

## Ephesians 6:18

### Introduction

In verse 17, Paul finished listing all the pieces of armor in the panoply of God. Now, in verse 18, Paul turns to the topic of prayer. The question is, what (if anything) does this new topic of prayer have to do with the theme of *“taking up” and “putting on” the “complete armor of God.”*

Many translations imply that there’s really isn’t much of a connection by making verse 18 the beginning of a brand new sentence, and even the beginning of a whole new paragraph. (cf. NASB; NRSV; NIV; NLT) So if we were to picture how Paul is thinking on paper, it might look like this:

<sup>14</sup>**STAND**, therefore,  
having girded your waist with truth,  
and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
<sup>15</sup>and having shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,  
<sup>16</sup>in all things, having taken up the shield of faith  
with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.  
<sup>17</sup>And take the helmet of salvation  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

<sup>18</sup>With all prayer and petition **PRAY** at all times in the Spirit,  
and with this in view, **BE ON THE ALERT** with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.  
(NASB; cf. NRSV; NIV; NLT)

Maybe you remember when we talked about “ing’s”, and how “ing’s” are participles? Sometimes, participles can be “their own man” and stand all on their own (which means we have to translate them without an “ing”). So if verse 18 is going to be the beginning of a new paragraph, the participles obviously have to stand alone (no “ing”). So the NASB translates: “With all prayer and petition *pray* at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, *be on the alert* with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” New sentence, new paragraph, new subject! But as a general rule, participles shouldn’t be made to stand alone if there’s some other verb they can “depend on.” You could say that participles are rather “clingy.” They’re always looking for some other word to hold on to. So let’s go back now and look at the big picture:

<sup>14</sup>**STAND**, therefore,  
hav**ING** girded your waist with truth,  
and hav**ING** put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
<sup>15</sup>and hav**ING** shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,  
<sup>16</sup>in all things, hav**ING** taken up the shield of faith  
with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.  
<sup>17</sup>And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...

See how the first four “ing’s” are all clinging to the opening verb, “*stand*, therefore...”? In other words, the “ing’s” are showing us *how* to *stand*. The “ing’s” are all, in a way, “commands,” but

they're still just serving the main command: "*stand*, therefore... *having* girded your waist with truth..." In verse 17, Paul drops the participles (the "ing's") and gives us another verb: "And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit..." But even this new verb isn't standing independent and all by itself (contra Hoehner). We wouldn't picture what Paul is thinking like this:

<sup>14</sup>**STAND**, therefore,  
    hav**ING** girded your waist with truth,  
    and hav**ING** put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
    <sup>15</sup>and hav**ING** shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,  
    <sup>16</sup>in all things, hav**ING** taken up the shield of faith  
        with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.  
<sup>17</sup>And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...

Even this new verb ("and *take*") is still telling us *how* to *stand* by giving us two more pieces of armor. Even though it's a main verb, it's still doing the same thing as all the other "ing's." OK. So now, in verse 18, what we actually have is two more clingy "ing's" – two more participles.

<sup>14</sup>**STAND**, therefore,  
    hav**ING** girded your waist with truth,  
    and hav**ING** put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
    <sup>15</sup>and hav**ING** shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,  
    <sup>16</sup>in all things, hav**ING** taken up the shield of faith  
        with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.  
<sup>17</sup>And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...

<sup>18</sup>through all prayer and petition, **pray**ING**** at all times in the Spirit,  
and to this end **be**ING** watchful** with all devotion and petition for all the saints,

So now the question is this: What are they clinging to? (We assume they *are* clinging to something!) They could be clinging to the most recent verb: "And *take* the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit." But then the most recent verb ("take") is itself clinging to the opening verb ("stand") all the way back in verse 14! So it seems like, really, these new "ing's" are actually clinging to the *entire previous section*. They're not just giving us another piece of armor (as some have suggested). Instead, since the new "ing's" are clinging to the whole entire previous section, we could picture what Paul is thinking like this (cf. ESV; NASB marginal note; NET note; O'Brien; Lincoln):

