Clean, Dirty, and Clutter

The antithesis of "clean" is, obviously, "dirty." The two are on opposite ends of the spectrum. Clean has its advantages, and dirty has its liabilities. Most folks actually prefer clean even if they are unwilling to put forth the effort necessary to achieve it. But through plain old laziness, they learn to tolerate, if not even in some ways enjoy, dirty. Clean takes significant effort to accomplish, and substantial effort to maintain. Dirty, on the other hand, seems to happen all by itself. While it certainly has its contributors- some in hugely significant portions and ways, dirty will spontaneously appear in the absence of clean every time. It's analogous to light and dark in that way. Without light, dark overshadows. And without clean, dirty dominates. But in between clean and dirty, there is **clutter**…

Clutter isn't necessarily clean or dirty, it's just superfluous- the extra "stuff." It certainly may become dirty, but it may be itself clean. However, the main thing clutter does is make clean more difficult to achieve. In this way, clutter- though it may be perhaps relatively clean itself, becomes the breeding ground from which dirty propagates, proliferates, and reproduces. This is so, not because clutter is necessarily dirty, but because it exponentially multiplies the required effort to achieve clean. In order to clean the dirt, the clutter must first be tackled. Just try to vacuum a room in which the floor is strewn with clothes, whether clean or dirty! The more clutter there is, the more arduous attention and extensive effort that is required to first deal with it. And such is not just a physical exercise either. Decisions must be made about each piece of clutter. Is it capable and worthy of becoming part of and being maintained along with the clean, or is it neutral at best or counter-productive to clean at worst, and therefore must be relegated to dustbin along with the dirty. Clean is not easy to achieve or maintain, but clutter makes the task next to impossible.

When it comes to house (or garage!) keeping, we all know, understand, and admit these things. But what about our "spiritual" houses? Although I refer primarily to our *individual lives* (as in 1Corinthians 6:12-20), the same is true for our *collectivities* (see 1Corinthians 3:16-17 where a local congregation is intended). Aren't the same principles at play?

Spiritually clean is not just preferable, it is vital. Hebrews 10:22, *"let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water."* In order to have the *sincere* (*true, pure*) *hearts* required for fellowship with God- either here or hereafter, we must be *cleansed* both *inside* (our *hearts* from an *evil conscience*) and *out* (our *bodies washed* with *pure waters* of baptism). Otherwise,

Spiritual dirt will also dominate. It doesn't "have" to be this way. We are neither destined nor predestined to it. But in the absence of concerted efforts toward cleanliness, spiritual dirt inevitably accumulates. As Romans 6:19 says our tolerance and/or *servitude* to *impurity* will result in *"further lawlessness"*- such is the pervasive nature of spiritual dirt and well as its physical counterpart.

But spiritual clutter can be just as much a hindrance to cleanliness, and just as much a breeding ground for dirt, as in the physical realm. Spiritual clutter is all the "extra" stuff that piles up in and dominates our lives. Like its physical equivalent, it may be neutral (neither necessarily clean or dirty), but certainly gets in the way of our efforts to clean and maintain clean. All the things with which we busy ourselves just seem to pile up to the point that we hardly know where to begin cleaning. And similarly, each piece of spiritual clutter must be first evaluated. Does it need to be retained and maintained as a

part of clean spiritual living because of its value to such, or should it be *counted "as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ"* (Philippians 3:8) to be swept up and discarded?

This process of "clearing the clutter," as difficult as it may be, is essential to proper spiritual cleaning, and the maintenance of clean spiritual living. So, *"let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us"* (Hebrews 12:1) by freeing ourselves first from the spiritual clutter (see 2Timothy 2:4), and then get busy cleaning. It really is worth the effort! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)