

The Christian's Life

Completely corrupt
 Completely cleansed
 Completely committed

I would guess that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the world's most famous sermon. I would also guess that it's the most misunderstood sermon. So many think of it as rules for membership in God's kingdom. If you want to be a Christian, then here's your checklist. Not quite. Huge crowds saw Jesus' miracles and were convinced that he was the promised Messiah, the Savior they were waiting for. Jesus wanted to make sure they understood what it meant to follow him. It was not always going to be easy. Although they would be blessed, they would still suffer. Christians are to live differently than the immoral world around them. They would be salt and light for the world. This morning, Jesus focuses on the 5th, the 6th and the 2nd Commandments to give some very specific examples of what he means by living differently than unbelievers. He describes for us The Christian's Life.

Completely corrupt

To get into this section of the sermon, let's look at what Jesus said one verse earlier, verse 20, **"I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."** The Pharisees and teachers of the law aimed at living a perfectly moral life and were convinced that they made it. The people listening to Jesus' sermon must have thought, "There's no way we can be better than them. It's impossible." Heaven has some very high standards.

When I witness to people, I ask them why they hope to get into heaven. One of the most common answers people give is, "Well, I'm a pretty good person. I haven't done anything really bad, like murder." That's how the Jews at Jesus' time felt. They thought that because they did not physically stop someone's heart from beating that they had kept the 5th Commandment. Jesus explained that God is not just concerned about actual murder. He is also concerned about our attitude, our heart.

Last summer in Milwaukee, two men who knew each other were visiting in a park. They started arguing about some issue and neither would back down or cool down. One of them pulled out a gun and killed the other. Lack of love for others led to a death. In verse 21, Jesus spoke about being angry with someone or using insulting language such as **"Raca [an expression at that time],"** like, "You moron!" today. Jesus explained in verse 23 and 24 that if you are harboring anger or hatred in your heart or holding a grudge against someone thinking, "I don't like them," then you can't really worship God properly. God wants us to be kind, loving, understanding and patient with others. If we are harboring anger

and hatred in our heart, then that means that we have some heart trouble. All of us have struggled with this. We are not living the a Christian's life.

Jesus continued by discussing the gift of marriage in :27-32. The common understanding at the time of Christ was that you could do and say a lot of dirty things, as long as you did not jump into bed with someone who was not your spouse. Jesus says, "Wrong." People also thought that if you got upset with your wife for some selfish reason – maybe you don't like her cooking or maybe she criticized you for your bad habits – you could divorce her as long as you filed the proper paperwork. Again, Jesus says, "Wrong."

Our culture is just as corrupt when it comes to marriage and the gift of sex, some even trying to change their bodies from the gender God gave them. Prime time television shows and movies show people getting into bed with all sorts of people. And nearly every week you hear about some celebrity who is getting another divorce. All of us have loved ones who have gone through a divorce. It's tragic. It shakes people to their foundation and leaves a scar on their heart. Just because a divorce might be legal does not always make it right. There are proper and improper reasons for a divorce. Jesus explains that even looking at another woman inappropriately is wrong. It's committing adultery in your heart. God's thinking certainly clashes with the world. We are told that sex sells. Women show off their bodies. Guys look and leer. The internet pops smut up on our screens. Living together before marriage and selfish divorce are accepted and nearly expected. So many married couples clash instead of cooperate with each other. These are serious matters.

Just like surgeons will cut out the cancer from a diseased body, Jesus says that it would be better to pluck out your eye or chop off your hand than to continue in that sin and suffer eternally in hell. But, of course, plucking out our eyes or chopping off our hands is not getting to the root of the problem. It begins with lust in the heart that is part of our sinful nature. It leads us to approve of dirty jokes, to look with longing, to cross the line. Our culture has corrupted our attitude and actions. We are not perfectly pure. We are not living a Christian's life.

Jesus continues by discussing the 2nd Commandment, **"Do not misuse the name of the Lord, your God."** The Jews were so careful about this that they did not even speak the syllables of God's name. Instead of swearing by God's name, they would swear by heaven, or by God's throne, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem. They thought that was getting around the commandment. But God knew the intention of their heart and they were still guilty.

This sin is so common in our society that no one seems to notice or care. I hear little children cursing and swearing. How often don't you hear others, or even yourself saying, "Oh, my God!" or, "Good Lord!" or texting "OMG!" Our bad language is highly offensive to our holy God. It's like wiping your feet on our country's flag. It's disrespectful. It's serious. It's just as bad as speaking the

words of worship or singing the hymns but not having your heart engaged, or saying the Lord's Prayer or the traditional Table Prayer without even concentrating on what you're saying. All of us have done that lots. Again, we are guilty. We are not living a Christian's life.

