Let Us Not Sleep

Sleep! How wonderful it is to sleep, when you've labored for a long time, and the weariness of duty has overcome the body! So, why would Paul tell the brethren, "Let us not sleep" (1 Thess. 5:6)?

There are three types of sleep, mentioned in the scriptures: Mk. 4:38, Jesus "himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion:" – a restful, refreshing sleep; John 11:11, "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep:" sleep indicative of death. The third sleep is that of religious carelessness and inactivity.

In Paul's admonition to the brethren, he identifies his use of the term by using a contrast, i.e., "but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6)

One aspect of Paul's admonition involves being prepared as a soldier. Paul said, "since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation:" similar to what Paul told the brethren in Ephesus, concerning their warfare.

Paul was accustomed to using warfare as an analogy for the Christian walk. Paul instructed Timothy to "war the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18), and to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). Paul referred to Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) and Archippus (Phm. 1:2) as a "fellow-soldier."

The nature of our warfare emphasizes the urgency of being awake. Paul told the brethren in Rome, "it is time for you to awake out of sleep" (Rom. 13:11), and to the brethren in Corinth, saying, "Awake to soberness righteously, and sin not" (1 Cor. 15:34). In a war where the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh (Gal. 5:17), where "fleshly lusts"…"war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11) we must give diligence not to become unconscious to the dangers we face. Just as Paul admonished the church of Thessalonica to "watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6), so also Peter warned the sojourners of the Dispersion to "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). In the world, individuals are warned to pay attention to their surroundings. Criminals are cowards at heart. They seldom prey on individuals that are aware of their surroundings. They prey upon those who are not paying attention,

and so is the case with the devil: “Be subject therefore unto God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam. 4:7). Let us not be asleep to the devices of our adversary, who, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Alertness must also exhibit itself regarding our consciousness of sin. Being asleep to a consciousness of sin was addressed by the Hebrew prophet, saying, “Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13). ret