<sup>14</sup>**STAND**, therefore,  
    hav**ING** girded your waist with truth,  
    and hav**ING** put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
    <sup>15</sup>and hav**ING** shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,  
    <sup>16</sup>in all things, hav**ING** taken up the shield of faith  
        with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

<sup>17</sup>And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,  
<sup>18</sup>*through all prayer and petition, pray**ING** at all times in the Spirit,  
and to this end be**ING** watchful with all devotion and petition for all the  
saints.*

In other words, what Paul is saying is that in order to *stand* we must be taking up and putting on the complete armor of God... and in order to take up and put on the complete armor of God and stand, we must be staying always watchful and alert in prayer. (cf. Lincoln) Everything we've just talked about for the last seven weeks is only *possible* with prayer. And yet with, and through, prayer, all things *are* possible – *especially* the taking up and putting on of the complete armor of God so that we might stand in the battle. One commentator says: “Paul wants his readers to understand that prayer is ‘foundational for the deployment of all the other weapons’, and is therefore crucial if they are to stand firm in their spiritual struggle.” (O’Brien; quoting Arnold) Very simply, it’s impossible to truly and fully take up and put on the complete armor of God apart from prayer. And more than anything else, this reminds us that the intense struggle that faces us every day (and some days more than others) is always and only ultimately *spiritual*. Apart from prayer, we cannot *stand*—apart from prayer, no one has ever stood—because apart from prayer, it’s simply not possible for anyone to take up and put on the armor of God.

But maybe we have a too restricted, and a too deficient view of prayer? Think about this: How is it that we are saved? Isn’t it through prayer? – Not so much the “repeat after me” “formula prayer,” but through that heart-prayer of simply calling on the name of the Lord.

✓ Romans 10:12–13 — The same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Apart from prayer—apart from that heartfelt calling on the name of the Lord—no one has ever been *saved*. And yet from that initial “calling on the name of the Lord”—from that initial cry of “prayer”—should naturally flow a whole lifestyle of prayer – a whole lifestyle of truly calling upon His name. And so Paul says:

**I.** “through ALL PRAYER and PETITION, PRAYING at **ALL** times in the Spirit,  
and to this end being watchful with **ALL** devotion and PETITION for **ALL** the saints.”

Prayer... petition... praying... petition... All... all... all... all... “ALL PRAYER and PETITION, PRAYING at **ALL** times... with **ALL** devotion and PETITION for **ALL** the saints.” What is this? Truly, it must be a *life* of calling upon the Lord. See what great lengths Paul goes to in order to emphasize and point out to us the vital, desperate importance of prayer. First, Paul refers to prayers and petitions of all different *kinds* – in other words, for all different kinds of things. Then Paul speaks of praying at all *times* – so in all different circumstances, whether good, or bad, or anywhere in between. Third, Paul speaks of being watchful with all *devotion* and petition – so praying earnestly and with unwearied persistence. And finally, Paul speaks of petition for all the *saints* – so prayer not only for ourselves, but for everyone who is fighting in the same battle. To sum up: prayer for all things, in all circumstances, with all devotion, and for all the saints. In other words, prayer is to be the ubiquitous, ever-present, all

pervasive, language and experience of every Christian. And prayer not as some existential feeling of communion with God, but as a very real, very nitty-gritty, very practical calling upon His name for *all things* necessary for the daily battle – for *all things* necessary in order that we may stand.

So we pray and petition God that we might *know* and be *rooted in the truth*, that we might live every day in true obedience and righteousness, that we might have the preparedness and calm assurance that comes from knowing we are at peace with God, that we might have a constant increase in faith and take God always at His word, that we might be filled with the joyful and confident expectation of our future salvation, and that we might be faithful to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Not only this, but in the “taking up” and “putting on” of all these things (made possible *through* prayer), we do so in the constant attitude and continual expression of dependent prayer.

