

You have probably heard the expression many times, 'Cleanliness is next to godliness.' We need to realize that sin is spiritually unclean in God's sight. He speaks of it as filth and corruption; it is as obnoxious to him as the decay and stench of death are to us. God repeatedly stresses in His Word the idea of cleanness and purity (e.g., Matthew 5:8, 1 Timothy 5:22, James 4:8, and 1 Pet 1:22). We read in Romans 3:23 that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Some of the dirt that covers us is very obvious to us. You may feel like the character 'Pig-Pen' in the popular 'Peanuts' cartoon; a cloud of dust and dirt follows us around continually. Usually we can tell when we need a bath; we don't even feel good unless we feel clean. The obvious dirt we make an effort to remove.

But some of our uncleanness is not noticed by us. Have you ever worked on your car or some other really dirty job, and found that after you had cleaned up someone told you that your elbows were filthy? You didn't scrub what you couldn't see. This can be pretty embarrassing! In Ecclesiastes 13:1 we read that "He that touches pitch shall be defiled." This reminds me of the story of Brer Rabbit, and shows the stickiness of sin. Have you ever decided that, although your carpet really didn't look dirty, you would clean it just for good measure. And then you were horrified at the black rinse water!

When I take off my glasses and look at them I see that they are covered with dust. I usually don't notice it because it is so close that I focus past it. How do my glasses get so dusty, anyway? If you have ever shown home movies or used a slide projector, you know that the air is literally filled with dust that you normally don't see swirling around. God can help us by illuminating the sinful nature in each one of us with His word. The problem with the carpet, the air, and with our own selves is that there are so many places for dirt to hide. It can be all through us and we might not realize it.

There are basically two types of cleaners in this world: surface and deep-down. I am mostly a surface cleaner. I pick up the obvious things: newspapers on the floor, glasses scattered throughout the house, clothes lying around everywhere, etc. As long as the surface looks neat, I conclude that the house is clean. Others are deep-down cleaners. They know that the carpet is dirty; the floors need mopping; the walls need washing. They dig out the real dirt from beneath the 'surface.' And it takes this aggressive approach to really get the place clean.

We need to realize that we have a similar problem in our soul house-cleaning as well. In Luke 18:10-13 we read,

*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

We sometimes get the wrong idea when it comes to asking for forgiveness for our sins. When we think of ourselves as sinners, we consider individual things that we have done that are against God's will. These are things sort of on the surface. I think that perhaps the publican was better informed. In contrast to the Pharisee's prayer of itemizing individual acts, the publican saw that the whole picture of his life was wrong. He was a sinner. He was deep-down dirty. It was a part of his nature, just as it is a part of ours. I think that at no time have we ever really been what God wanted, as far as being a companion to him and accomplishing the purpose that he set out for us. It is much easier for us to consider our 'sins' than it is for us to delve into our 'sinful nature,' just like it is easier to just pick up around the house than to really dig out the dirt. Similarly, it is easier to pull the top off a weed than to really dig out the root. And yet our 'sinful nature' is the root and cause of our sinfulness as we walk with him. Our point of attack in dealing with our sin must be shifted from outward acts to the inward soul.