

CLEANING THE HOUSE

The phrase “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” isn’t found in the Bible, but was first used by John Wesley in a sermon in 1778. Think about that principle for a minute. Do you agree with it?

Physical cleanliness doesn’t necessarily have a lot to do with godliness. Some people’s houses are immaculate but they are atheists! On the other hand, godly people usually try to be clean.

Here’s an interesting statement about “Dusting”:

“A house becomes a home when you can write “I love you” on the furniture.” I can’t tell you how many countless hours that I have spent CLEANING! I used to spend at least 8 hours every weekend making sure things were just perfect – “in case someone came over.” Then I realised one day that no one came over; they were out living life and having fun!

Now, when people visit, I find no need to explain the “condition” of my home. They are more interested in hearing about the things I’ve been doing while I was away living life and having fun. Life is short! Enjoy it! Dust if you must, but wouldn’t it be better to paint a picture or write a letter?

Dust if you must, but there’s not much time, with rivers to swim and mountains to climb, music to hear and books to read, friends to cherish and life to lead.

Dust if you must, but the world’s out there, with the sun in your eyes, the wind in your hair, a flutter of snow, a shower of rain; this day will never come again.

Dust if you must, but bear in mind, old age will come and it’s not kind...And when you go – and go you must – you, yourself will make more dust!”

So perfect physical cleanliness isn’t really essential, but spiritual cleanliness is different. The Bible doesn’t have much to say about the dust and dirt that accumulates in our homes, but it does say a lot about sin and its effect on us, and thus the necessity for spiritual cleansing. I think it’s true that spiritual cleanliness is next to godliness, and I’ll prove that in the sermon.

Let’s look at something that occurred in the ministry of Jesus just prior to the Passover preceding His death. [John 13:13-22]

Verses 13-14 ¹³ “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts He found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

Crowds of people swelled around the temple at Passover time. Jewish pilgrims came from all over Palestine to participate in animal sacrifices at the temple, so they found it convenient to buy their sacrifices nearby. Entrepreneurial merchants took advantage of this, selling live animals and birds right in the temple courts. Others found business opportunities in currency exchange. This marketplace in the temple courts reduced the space available for people to assemble in worship, and fostered a secular commercial atmosphere that was inconsistent with the holy purpose of those sacred courts. This contemptuous practice dishonoured the God of Israel for whose honour the temple had been built. Jesus had probably seen this activity before, and heartily disapproved of it. Now He decided to do something about it.

Verses 15-16 ¹⁵ “So He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves He said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”

He was amazingly forceful and pushy as He cleaned out the temple courts. Here was an action of bold spiritual cleansing prior to Passover. This was hardly “gentle Jesus, meek and mild”!

Verses 17-18 ¹⁷ “His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ The Jews then responded to Him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

It was done out of zeal for God (Psalm 69). Many were surprised and wanted to know what gave Him the right to do this.

Verses 19-20 ¹⁹ “Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” ²⁰ They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”

Jesus’ answer to them was cryptic.

Verses 21-22 ²¹ “But the temple He had spoken of was His body. ²² After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

This was a reference to His body. The temple is the body of Jesus Christ. The resurrection would prove His authenticity.

So what does the cleansing of the temple mean to us?

John 11:55 “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover.”

Prior to Passover, the people engaged in ceremonial cleansing. Matthew Henry’s Commentary says about this cleaning:

This was either, first, a necessary purification of those who had contracted any ceremonial pollution; they came to be sprinkled with the water of purification, and to perform the other rites of cleansing according to the law, for they might not eat the Passover in their uncleanness...Or, secondly, [it was] a voluntary purification, of self-sequestration, by fasting and prayer, and other religious exercises, which many that were more devout than their neighbours spent some time in before the Passover, and chose to do it at Jerusalem, because of the advantage of the temple-service.

The cleansing of the temple at this time makes a lot of sense when you realise it was the time of traditional individual pre-Passover cleansing for all the people.

The temple pictured the Body of Jesus (John 2:21). But we know the Body of Jesus is the Church.

1 Cor. 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

There's another beautiful scripture on this point in Ephesians 2.

Eph. 2:19-22 ¹⁹“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”

So the Church is the Body of Jesus Christ and the temple of God today. [Verse 22]

At times the new covenant temple of God, the Church, just like the ancient temple in Jerusalem, is in need of a house-cleaning. Providing that cleaning is one of Jesus’ jobs, just as He cleansed the physical temple.

Eph. 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

He died to cleanse the Church through His blood. He totally turned over the tables of sin and whipped the evils in our lives.

John 15:3 “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

Jesus is the Word and spoke the Word. The water of the Word of God cleanses us, the temple.

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

This is what the Word of God can do in our lives. Just as Jesus visited the temple and cleaned it up, He does the same in the Church today. He cleans up the Church and each of us, via His Holy Spirit and His Word.

It is important that we are yielded to the Spirit of God and looking into the Word of God so that we are being spiritually cleansed. We need to let Jesus knock over the tables of the sins in our lives. Things like telling lies, hating people, or looking down on them, gossiping, lust, jealousy, failing to be forgiving, unkindness, dishonesty, laziness...the list goes on. These are things God hates. God hates sin and so should we! Things like this hurt us, so we should destroy them before they destroy us! Zeal for the temple consumed Jesus—how much more is He consumed by zeal for His spiritual temple—our bodies? We should make whips of rope and turn over the tables of any sins in our lives!

This happens both individually and corporately. It happened to the Church as a whole in the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago. Another example was the reformation God brought about in our fellowship 30 years ago.

1 John 1:7-9 ⁷“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.” ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

As well as being cleansed by the water of the word, we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. It's interesting that water and blood flowed out of His body when He died.

How are we to participate in this cleansing? It's as simple as A, B, C and D.

CONFESS our sins, this verse says.

ACCEPT that Jesus forgives them through His blood.

BATHE ourselves in His Word, by Bible study (daily personal study), and listening to sermons. We have a bath or shower to remove physical dirt—so we can bathe or shower in God's Word to get rid of spiritual dirt.

DESTROY sin, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The temple was the dwelling place for God's presence. So our bodies are the dwelling place of God's presence through the Holy Spirit. The temple needed to be cleansed and dedicated to God, and so our minds need to be cleansed and dedicated to God. Don't allow the moneychangers and corrupting thieves of sin to rule in our minds. Knock them down and tip them over with the cleansing of the Holy Spirit!

The time of the Lord's Supper is a reminder to us each year of our need for cleansing that comes from Jesus, the zealous Cleanser of the House. As we look forward to Jesus' sacrifice covering our sins when we take Communion, let's think about how much we need it.

How hopeless we are at keeping spiritually clean! We can't do it without the help of the Holy Spirit. So let's be willing to undertake regular self-examination and bathing in God's Word, determined to allow Jesus to clean up the temple of our lives just as He cleaned up the temple in Jerusalem all those years ago.