

SONGS:
CLOSE:

Steps to Staying Clean

In Pursuit of Holiness – Part 1 of 10

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:13-16

AIM: To show that if the Christian is going to stay clean and live a holy life in an unholy world, the solution is not *isolation* – or more *information* – but *application*.

INTRODUCTION:

When my wife and I were called into missions, my wife's desire was that we did not get called to a country where she lived in a hut with animals under the floor or lizards, spiders, and rodents running through the house.

While visiting a church in a southern US state we were settling in our room and I was in bathroom – when I heard my wife scream, "There's a lizard in here!"

I assumed she didn't scream that because she wanted me to look up the word lizard in my Greek dictionary ... or start working up a sermon on how to minister to lizards ... she didn't want information—she wanted action.

I chased the reptile from the curtains and around the room until he or she scooted down a hole in the base of the floor. I blocked the hole and the dastardly villain was banished from our presence.

I came across an article in the US that reviewed how most people are actually willing to live with rodents and spiders and all sorts of pests ... this article revealed how researchers found that people will dish out hard earned money for exterminators – which means they'll finally get serious about getting results – only when the following pests have invaded their homes.

- 24% of adults will pay an exterminator to get rid of spiders
- 27% of adults will pay to have exterminators come out and kill ants
- 56% will pay to get rid of mice
- 58% will pay to get rid of roaches
- 90% of adults will pay to get rid of termites.

Now I gave you that research, not so much to tell you how many people will spring into action to get rid of which animal – what struck me was how many people were willing to live with them.

Half of them didn't mind spiders, ants, mice and roaches – and even 1 out of 10 were okay with termites turning their foundation into mud. Evidently it's really not that big a deal for them!

A. I found that to be an illustration and a warning for the believer.

How many Christians will live with something that doesn't belong ... with invaders ... with spiritual ants, spiritual spiders, spiritual rodents and spiritual termites?

In other words, how bothered are we with things that invade our hearts that do not belong in-doors?

Let me put it another way –

"What are you willing to tolerate and what eventually drives you to action."

I am convinced that what the believer needs today is not simply more information ... but application.

Where we arrive at the point where we not only declare the right beliefs, but also demonstrate the right behaviour!

As you know by now, if you've been with us in our study, the believers to whom the Apostle Peter is writing are living in a corrupt society where everything is tolerated; where anything goes – where right is wrong and wrong is right.

In the First Century, culture had become synonymous with political, economic and moral corruption; which meant, that for the believer, temptation wasn't being offered behind closed doors – it was bartered and sold and freely offered on Main Street.

B. So ... how do you handle that kind of culture?

- How do you handle relentless discouragement or temptation?
- How do you know what to tolerate and what to exterminate.
- Let me put it this way: how do you stay clean while living in the middle of corruption?

The Apostle Peter arrives at that intersection in our study.

If you have your copy of the New Testament, turn once again to 1 Peter. We've just finished Peter's introductory comments in chapter 1 that have been freighted with doctrinal truths.

Now we arrive at **vs. 13**, the place New Testament Bible students identify as the hinge verse that changes Peter's objective from belief to behaviour.

And before we dive in, let me quickly tell you that Peter's premise is fairly simple – if the Christian is going to stay clean and live a holy life in an unholy world, the solution is not isolation – or more information – but **APPLICATION**. Peter is now going to move us to take action.

What I want to do is break down these next few verses into what I'm just going to simply call, **6 Steps to Staying Clean**.

In fact, you could amplify it to read, Six Steps to Becoming ... and Staying Clean.

I. AND STEP #1 IS THIS: GET A HANDLE ON YOUR THOUGHT LIFE

A. Notice vs. 13 – “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind...”

1. The “Wherefore” is therefore based consequently for the cause on all the discussion we've just completed on **what to believe**, now here's **how to behave** – “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind...”
2. The verb “Gird up” in ‘gird up the loins of your mind...’ is so rare that it only occurs here in the New Testament.
3. This takes the reader back into the context of the Book of Exodus where the Passover is being established among the Israelite people, who've been held in bondage to the Egyptians for nearly 400 years.
 - a. Following God's command to them through Moses, each household has slain a lamb and applied some of its blood to the doorposts of their slave huts
 - b. They have cooked the lamb and all the Israelites are told – and I quote – “And thus shall ye eat it; **with your loins girded**, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand...” (Exodus 12:11).
 - 1) **WHY?** Because you're about to be freed from Egypt
 - 2) Your lives have been spared by the blood of an innocent lamb and you are about to begin a new life with new laws and a new home that is a land flowing with milk and honey.