We cry out to God, petitioning Him and asking Him for all these things *at all times and in every different kind of circumstance* because we know that however the circumstances in our lives may change, the intensity of the struggle never, ever goes away. Satan can throw the fiery darts of ease and comfort just as well as hardships and trials. He can attack us with spiritual pride and self-sufficiency just as well as with discouragement and despair. Calvin says: “Paul therefore desires us to allow no opportunity to pass,—on no occasion to neglect prayer; so that *praying always* is the same thing with praying both in prosperity and in adversity.”

We cry out to God, petitioning Him and asking Him for all things necessary to stand in the intense struggle, at all times and in every different kind of circumstance, and not only for ourselves, but also for others and in light of all the different circumstances that all of God’s saints are facing at all times all around us. As one commentator says: “[We] need the intercession of fellow Christians if [we] are to stand firm in the thick of battle.” (O’Brien) Praying for one another, petitioning God on behalf of one another, is such a desperately important thing. It’s one of the means that God has ordained to assure us of the victory. So we can know that when we call upon the name of the Lord for those around us, those prayers and petitions are never in vain.

Prayer and petition for all things necessary to the battle, in all circumstances, with all devotion, and for all the saints is the calling of *every* Christian. And so putting all of this together, we can only conclude that there is never a single moment of our lives that need ever be passed without prayer. (cf. Calvin) Paul says in 1 Thessalonians:

✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:17 — Pray without ceasing.

And then in Colossians chapter four:

✓ Colossians 4:2 — Continue steadfastly in prayer.

As one commentator says: “Nothing less is suggested than that the life and strife of the saints be one great prayer to God, that this prayer be offered [ever new and afresh], however good or bad

the circumstances, and that this prayer [be occupied with] the need... of all the saints.” (Barth; quoted in Lincoln)

Now is it possible that we’re beginning to feel burdened? Is it possible that we’re wondering how we can ever maintain such a constant and unceasing spirit, and attitude, and lifestyle of prayer? Paul says:

## **II. “through all prayer and petition, praying at all times *IN THE SPIRIT*...”**

Prayer is not a work of the flesh. Prayer is not a duty that can ever be fulfilled in the flesh. True prayer – the kind of constant, unceasing prayer that Paul is talking about here – can only ever happen “in the Spirit.” In other words, this prayer is only possible as it is inspired, and prompted, and enabled by the Spirit. (cf. Lincoln; O’Brien). As one commentator says, this is “prayer that the Spirit has given the believer strength to utter.” (Thielman) But too often, and perhaps even most often, we approach the task of prayer without any awareness that even in prayer itself, we are entirely and wholly dependent on the Spirit. And so we speak words that feel like they’re going nowhere. We weary quickly. We pray without earnestness and zeal.

And so now maybe we’re saying to ourselves, “How do we *get* the Spirit?” “How do we *tap in* to the Spirit when we pray?” “How do we *make it happen*?” But, of course, it’s not like that. It’s not some magic button we push. It’s really just recognizing by faith who we are, and who it is that *already* dwells within us through faith in Christ. Paul says in Romans chapter eight:

- ✓ Romans 8:15 — For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry [out], “Abba! Father!”

That’s prayer. That’s what all of prayer is to be at its heart – the “crying out” of “Abba! Father!” The simple, heartfelt, and sincere calling upon the name of the Lord. And this “cry” of “Abba! Father!” is always inspired, and prompted, and enabled by the Spirit – the one who is constantly bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God (cf. Rom. 8:16). This is what it means to pray in the Spirit. In fact, it’s those words “*in the Spirit*” that really show us what prayer *is*.

If our prayers are all inspired and enabled by the Spirit, then this also assumes that they are guided and directed by the Spirit. In other words, it’s the Spirit of adoption as sons who leads us into praying for the things that sons and daughters of the heavenly Father pray for. When Paul says that we’ve received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out, “Abba! ***Father!***”, this naturally brings to mind the Lord’s prayer in Matthew chapter six:

- ✓ Matthew 6:9–13 — “Our ***Father***, [who is] in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We can think of the things that Paul has already prayed for in Ephesians – things like spiritual enlightenment and strength to comprehend and live in light of God’s love (Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-

21). These are prayers not only inspired and enabled, but also *guided* and *taught* by the Spirit. Jude writes:

