

Sleeping in the Church

Acts 20:7-12: “And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead”.

Eutychus did not only doze off while listening to the apostle Paul but also tilt over and fell right out of a third story window. Dr. Luke recorded this event so every generation across the entire world can read about it not to embarrass the young man but to caution us of the danger of sleeping in church.

Why do people fall asleep in church? There are six factors:

Religious tradition: Some of us came from a religion where our parents brought us to church, who unconsciously taught us to associate sermons with sleep when they allowed us to nap in their laps. When you allow your children to sleep during Bible studies or worship service, you are preparing them to sleep in church in their adulthood. You can break tradition or repeat history!

Material factors: Sometimes, the church facility is warm, poorly ventilated, and dimly lit driving us to feel drowsy and sleepy. Eutychus might have fallen to sleep because of the flickering lamps casting hypnotizing shadows and raising temperature of the room. Cooling the room might help but not completely since the real problem is not the building but the mental attitude of the believers.

Physical factors: Some easily fall to sleep because they are under medication, treatment or physiological factors that forced them to sleep. Most believers suffering from dreadful physical illnesses are able to concentrate than those without appalling pains and agony.

The pains and lack of sleep could easily be blamed for it but for most habitual sleepers in the church, that is not the case. The real issue is not the lack of sleep but the lack of concentration.

Eutychus might have been an over-worked house slave whose resting place was the window sill. He has no time to rest before the prolonged Bible study. If you consider the Word of God important, condition your body if necessary before any Bible study to avoid falling to sleep. Take a short nap or exercise if necessary. Physical exercise is always profitable to keep you awake during Bible studies (1 Tim. 4:8) but that is not the solution. What you need to learn is how to control your mental attitude.

Demonic beings: Fallen angels will do anything to divert and distract people from the Word of God. People who cannot concentrate and remain focus on Christ are in danger of becoming eternal losers simply because they sleep mostly during Bible studies. The demons can only create environment suitable for sleeping, but they do not have power to put anyone to sleep. The decision to sleep or not to sleep is your personal decision. You sleep because your old sin nature (the flesh) has controlled your soul; you do not need the assistance of demons to doze off (Mat. 26:21-24).

Personal factors: The lack of volition or personal interest for the Word of God and spiritual matters. The individual is simply forced to attend by some external factors but without respect for the Word of God. Some attend the Bible studies because they were invited by people they cannot refuse, others because they have different motives like to sell their products or to meet somebody.

Personal factors may include:

- Negative volition
- Not filled with the Holy Spirit
- Disrespect for the Word of God
- Wrong motives for attending Bible class
- Preoccupation with self and details of life
- Stubborn pre-programmed emotional response
- Deficient capacity and discipline to concentrate

Preacher factors: Majority of those who habitually sleep in church will blame the pastor. Some blame the poorly organized and rambling message, monotone delivery, too much time spent on needless detail; the topic is out of touch with people’s needs. Solomon has several suggestions for the modern day preachers: In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd (Ecclesiastes 12:9-11).

The job of a genuinely called and gifted pastor is to provide the congregation the knowledge or the Word of God that corresponds to every doctrine for the Church Age. The pastor can only give what he has already possessed in his soul. He cannot draw out epignosis (that is full knowledge of Bible doctrine) if all he has is nous (theological and academic knowledge) of the Scripture only.

Since the primary job of the pastor is to teach Bible doctrine, he must ponder upon the Word of God. His soul must focus on Bible doctrine, always dwelling on the truth of Bible of the Scripture. His thinking is centered on the Person and on the Word of Christ. He must refute traditions, myths, superstitious belief, and human viewpoint. He spends ample time in searching out (verifying the truth of the Scriptures by careful examination of the revealed truth (Acts 17:11). He refuses to accept new trends that are not biblical.

He tests every new teaching on the validity of the Biblical truth (1 John 4:1), and makes a careful examination of every doctrine before teaching it. The local church is a classroom designed for studying Bible doctrine in order to know the will and plan of God, not a place for meeting celebrated Christians or a place for learning cooking, baking, piano lessons, photography or martial arts.

He arranges his teaching systematically using the four methods (exegetical, categorical, historical and grammatical) for doctrinal studies, bringing out the truth without subtraction or addition to its essence, by selecting delightful words (appropriate and timely vocabulary) for good comprehension. The preacher and the listeners must be both spiritual (filled with the Holy Spirit and inside the divine sphere). The carnal pastor cannot convey the spiritual truth with clarity of purpose and the carnal congregation cannot receive, believe and perceive the spiritual truth apart from spirituality (see Tract No. 07 and 12) and positive volition (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

A good preacher is capable of driving the Word of God deep into the souls of the people, but who can stop the sleepy believers from dozing off except his own volition. All the above mentioned factors that contribute to nodding of people in church are avoidable and therefore not permissible. Your relationship with God is personal and you are personally accountable to God for your attitude toward God and toward His Word. Sleeping in the church is a temptation you must overcome if you are to advance spiritually. Add discipline to your desire and determination to learn the will and plan of God.

No amount of hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation) and homiletics (the art of preaching delivery) can prevent the believers from sleeping without spirituality and positive volition. Some modern day preachers are like Lecretius (Roman philosopher, 99-55 BC) who was able to discuss extemporaneously anything related to nature but nothing significant and essential to mankind. They can talk for hours without saying anything.

We are hooked by such captivating, glamorous, and gorgeous preachers even though they have nothing to say about the truth and spirituality. They are liars and celebrated entertainers who pamper the human arrogance. It most obvious that lying preachers could keep their congregation awake while the doctrinal preacher put them to snooze.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths (2 Tim. 4:3-4). It is very difficult to find a local church with a pastor who is preaching pure Bible doctrine, whose top priority is the spiritual growth and maturity of his flock.

If the preaching is all about myths, lies, human viewpoints, demonic doctrines and superstition the audience are all awake and alert. You seldom see a person sleeping in the gathering of the cults. But some genuine pastors have turned comedians. They have mastered the art of cracking jokes just to keep the people awake, and the only things the audience remembers are the jokes not the Word of God. Some have turned dancers and acrobats, they keep moving like a spinning top. Others have turned the podium into a chopping board every time they see somebody falling into doze.

It is not the job of the pastor to keep you awake during the communication of the Word of God. You must learn how to keep awake to get the maximum benefits from every doctrinal teaching.



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