we act towards these people? Does it make any difference? Should we let our Christianity show or keep it hidden from them?

In addition to friends, most of us have contact every day with dozens of people who are not members of the church: the people you stand beside at the bus stop or in the elevator, the person you buy gas from, somebody you meet in passing in the mall and exchange a word or two with, the waitress who serves you in the restaurant, the salesman who waits on you in the department store. Many of these people we will see only once. Do we have to conduct ourselves in a Christian way around them? They do not know that we are Christians; what difference does it make how we act toward them?

Paul says that our Christianity affects even our relationships with people outside the church, whether we have known them all our life or meet them only once. How should we act toward unbelievers? First, we should act wisely, acting in a way that will best accomplish our purposes as a Christian—and that purpose is to influence others for good and, if possible, to win souls for Christ. Second, we should make the most of our time. In this context, this suggests that every relationship with an unbeliever—even if only for a fleeting moment—has life-changing poten-

tial. We should, therefore, take advantage of every moment to influence others for good. Third, we should make sure our speech is always “with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt.” Be careful what you say, all the time, to everyone, even if you do not know the person you are talking to!

Thus, Paul’s advice for our social relationships, whether longstanding or casual, is this: Use every opportunity to make friends for Christ by being kind and friendly and speaking graciously to everyone!

The main point is that in every social relationship with unbelievers, whether it involves being with people we have known for years or associating with people we do not know for only a minute or two, Christianity must affect that relationship!

CONCLUSION

Christianity must be pervasive. Christianity affects and improves every relationship. Someone said that if your Christianity has not done anything for your temper it has not really done anything for you. We might add that if Christianity has not done anything for the rest of your life—if it has not affected the way you live, walk, and talk every day—at work and play, in every relationship, then you are not really living New Testament Christianity. We might see Paul’s words to exhort us to make Christ’s religion pervasive in our life: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).

Christianity can help you succeed in every aspect of your life. That is what we meant earlier when we said that Christianity not only affects, but also improves, every relationship. If you do

your best to follow Paul’s instructions to be a good wife or a good husband, a good parent or a good child, then your family relationships will be improved. You will be happier and more successful in the family. If you work hard at whatever job you are asked to do, you will be more likely to succeed at work. If, as an employer, you treat your employees right, you are more likely to succeed at business. If you obey the rules for dealing with people outside of Christ by acting wisely and speaking graciously, you will be more popular and have more friends, while at the same time you will do more good for the Lord and His church.

In other words, Christianity has the power to make you a better father or mother, a better parent or son or daughter, a better employer or employee, a better friend or neighbor. Thus, Christ can improve every one of your relationships; He can make you happier and more successful.

Two things remain to be said: (1) If you are a Christian, have you let Christianity affect every aspect of your life? Or have you tried to confine Christianity to a small compartment marked “religion” which has no relevance to anything else? If you must answer “yes” to the latter question, it is time for you to repent. Change your ways. Begin to follow the New Testament instructions in all of your relationships. (2) If you are not a Christian, can you not see that you have so far denied yourself of the opportunity to let Christ bless and improve every relationship? Christ has the power to make every one of your relationships better. Will you not let Him do it? Will you not accept His invitation?