

Should Christians Keep a Clean Home?

Tim Conway | *illbehonest.com*

Question: "Should Christians keep a clean home? Growing up, my mom would say things like cleanliness is next to godliness, which is not in the Bible. However, shouldn't Christians keep a clean and orderly home ready to receive people hospitably, and especially if they live with others out of the spirit of being considerate? Is there a biblical basis for this?"

Discussion:

Tim: Now, does the Bible say anything specifically about keeping your house clean? I know this, there's a text in the Proverbs that has often stuck out in my mind. And it's a text that has to do with the sluggard. Have you ever read where Solomon is basically indicating that he went by the field of the sluggard, and what did he see? Anybody remember?

(from the room) It was all overgrown.

Tim: Look at Proverbs 24:30. "I passed by the field of the sluggard..." Is that the same text or is there another text that talks about the wall being broken down? Is that the same text?

James: It's right there in v. 31.

Tim: Okay. Yeah, go ahead and read those.

James: "I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down."

Tim: Yeah, that's what I always remember. When I pass by stone walls or fences and they're broken down, it reminds me of that. And so, do you see a correlation? I mean, you pass by the house of the sluggard and what do you see? Is my lawn mowed before I use any examples? But you know, you look at people's lawns. You look at their house. You look at their shutters. You look at their fence. You walk in their house. You look at their automobiles. It says something about people. And so, does that mean that some people have messy houses... well, let's ask this question: Does it mean that everybody that has a messy house is a sluggard? No. There are some people that just aren't neat, and they're really hard workers. But, would we say that oftentimes where things are dirty, things are unkempt, there's dust all over, there's nasty looking carpets and floors, could that often be connected back to being lazy? You better believe it. So that's one of the questions that needs to come up.

I've been in a situation pastorally where I have been approached about one specific family on several occasions. And the question comes up. And honestly, I have never spoken to the family. And the reason that I haven't is because neither of them strike me as being lazy. In fact, they

strike me as being very servant-oriented people. And the way the house is kept by the ladies in the family meets the approval of the man of the house. So... But see the thing is if I'm going to intervene pastorally, I think it needs to be a legitimate enough issue. And look, it can become legitimate enough. You know, if you live next door to me and I don't take care of my garbage and I'm starting to get rats and they're going over to your house, you know, consideration might say I should clean this up. If I live in a neighborhood and I'm letting my lawn and my house go to pot so that it's devaluing your house down the street, or you know, I see you have a for sale sign in the yard, and I just throw my garbage out front. That's not being kind. That's not being considerate. I'm not giving thought to you. Certainly, if somebody's living in the house, you know we have Papa living in the house right now. You know, it wouldn't be nice if we just left that bathroom right there uncleaned for several months. I'm sure he appreciates that things are clean.

But here's the thing, I think we need to be careful that we don't take our standard and impute it to somebody else. We need to be careful there. Because there really isn't anything in Scripture (incomplete thought). You can't go to a text that deals with the cleanliness of the home. You would have to go to certain other principles. And you know, even the family that I was just referring to, they're very hospitable. And so, you know, if you're being invited over and you enjoy the fellowship, but you don't enjoy looking at the carpeting, you don't have to go, I guess.

James: So you made the comment that there's no text that deals with cleanliness in the home. Are you basically saying that Proverbs 24, though it talks about the exterior, you're saying that doesn't imply...

Tim: Well, I'm just saying this. That is specifically a text that deals with the sluggard. But I'm saying this, that just because a house on the inside doesn't meet my standard, doesn't necessarily mean that the people are lazy. You see, I think that's one of the things you want to consider: is the house not clean because somebody's just being lazy? But if the issue is that you talk to the husband and wife and this is paradise for them, and the husband's very happy with it and the wife basically keeps the house at his standard and they're all happy, it's hard to come in there and say, "Well, you're being lazy," when they're not lazy. It's just the reality is their standard is different.