- ✓ Jude 17–21 — But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, *building yourselves up in your most holy faith and **praying in the Holy Spirit**, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

For Jude, praying in the Holy Spirit means building ourselves up in our most holy faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. We’ve already seen that here in Ephesians six, our call to prayer is specifically so that we might take up the armor of God and stand in the evil day. But even when we don’t have the words, and don’t know what or how to pray—*especially then*—we can still pray in the Spirit – we can still cry out in the Spirit, “Abba! Father!” Paul says a little later in Romans eight:

- ✓ Romans 8:26–27 — Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Prayer is not a work of the flesh. Prayer is not a duty that can ever be fulfilled in the flesh. All true prayer is the crying out of “Abba! Father!” because we have received the *Spirit* of adoption as sons and daughters. True prayer – the kind of constant, unceasing prayer that Paul is talking about here in Ephesians – can only ever happen “in the Spirit.” It’s those words “*in the Spirit*” that truly show us what prayer *is*.

Prayer is not a work of the flesh, and yet it does assume the importance of being ever watchful and vigilant. Paul says:

**III. “Through all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the Spirit, and to this end *BEING WATCHFUL WITH ALL DEVOTION* and petition for all the saints.”**

For what *purpose* are we to be watchful with all devotion? For the purpose of praying at all times with every kind of prayer and petition. As Lincoln puts it, “The purpose of [being watchful] is to pray constantly.” But on the other hand, praying constantly is also the key to being watchful. I like what another commentator says: “Prayer causes alertness and alertness keeps believers in prayer.” (Hoehner)

In the Bible, it’s watchfulness and prayer, and prayer and watchfulness – they just go *together*. Paul exhorts us in Colossians to be **watchful in prayer**. (Col. 4:2) In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said to His disciples:

- ✓ Mark 14:34, 37-38 (cf. Acts 20:29-31; Rev. 3:2-3) — “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and *watch*.” And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not *watch* one hour? *Watch* and *pray* that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Almost always in the New Testament, this whole idea of “watchfulness” has to do with *staying awake* so we won’t be caught *sleeping* – especially since we’re living now in the last days, and awaiting the coming of Christ. Jesus says in Luke:

- ✓ Luke 21:34–36 (cf. Mat. 24:42-43; 25:13; Mark 13:34-37; Luke 12:37; Rev. 16:15) — Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But *stay awake [be watchful]* at all times, *praying* that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

So watchfulness means not getting bogged down in the affairs of this life. Watchfulness means not being dulled and deadened by the clamor of this world. As one person says, watchfulness means not being “entangled and absorbed in this world and age.” (Lovestam; quoted in Lincoln) Watchfulness means staying alert to our spiritual need and the spiritual battle that’s all around us. And the way we stay awake, and alert, and watchful is by constant prayer. And it’s for the purpose of constant prayer that we are called to stay always awake, and alert, and watchful.

- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:5–6 — You are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us *keep awake* and be *sober*.
- ✓ 1 Peter 4:7 (NASB) — The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and *sober* spirit for the purpose of *prayer*.
- ✓ 1 Peter 5:8 (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13) — Be *sober*-minded; be *watchful*. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

## Conclusion

Have we fallen asleep? Are we falling asleep? Are we bogged down in the affairs of this life? Have we been dulled and deadened by the clamor of the world? Have we become entangled and absorbed in this present age? Are we no longer alert to our spiritual need (the spiritual need of *all* the saints) and the spiritual battle that’s all around us? Perhaps Jesus would say to us today, “Could you not *watch* one hour? *Watch* and *pray*...” Or as Paul says:

- <sup>14</sup>**STAND**, therefore,  
 hav**ING** girded your waist with truth,  
 and hav**ING** put on the breastplate of righteousness,  
<sup>15</sup>and hav**ING** shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,  
<sup>16</sup>in all things, hav**ING** taken up the shield of faith  
 with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.  
<sup>17</sup>And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,  
<sup>18</sup>*through all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the Spirit,  
and to this end being watchful with all devotion and petition for all the saints.*