4. To *“gird up your loins”* was a reference to someone in this ancient world, pulling up the hem of their outer garments that flowed to the ground – to pull the hem of their garments up between their legs and tuck the fabric into their belts. It would make movement easier ... faster ... less encumbered.
 - a. Roman soldiers always adjusted their garments and tightened their belts before running into battle to eliminate any restrictions from their outer garments.
 - b. Now what Peter does here in this text is transfer the idea of tightening up your clothing to tightening up your thinking.

B. Gird up the loins – notice – “of your mind”

1. This word *“mind”* refers to your thought processes and its disposition—i.e. a person's inherent qualities that reflect one's intent, nature and character.
2. In other words, tighten up the thought processes – get a grip on what you allow to invade your mind, and move into the home of your heart.

You could paraphrase this phrase to read:

- Tighten up the belt around your mind! (or)
 - Roll up the shirtsleeves of your mind! (or)
 - Pull your thoughts together!
 - Or as many a father would tell his sons ... “growing up—use your head! Think man—think!”
3. **By the way** – Peter is giving us the FIRST and important step in doing battle – because it is a battle that takes place in your mind.
 4. We do battle with those thoughts that surround you and me attempting to invade and infest our thinking processes, because they will ultimately inhibit us in fighting the good fight or running the race with endurance.
 5. This is exactly what Paul has in mind when he exhorts the believers in Corinth to be *“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5)
 6. Let us paraphrase the thought of our Corinthian text this way – **fit every loose thought ... into the structure of a life shaped by Christ.**
 7. If you want to be clean in the midst of an unclean culture, don't be loose in your thinking – mark it down—loose thinking leads to loose living.
 - a. Just ask Eve ... or King David ... or his son, King Solomon.
 - b. Tolerate temptation ... manage sin ... make room for it ... it's just a couple of ants ... it's just a few termites out in the garage ... they're not inside the house ... what can they really do?
 - c. **BE WARNED**—Those little thoughts ... those little mental invaders, must be dealt with, AND dealt with without mercy or apology or negotiation.
It's time for action.

Step #1: Get a handle on your thought life:

II. STEP #2: GET A GRIP ON YOUR EMOTIONS:

- A. Peter writes further in vs. 13, *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,” i.e. prepare your mind for action, “be sober” – not from imbibing spirits but ‘in the spirit of your mind’*

1. Peter isn't talking about being sober in contrast to being drunk or intoxicated—though that is the literal meaning—Peter is talking metaphorically about being emotionally self-controlled – about being sensible and composed
 - a. The word “*sober*” refers to being steady, calm, controlled – it can even refer to someone who is carefully weighing matters at hand.¹
 - b. You could render his command – stay level-headed.²
2. Keep in mind the first readers of this letter in the First Century – they had every reason to panic ... to stay up at night ... to overreact at every news release from Rome about what the Emperor just did or the laws the Roman state just decreed against them.

B. Peter says, “Be sober” ... in other words, don't stagger around out of control and lose your balance.

1. Yes, these are mind-reeling times, mind-numbing times, but Peter exhorts ... don't panic ... don't get carried away ... don't come unhinged by trouble ... don't lose your emotional stability in the face of hostiles or troubles or in unfair or insecure seasons of this life.
2. This is spiritually applying the words of that famous poetic line of “*IF*” by Rudyard Kipling written in 1909 giving advice to his son,— “If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs – you'll be a Man, my son?”
3. Evidence of spiritual maturity is getting a grip on the excesses of unbridled emotions.

Peter effectively writes here: Get a handle on your thought life – Get a grip on your emotions and ...

III. STEP #3: GET FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE:

Notice vs. 13, the middle part, “*and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...*”

A. We are to FIX OUR HOPE – i.e. pin our hope – on the coming of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

1. This command is actually the central verb or thought of this paragraph.
2. You can understand this verse to read something like this: *While you have girded up your minds and are currently getting a grip on your emotions, fix your hope on your future with Jesus Christ.*

B. FIXING YOUR HOPE isn't an emotional feeling – it's an act of the will.

1. We are to live expectantly ... live with anticipation of the glory of the coming Lord and our inheritance, which will never fade away.
 - a. In a very real sense, the Christian lives in the future tense.
 - b. In contrast, the world of unbelievers lives in the past tense or, at best, in the present tense.
 - c. The unbeliever is constantly looking for someone or something to place his or her hope in.
2. But for the believer, what excites us most isn't what happened yesterday, or what happens today, but what we know will happen in a future day.
3. We live in the future tense and our present actions and decision are governed in light of that future life we are to have with Jesus Christ.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Hopeful: First Peter* (David C Cook, 1982), p. 44

² Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, BMH Books, 1984), p. 91

If you're married, you may well remember that as soon as you got engaged, all your thoughts and all your actions and all your plans had to do with that future life with your bride.