And we all have different standards of cleanliness. Some of us shower every day. Papa says he used to shower a couple times a day when he was in the military. (incomplete thought) Some people need to shower more. But we have different standards of personal cleanliness. There are some people that their hair is all over all the time. Maybe you're saying, yeah, that's you. But whatever, we have different standards of grooming, of cleanliness, of our clothing - whether we look sloppy or more sharp-dressed. We have standards of: would you let a dog in the house and all the hair? But we all have different standards. So I'm just saying this, that if I'm in somebody's house and I'm noticing, man, there's cobwebs all over the place. And look at this carpet. This is really nasty. It's like the kids poured Kool-aid all over it all the time. But they're all happy. And it's not that they're lazy. They're working all the time. It's just not a priority in their life to clean the

dust off the blades on the fan. You know, I sit, I see things. It's like, oh, that looks dirty. When I see it, a lot of times, I run over, grab something, and make it right. But some people, they don't see that. It just doesn't register. They don't care.

James: Now in Proverbs 24, it says that the man lacks sense. So couldn't part of it be a lack of wisdom? A lack of understanding?

Tim: It could be. And I think that's the issue. What you have to do is find out what's the issue? If you talk to the people and you get the feeling they don't really lack sense, and they're not really lazy. It's just their standard isn't quite where mine is, then I've been minded to leave it alone.

But you know, I know that there's some other principles to look at. If they are having people over, if they're an older couple in the church, what kind of example is she setting for the younger women? There's all sorts of things to consider: example, hospitality, how it affects other people. But if you're in a situation where it doesn't affect other people, the only people it affects are your immediate family, and everybody in your immediate family just thinks it's great.

(from the room) What if the husband has a standard of cleanliness and the wife is not meeting that, but because she has little ones, does he have to live in an understanding way with her?

Tim: Oh yes, if that's the issue. If the issue is she's being lazy, now that's a different situation. But if the issue is she's in over her head, well, he needs to kick into gear and start helping, or he needs to hire somebody to help her. I mean, his life may be full too and maybe both of them are really full. And they just need some help.

(from the room) Talking about that, both Vange and I were sick, and Vange is very conscientious about leaves in the front yard and the grass and all this, you know. And we couldn't get out to do anything about it. One day I looked out there, and there was an angel out there blowing the leaves...

Tim: Did he have a beard? Was it a bearded angel?

(from the room) Who's that stranger out there? It turned out one of the brothers who came to rake the leaves for us. I was so thankful that the Lord provided.

Tim: Yeah, here's an example. Papa and Vange, they have two different standards. Papa says if he even drops a little something, Aunt Vange's right there picking that little thing up. It's like Papa almost likes to scatter confetti on the ground just to make it look more lived in. Right, Papa?

(from the room) Yes, she's very particular about being clean.

Tim: And that's the thing, some people are more meticulous than others. And so where do we draw the line? Is there a line below which you're now kind of in the realm of: it's not a good testimony? I think, but who's going to set that line exactly.

James: Even our city sets the line to some degree.

Tim: Right.

James: If you let your grass get to a certain height, you get fined or something like that.

Tim: Yeah, I think that's an issue is testimony. Those are factors that need to be brought in, but still even with that we have differences. We have differences of opinion there. And one of the things I would say that I have typically gone back to is I look at a man as really holding sway in his household. And you know, if his wife is measuring up to his expectation, I would be slow to find fault.

(from the room) I hate bringing it up, but I know this person probably sending that question lives in North America, and I remember a brother who traveled with you to Indonesia or one of those places one time. He said that he was really challenged by that aspect of cleanliness or lack of cleanliness in the home he stayed in. He said the challenging thing was how much these people loved the Lord and their Christlikeness, but the challenge was his discomfort with the lack of cleanliness. So I bring that up because if you're going to preach something or set a standard like that from Scripture, it can't just be for Americans. It has to be for everybody. So I think the principle stands like you were saying, it has to do with a heart issue of laziness. And maybe for them, being lazy is not shaving or something like that. Maybe some third world issue, third world country issue. So I think it's important to know that if it applies to us, it's got to apply to Christians everywhere.

Tim: Yeah, it's going to be a universal principle. And the truth is that there's a lot of other places in the world where our standard of cleanliness is extreme on the high end. Okay, we've got one more.

Just remember this. I put this down. "Unwashed hands do not defile a man."