

## “Mr. Clean”

### 1 Timothy 6:6-19

“Mr. Clean,” the bald, muscular, earring-bedazzled and immaculately dressed icon of all things shiny and scrubbed turns 61 this year. Since 1958, America has become accustomed to seeing him show up in commercials helping someone make things spic-and-span with his patented formula. And in these 61 years, he hasn’t aged much. He wears a white shirt, has white eyebrows, his arms are folded. He looks like a very clean bouncer at a nightclub — not a male version of a merry maid.

On the face of it, this is odd — a bald guy telling a woman how to clean house.

Reimagining this with today’s sensibilities in mind, it might make more sense for *Ms.* Clean to show up in the kitchen and share some tips with the woman of the house. Or, have Mr. Clean appear out of nowhere to rescue Mr. Husband from some incomprehensible mess on the kitchen floor.

Anyway — Mr. Clean’s solvent was originally created as an alternative to the caustic fluids that had previously been used for cleaning ships. Perhaps that’s why Mr. Clean looks like a guy who’s just stepped off of a squeaky-clean Navy ship in port from some exotic locale.

Then again, he might just be a pirate.

That description may be more accurate than we thought, given the fact that the price for products like Mr. Clean and other household cleaning supplies is inching upward. If you’ve been at the store to pick up paper towels, bleach, diapers, laundry detergent or even toothpaste, you may have felt like you’re getting cleaned out yourself.

Prices are increasing up to 20 percent on a number of cleaning staples. Big manufacturers like Procter & Gamble (Mr. Clean's parent company), Colgate-Palmolive and Clorox claim that the increases are necessary to offset higher commodity costs and to boost their profits.

Keeping things clean has always been costly, not only in terms of the various goos, potions and wipes we use but also in terms of elbow grease. Dirt and grime have a tendency to accumulate quickly, and it takes a diligent, determined and weekly effort to scrub, scour, sweep, mop, dust and wipe down all things domestic.

The same is true for our spiritual lives. Left unattended, our lives tend to accumulate a lot of harmful gunk that can really gum up the works and make it difficult for us to live freely and cleanly as God intended. If cleanliness is next to godliness, as our grandmothers often said, then the reverse would also seem to be true: a godly life is a clean life.

The cost for this kind of life is going up, too, as a sinful world seems to be intentionally spreading dirt into every area of human life via the media, angry debate and bad behavior. It's a world that can leave us all feeling just a little bit dirtier every day.

The same was true in the first century, and the apostle Paul acknowledges the need for some serious house cleaning, particularly in the church of which his young protégé Timothy was the pastor. The church had been dirtied up by some contentious people who had been stoked by false teachers who did not "agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness" (v. 3). The same false teachers believed that godliness was a means of financial gain, increasing their own profits (v. 5).

Essentially, these interlopers had pirated the church, no doubt trying to look squeaky clean in the process.

Paul thus gives Timothy a lesson in spiritual housecleaning that doesn't require an overstuffed janitorial closet. It's a lesson in simplicity, contentment and using the right solution.

1. *Simplicity.* One of the responses people have to the rising cost of household cleaning supplies is to seek simpler and more natural solutions. Vinegar, for example, is really cheap and can be diluted in water to become a miracle cleaning solution for windows, countertops, and killing weeds around the church – ask Mary. Baking soda has a wide variety of cleaning applications. A cloth rag is reusable and washable and can take the place of a bunch of disposable paper towels. It's about looking around at what one already has at hand rather than expending the resources to accumulate more.
2. *Contentment.* Paul's advice to Timothy is to do the same thing — focus on the resources at hand. “Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment,” says Paul (v. 6). In contrast to those who are addicted to their desires and the accumulation of money and stuff, which clutters not only one's house but one's spiritual life, Paul reminds Timothy that the real necessities of life are those that are the most basic and simple. Since we entered the world naked and leave it the same way (v. 7), everything we deal with in between must be put into perspective.

We are stewards, not owners; thus we must be careful not to put too much value on things that seem to be necessary but really aren't. Food and clothing are the essentials, says Paul (v. 8), and if we have those, it is enough. We can be happy and content.

*People who live simply live cleanly, and those who live cleanly live with contentment.* They are not dependent on anything other than God to supply their needs.

The false teachers, on the other hand, are slaves to their cravings and thus continue to accumulate the world's dirt in every corner of their lives.

3. *The right solution.* Many people think that money is the answer to everything. More money solves problems.

Actually, more money often adds to our problems.

But let's be clear here: Paul isn't running down wealth as a terrible thing. It's actually a great thing when it used wisely and with the mindset of a godly steward.

Pursuing wealth over godliness, on the other hand, can lead people into all sorts of temptation and trap them in "many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction" (v. 9). It's not money itself but the *love* of money that digs up all kinds of evil dirt that gets spread around in someone's life. It can lead people away from the faith — something which clearly happened to some in Timothy's community, leaving them "pierced with many pains" (v. 10).

The truly godly person, by contrast, understands that money is not the right solution for getting things clean. Godliness is not about money or marketing. The right solution is a mix of things like "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" (v. 11). Paul's list sounds a lot like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

“Gentleness” was a moral ideal in the Roman world and was said to be an especially important virtue for leaders. It involved calmness and moderation as opposed to the power and dissension sown by Timothy’s opponents.

Paul knew the difficulty of being a Christian in a hostile world, so he further encourages Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith,” appropriating the language of an Olympic contest to represent the moral struggle of leading well and staying clean in a world that is dirty and fights dirty. The prize for winning such a fight and coming out clean is the eternal life to which Timothy was called and for which he “made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (v. 12).

A clean life is modeled on Jesus, says Paul, “who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (v. 13). Those who confess Christ and model their lives after him can stand before anyone in the world, even the powerful and the accusers who would seek to judge them and remain clean “without spot or blame” until Christ returns (v. 14). The “King of kings and Lord of lords” will return at the right time and he is the one for whom we live, no matter how much dirt the world tries to pile on us or how much pressure the Pontius Pilates of this world bring to bear (v. 15). God is the real ruler of the world, the one who alone has “immortality” and is worthy of our worship (v. 16).

Paul goes on to say that if anyone does happen to be wealthy, it’s important for them to use their wealth in ways that are both godly and clean. They are to “set their hopes” on God, who provides all things (v. 17), to be rich in doing good and in generosity (v. 18), and to store up “the

treasure of a good foundation for the future” (v. 19). That’s the way to take hold of the “life that really is life” — a life in which godliness and cleanliness really are bound up in one another.

Paul’s teaching to Timothy encourages us to think about doing some of our own fall cleaning for our spiritual lives. What do we spend our time and money accumulating?

Is it worth it? Does it actually get us closer to godliness? It’s an invitation to do some inventory — are we content with what we have, and do we share our resources with others in need? Are we being overwhelmed with the world’s dirt and clutter, or are we focused on fighting the good fight of faith? Are we bringing in our stuff for the rummage sale next week or are we leaving it for our kids to clean out some day?

Mr. Clean would like us to pay a little more for his products these days. He might be a pirate, but then again we might not need all those supplies anyway. A truly clean life involves simplicity, contentment and the right solution.

No earring required.

May the peace of God . . .

#674 – Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