Everything was interpreted in light of the fact that one day you were going to be married.

You treated money differently, in light of that wedding. You began buying things and saving things and building things with that day in mind.

After you get engaged – you started doing things I'd never done before.

Like saving money.

I heard of one fellow who worked for an entire day on a man's property and when it came time to be paid he asked his employer if instead of being paid in money could he be paid with an old table and set of chairs he saw in his garage gathering dust. The owner was somewhat dumbfounded, but agreed – happily!

Why in the world would a guy work all day for a table and chairs that didn't fit in his college dorm room? Because after graduation he was getting married and the couple would need chairs and a kitchen table where he would one day soon sit and eat his wife's experiments. Which were always delicious – He was thinking about his future.

My Kathi, like many a bride to be who waited for that special day to finally arrive, was collecting things in a cedar hope chest that her brother made – it was appropriately named – “A Hope Chest” – her actions and collection of things were now based on her future expectation when she would marry the greatest guy in the world!

4. ***You want to stay clean in a corrupt culture?*** – DON'T get bogged down in the past – DON'T get enamoured with the present – **BUT DO GET** your focus fixed on the coming of your bridegroom, Jesus Christ – and a future marriage supper of the Lamb

Rev. 19:7-9 says, *“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 8] And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. 9] And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”*

The Apostle John and the Apostle Peter must have been reading each other's notes, because John put it this way, *“but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is. 3] And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”* (1 John 3:2-3).

Get the connection? Staying clean today has a lot to do with where we plan to be – and it might be tomorrow that we will be there!

So ... Get a handle on your thought life – Get a grip on your emotions – Get focused on the future ...

IV. AND STEP #4: GET RID OF OLD HABITS:

A. Notice verse 14 – “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your **ignorance**...”

1. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts...
2. *“Ignorance”* here doesn't refer to intellectual lack of knowledge or information – as in, you didn't know that it was wrong
 - a. Peter is referring to a kind of moral ignorance in the willful, defiant suppressing of the truth so that you can convince yourself and those in your world that it isn't really wrong – but from a sinful perspective that it's actually right

- b. **Romans 1:18-24** – “...Men, who hold [down] the truth in unrighteousness ... 19] for God hath shewed it unto them. 20] ...so that they are without excuse: 21] Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; ... 24] Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts...”

B. But you – “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts...”

1. Notice the foundational relationship to getting rid of old habits is not being conformed to the former lusts.
2. We get rid of former lusts because we have a new family and take on the character and likeness of that family—“As obedient children...”

“But as many as received him, – Jesus Christ – to them gave He power [the authoritative privilege] to become the sons of God...” (John 1:12)

How many of you grew up with brothers and/or sisters?

How many of you parents have more than one child?

Have you noticed how they all are so entirely different from each other?

You see them grew up having the same mother and father, living in the same house, eating the same food, going to the same church, attending the same schools, and playing in the same neighbourhood. – *But oh, are they ever different!*

Each has different tastes and different personalities. Some were disobedient and some maybe spiritually minded.

In our family we had no set traditions on our birthdays – our kids didn’t have much money for presents, as missionary kids, although they seemingly never really thought of it ... but they loved Kathi usually making them their favourite cake. One would choice red velvet chocolate cake, another coconut cream pie; mine was always angel food cake – which fit my personality. HAHA! No actually it was Jewish Apple cake.

One kid takes piano lessons, I took clarinet and saxophone lessons, another like my wife learnt to play the accordion. I mean, how cool was that?! Think of what her future could have been?! Someone else plays football – where could you go in life being good at that?

Children all have different character and personality traits – they are all unique and sometimes worlds apart – however, there was one characteristic that was expected from all of us as children – *and that is obedience!*

Listen, we come into the family of God by faith in Christ – and we are all uniquely different in our personalities and our emotional wiring and temperaments and abilities and tastes – but ONE characteristic that we should all pursue alike is OBEDIENCE.

C. And what does obedience look like?

1. Well first, Peter tells us what it doesn’t look like – notice again, “As obedient children, **NOT** fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts...”
2. “Fashioning yourselves according to...” (this is a rare verb that appears only again in in Romans 12:2) – “And be not conformed to the world...” literally:
 - ⇒ don’t be squeezed into the mould of this world –
 - ⇒ don’t be fashioned by worldly fashion –
 - ⇒ don’t pattern your life after the pattern of this world.
3. Listen, the oldest argument in the world for defending one’s behaviour – and children start using it early in life – is that everybody else is doing it!