Jesus told his listeners that for these sins, they deserved to be on trial before the Sanhedrin (:22), to suffer hell (:22), to be arrested (:25), to have your whole body suffer hell (:29, 30). As read these words, my heart started to shiver. I'm guilty. I deserve to be condemned in this way. We are all completely corrupt.

Completely cleansed

I don't think anyone of us would be comfortable letting others read our thoughts or look into our hearts. We would be ashamed of the sinful thinking that lurks inside of us. Sometimes, we even surprise ourselves that such thoughts would pop into our minds, sometimes even in our dreams. We do not want people knowing what is really inside of us. But Jesus did not hesitate. He made a habit of letting people know what was really inside him. When men sat on his chest and pounded spikes through his flesh, what came out of him was not anger. It was (Luke 23:34), "**Father, forgive them.**" When he opened his eyes to how unspeakably horrible our world can treat God, when he saw a world that gets serious sick pleasure out of divorcing itself from him, he did not divorce himself from the wicked world. He sacrificed himself to it.

When Jesus was crushed by people who hated him, when he was broken and bleeding and dying, he showed us exactly who God really is, as St. John explained (1 John 4:8), "**God is love.**" A few chapters earlier, John also explained (1:7), "**The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from all sin.**" Jesus' blood did not cleanse us from only some of our sins or only from part of the guilt of sin. It cleansed us from 100% of the guilt of 100% of our sins. You are completely cleansed.

Do not go through life worried that God is going to "get you" for your sins. Do not worry that God might not let you into heaven because you are not good enough. Did Jesus die for you? Yes! Your sins are forgiven. Did Jesus rise from the dead for you? Yes! You will also rise and live forever in heaven. You can smile to know that Jesus loves you, as an individual, as a Christian! As a Christian, you are completely cleansed.

Completely committed

So, you can see that the Sermon on the Mount is not a checklist of what we have to do if we want to be a Christian. If we had to be good enough in order to be Christians we would never make it. None of us could ever even get close to living a perfect life with perfect and pure thoughts. You did not make yourself a Christian. Through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit brought you to faith. He made you a Christian. God brought you into his kingdom. Instead of a

checklist for what we have to do in order to be a Christian, the Sermon on the Mount is an explanation of what a Christian's life will be.

We rejoice to know that God loves us, that he smiles at us and is preparing a special place for us by his side in heaven. We did nothing to earn that, but we can do something to lose that. We could just give into the sinful impulses of our hearts. We could just say that everybody else is doing it. We could just sin and not care about it. That's a real temptation. But then we would be walking away from Jesus, not with him. We would be going back to the smut and filth of a sinful life. Even though Jesus completely cleansed us, we have the scary ability to make ourselves completely corrupt again. Lord, have mercy.

Besides, what do you want to say to Jesus for completely cleansing you? "Thank you!" of course. When we live according to the 10 Commandments, we are showing God that we want to walk with him, that we appreciate him, that we are thankful for being saved. The commandments are not old-fashioned burdens, but godly guidelines for a blessed life. We know that the 10 Commandments are for our good and we want to "give back" to God for saving us. We're not going to see what we can get away with before we cross the line into sin. We want to avoid sin like the plague. It's deadly. We are going to show loving kindness to others, even those we don't like, even though they don't deserve it. We are going to love and honor our spouse and live a pure and decent life. We are NOT going to use God's name to curse or swear frivolously. We will use his name to call upon him in trouble, pray to him, praise him and give him thanks. We are going to be completely committed to live as Christians should live.

If you leave this service today and simply shrug your shoulders, "Meh. My life isn't that bad. At least I haven't murdered anyone. I'm better than most. At least I'm in church. I don't need to examine my heart and repent of any sin. I don't need to make any improvements in my life." If the devil puts those thoughts in your mind, then he wins... he wins your soul. BUT, on a hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus cried out, "**It's finished.**" He crushed the devil's skull. The devil has already lost. When Jesus rose from the dead, he proved that he won. He won you ... body and soul. You are a Christian. You belong to Christ here and eternally. We want to walk as a child of the light. We want to follow Jesus, using his commandments as our guidelines. We want to live a Christian's life. Amen.