

DCF:

One of the more popular streaming channels on the internet is HGTV. Seen it? They have a lot of shows dealing with renovations. “Flip or Flop”, “Hometime”, “The Property Brothers” and “Fixer Upper.” Then there’s the PBS show “This Old House” that’s been running for years. People like to see how homes can go from being run down to show places. There’s just something about seeing progress that sparks interest in so many people’s souls.

But I’ve noticed something with almost all of those shows. It’s often not a simple, straightforward path from dump to palace. At some point in the show, a big problem is uncovered. “It’s worse than I thought” are often the words that come out of the host’s mouth. And then they cut to commercial! Of course you have to keep on watching, to see the problem and then how to fix it.

You know, our lives are kind of like those home improvement shows. God created us to be His temple. That’s how He describes us. We know that we have been infected by sin. We know that we need to be spiritually renovated. But do we know how deeply? Today we dig into Jesus’ words to us and find out that when it comes to our sinful lives, “**IT’S WORSE THAN I THOUGHT.**” There’s been some serious sinful smoothing that has gone on and today we receive godly clarity from our Savior.

So, on with the show.

Part One: Sinful smoothing

We haven’t moved since last week’s Gospel lesson. Jesus is still on the mountainside, teaching His disciples what it means to live their faith. Last week we heard Jesus start with the basics - who you are. You are salt. You are light. Live to glorify God. Today Jesus gives us a “thought” checkup, a deeper dive into God’s Law. He gives us a clearer picture of what it means to live as a Christian. In today’s section of Scripture, He uses four comparisons. He tackles the topics of murder, adultery, divorce, and oaths.

He points out to His disciples and to us that there’s been some serious sinful smoothing when it comes to these commands of our Lord. Now, don’t think that Jesus just took potshots against the religious leaders of that time. Don’t think that He didn’t know what He was talking about. He lived it. From the time He was able to attend worship services at His local synagogue until now, He had heard what the religious leaders were saying. Since He was also God, He could look into people’s hearts and know exactly what they meant and believed. And what did He see? Sinful smoothing, a definite disconnect between what the rabbis and priests were saying and what God demands.

He helps us see the problem by showing us the difference between the two. As we read through this portion of Scripture, notice the way Jesus states what the teacher say and then what He says. “**You have heard it said...**” - that’s the false teaching. Then, “**But I say to you...**” - that’s God’s clear direction for life.

As you roll these verses over in your mind, notice the common thread binding these four false teachings together. There’s a narrowing of God’s commands, a smoothing over of sin. Only sins of action are considered sinful. You only break the 5th commandment if you kill someone, not if you hate them or call them names. You only break the 6th commandment if you fail to give your ex a divorce certificate. You only break the 2nd commandment if you swear by God. All of these false teachings, the “**You have heard it said**” ones, eliminate sins of thought and word. Sinful smoothing.

Our sinful nature likes to do the same thing, lulling us to sleep by modifying the commands of our Lord. We like to think that we are basically pretty good. I haven’t shot my neighbor. I’ve been nice to him most times. I didn’t yell at my boss, even though he’s a jerk and doesn’t know what he’s talking about. I haven’t had an affair or beat my kids. All my actions in life have been pretty good, right? Plus, any thoughts I have are stored safely in my mind. I’m not hurting anyone if I think some not so good thoughts, so I’m doing fine with God. Right? And even if I’ve done some not so God-pleasing things, I had a good reason for doing them. After all, God wants me to be happy. Right? Plus, today’s culture says it’s ok to call someone a fool if they deserve it. It’s ok to gossip and try and ruin someone’s reputation. It’s ok to switch out marriage partners if that’s what makes you happy. It’s ok to break your promises and use God’s name to further your selfish

plans. ***“You have heard it said,”*** by our sinful nature, the world and Satan himself. Did God really say these things are wrong?

When we have your sinful nature, the world and the devil trying to blind us, Jesus steps in and shows us our lives are even worse than you thought. Today He gives us Godly clarity.

Part Two: Godly clarity

When God demands perfection from us, He’s not just talking about our actions. When He says we are to ***“love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your mind and love your neighbor as yourself,”*** He’s commanding us to live for Him in our thoughts, words and actions. Not just one or two, but all three. God shows us our lives are worse that we often think.

We sin against the 5th commandment when we carry a grudge. We sin against the 5th when we slam someone else’s reputation. We sin against the 5th when we wish something evil would happen to him. And then when something bad does happen, inside we’re happy. “Yeah, he got what he deserved” and we kick him when he’s down.

We sin against the 6th commandment when we fantasize about being with someone not our marriage partner. We sin against the 6th when we dream about what life would be like living with that other person. We sin against the 6th when we divorce our marriage partner for any reason other than infidelity or desertion. “He doesn’t make me happy.” “Our life together isn’t turning out the way I want it to.” “I didn’t know that living with him would be so hard.” So, we divorce. The world tells us it’s ok. Our sinful nature tells us it’s ok. God tells us we have sinned against Him.

God shows us we sin against the 2nd Commandment when we use His name to back up some trivial statement that we make. “I caught a fish this big, swear to God.” “I’ll never go back on my promise, swear to God.”

It’s worse than I thought. God makes that very, very clear. We are infected by sin, deadlier than the corona virus, deadlier than cancer. All of our thoughts, words and actions are imperfect, tainted by sin. By ourselves, we are unacceptable to God. If you think you are good enough to get into heaven, you’re not.

God saw our poor, miserable condition and understood our problem. He did not sweep our sins under heaven’s rug. He didn’t decide to ignore the awful way we treated His perfectly reasonable demand to be perfect. He stepped in and saved us from ourselves. He sent Jesus to suffer the pain of sin’s eternal punishment for us. He sent Jesus to live that perfect life which He wraps around each and every believer. He sent the Holy Spirit to create a saving faith that grabs hold of God’s gift of forgiveness. He saved us.

When we look at our lives in the mirror of God’s Law, we have to admit that our lives are even worse than we thought. But when we look at our souls in the light of God’s Gospel, we see that our lives are even better than we could ever expect or imagine. We are saved children of the heavenly Father, bound for heaven because of the work of Jesus Christ. How awesome is His gift! How delightful knowing that He loves us with an almost incomprehensible love!

It is that awe, that delight at our salvation that moves us to say thanks by striving to live a life that pleases Him. Out of thanks, we strive to get rid of all those grudges, those thoughts of payback towards someone else. When those thoughts come creeping into your mind, remember Jesus’ prayer. ***“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”*** When 6th commandment sins come sneaking into our minds, remember God’s encouragement to ***“keep yourselves pure”***. When tempted to use God’s name in a trivial way, remember ***“whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”***

As we look back on the last months of our lives, in the light of today’s Scripture lesson, we must admit ***“IT’S WORSE THAN I THOUGHT.”*** By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we eliminate the sinful smoothing that has infected our lives and with Godly clarity live for Him as His children. May our Christian lives tomorrow be better than we expected.

By the grace and power of God, may it be so.

AMEN