- a. I got news for you – God doesn't care what everybody else is doing. God already knows what everybody else is doing!
 - b. And it is God, through Peter, who is commanding us – warning us – encouraging us to fight against the **undertow** of the majority that wants to pull us out to sea.
4. And what is this undertow — this pattern and fashion of the world
In a word – **LUST**.
- a. Peter calls them, "*former lusts*" – which is encouraging by the way. **BECAUSE** Peter calls them *former lusts*" – this informs us that they ALL can be broken.
 - b. *What are they?* Well, this word for "*lusts*" is used often in the New Testament letters to characterize a life of sinful desires, the selfish pursuit of wealth, power and pleasure; evil longings, uncontrolled appetites, sensual impulses and all other unrighteous motivations and selfish urges that drive the unbelieving world.³

This characterisation is their pattern. Which is why whenever someone does something so obviously self-less, it makes news.

Like the news article from the Daily Herald in Chicago that ran a few years ago about two Newlyweds who lost all their money. This couple had left a black zippered case – the size of a personal calendar – on the roof of their car as they sped away from their reception to begin their honeymoon. The case had all their wedding gift money and other cash gifts from their parents zipped up tight in this black case. When they reached their destination it was gone. The newspaper ran the story. Two days later the same newspaper carried the headline, "Finders Keepers? Not Everyone Believes It." David Yi, an unemployed suburban resident had found the black case with the \$12,000 dollars inside. In spite of the fact that he was unemployed and had mounting bills, he tracked down the couple and gave it back to them. After this hit the newsstands, David was inundated with job offers – and why not ... employee theft is in the billions every year ... where can you find an honest employee?

For carpenters in Nazareth, one of their chief tasks would have been to carve ploughs for oxen to pull and yokes for their harness.

For several years, the Lord Jesus no doubt worked as a young boy and into his early adult years alongside his adoptive father, Joseph, sweating over planks of wood as he sawed and sanded and fastened.

It always intrigues me that Jesus could have waited until no one was looking and no one was around and He could have twinkled His nose or snapped His fingers or gave a word and poof – there's a perfectly constructed yoke or plough.

Why should Jesus sweat it out?

Because in His humility, He had chosen to accept the limitations of mankind (Phil. 2) and he showed us how to put in an honest day's work ... He laboured for 18 years or so, setting an example in a world that even then was governed by getting by with just enough.

I'm always struck by the fact that Justin Martyr, the second century church leader in Galilee, made an interesting statement pointing out that farming families were still using the ploughs Jesus had crafted, 75 years later.

What a model for a work ethic! What distinction in a world wrapped up in a quick deal – and shoddy workmanship.

V. CONCLUSION

³ Adapted from MacArthur, p. 66 & Daniel. Powers, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 68

Perhaps the first step in becoming clean and staying clean for you this week will be to put in an honest day's work – with excellence as your work ethic. THEN...

1. Get a handle on your thought life:
2. Get a grip on your emotions:
3. Get focused on the future:
4. Get rid of old habits:

Steps number 5 and 6 are for the next Lord's Day, the Lord willing.

Until then, we have plenty to apply for this coming week.

Are you deeply committed to living for Christ? Are you willing do anything God tells you to do. Will you allow the Lord to show you what to do? Are you totally open to God's leading?

—Such an individual would obviously be focused on the future; someone not wanting to be hindered by old habits or runaway emotions or loose thinking...

—Someone unwilling to tolerate spiritual termites to move in where they don't belong and eat away at the foundation of the faith. So, this week ...

- let's tighten our belts around our thinking –
- let's roll up the sleeves of our thought life –
- let's get a grip on runaway emotions –
- let's get focused on that future marriage that governs our decisions –
- and let's continue – even this week, to break off old habits that so easily and quickly turn into concrete slowing us down.

I want to close by praying the words of a Puritan who prayed centuries ago – in a collection entitled *The Valley of Vision*. But first, let me paraphrase this text we've explored together today by one author (Eugene Peterson).

"So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives. Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; [but] you do now."

Father, day and night are thine,
Heaven and earth declare thy glory;
Let me never slumber, never lose my assurance,
Never fail to wear armour when passing through enemy land.
Fit me for every scene and circumstance;
Let me never undervalue or neglect any part of thy revealed will;
May I duly regard the doctrine and practice of the Gospel
Prizing its commands as well as its promises [so that]
If I prosper I may not be unduly exalted,
If I suffer I may not be unduly sorrowful.
Balance my mind in all varying circumstances.
Lord, help me, for I am often lukewarm and chill;
Unbelief mars my confidence,
Sin makes me forget thee.
Let the weeds that grow in my soul be cut at their roots;
Grant me to know that I truly live only when I live for Thee.⁴

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⁴ Adapted from *The Valley of Vision*, (Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), p. 254