

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Strength for the Battle

Ephesians 6:18

Intro: We have studied every piece of the full armor of God, the armor that God has equipped every believer to use in spiritual warfare. We've seen that it is not so much the need to receive the armor, as it was given to us at the time of our conversion, but what we often lack is the daily appropriation of it – the taking it up and putting it on that most Christians fail to do. We've seen that each piece is strategically placed to defend or counteract every attack from the forces of evil and when we use them as the Lord intends for us to do, we not only bring the fight to the enemy but we also cause the enemy to turn and run. The full armor of God comes with a lot of benefits and with a few incidental consequences. I stepped on the scale this morning and let me tell you, the full armor of God is heavy!

Now, for the most part, people love a good fight. How else would you explain the long-standing popularity of boxing over the years? That drive to witness a good fight has allowed other contact sports to thrive like football, rugby, MMA fighting and kickboxing. I even went to a fight the other day and a hockey game broke out and ruined the whole vibe! We don't even really mind if the fight is "scripted." Professional wrestling is exactly that. Yes, people get hurt but for the most part, all the participants follow a script and know their place. It's real but it's also rehearsed.

Of course, so is every fight scene that has ever been filmed for a movie or television show. They've been showing fights in movies from the very beginning and that's what made them such a big hit. Sure, there are plenty of movies that focus on feelings and emotions but most young adolescent males just want to see someone get punched in the nose and they never really lose that desire when they grow up. Every fight scene is scripted and meticulously choreographed both for the actor's safety and the audience's pleasure because we want it to at least look real. But lately, the desire for realism has fallen by the wayside in favor of battles of a more super-human type.

Over the last few decades, the movie market has been flooded by and onslaught of comic-book super hero story lines. Now, this isn't the first time

comic books have been made into movies it's just the first time it has been done well. But the draw for the success of these movies is the deep seated human desire to be more than human, to be able to leap over tall building in a single bound, run faster than a speeding bullet or shoot webs and swing from building. We desire to have super-human power. In one movie, Batman was assembling a group of super heroes and one of them had the audacity to ask him what his super power was. He just said, "I'm rich." We laugh but if you really think about it; I have a better chance of being bitten by a radioactive spider and have that turn out to a positive than I do becoming a billionaire. So, he's got a point.

I think, down deep inside, we all would like the power to do more. We'd love to have access to super human abilities but we don't. Barring that, we may also dream of having access to some secret resource from which we can draw strength and ability. What Paul tells us as he gets to the end of his discussion of the believer's spiritual warfare and armor in Eph 6 is that we do have such a resource. Our secret resource is prayer. And what makes it so important is that the weakest Christian can at any period of their life at any moment of the day and in any circumstance cry out to God for help and instantly have the resources of the infinite, sovereign God at their disposal. Paul takes special care to emphasize this point because he devotes extra space to it. The other aspects of our warfare have been mentioned quickly and in passing. Now, he describes the need for prayer in greater length (18-20).

What Paul is telling us here is that prayer is the energy that enables the Christian soldier to both wear the armor and wield the sword. We cannot hope to fight our spiritual battles in our own power, no matter how strong or talented we may think we are or may actually be. Relying on the strength of the flesh to fight in spiritual warfare is always a losing strategy. When Amalek attacked Israel in Ex 17:8-16, Moses went up to the mountaintop to pray while Joshua used the sword down in the valley. It took both to defeat the enemy, Moses' intercession and Joshua's fighting skill. Prayer is the vehicle, the conduit that brings the power for victory in spiritual warfare; but not just any kind of prayer. Paul shares with us exactly how we are to pray if we want to defeat Satan.

Paul's actually implying a warning for us here: we can be clothed in God's armor—having the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, our feet

shod with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit—and still fail to triumph because we fail to call upon God. A great military disaster of the early Middle Ages was the defeat of the knights of Charlemagne. It's narrated in the Song of Roland. This story is so poignant because the defeat was completely unnecessary. Roland, the commander of Charlemagne's rear guard, could have called for help from the main body of the army merely by sounding the alarm. But he would not do it. Pride held him back. And, because he failed to call upon his secret resource, Roland's troops were massacred. Likewise, many Christians can trace the secret of a defeated life to prayerlessness.

18 – While the imagery of warfare doesn't appear in this verse, we should understand that what Paul is saying in this verse is grammatically linked and thus, is dependent on the instructions found in the previous section. Here, Paul instructs believers to pray and to stay alert. As believers are to stand with truth around their waist and righteousness over their chest, and as they take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, they are to do so while praying and staying alert. These 2 commands describe the mode in which believers are to conduct their spiritual warfare – in a posture of prayer. Prayer is like the army supply line that brings bullets and butter to the soldier on the front line. Without ammunition and food, the soldier has no strength or defense.

How important is prayer? Paul lets us know by repeating the word all 4 times in this passage, as if to say that there is nothing that can't be prayed for and that there is no situation in which prayer is unavailing. He says that we should pray always (on all occasions), with all (kinds of) prayer and supplication, with all perseverance, and finally, for all the saints. It is a helpful and comprehensive outline.

Let's start with the challenge to pray always, or on all occasions. Does Paul mean we should be praying 24/7/365? Not hardly, since that would require believers to cancel all other activities for devoted prayer time. No, this exhortation refers to a posture of prayer that should always characterize a believer's life. Meaning, in the midst of whatever other activities we might be engaged in, we are to always be, in a sense, prayerful. This posture of prayer means that we should always have an eye on bringing our concerns and requests to God. At any time of the day, if something upsets us, we

should pray; if something encourages us, we should pray. If something offends us, we should certainly pray before we start pointing fingers and issuing threats and calling down fire heaven. We are to be in a constant state of dependence on and acknowledgment of God's providence over our lives.

This explains why so many Christians spend so little time praying- we believe we are fairly self-sufficient. When we're upset, we'll take care of it, one wrong way or another. When we're encouraged or blessed, "Yay! Good for me!" We tend to think poorly of God's sovereignty over our lives, if we think about it at all. That is, unless things go real bad. When do you usually pray? I sure there's hardly anyone—Christian or not—who doesn't pray in the midst of difficulty. Even professing atheists will sometimes break down and pray if things get bad enough (clog). Sometimes they do it unconsciously, "O God, what am I going to do?" What's sad is that the prayer life of many Christians is often not much better than that. They'll pray in church; sort of (end?). They'll often give thanks before diving into a meal. But the times they really pray are when things go bad for them and they find themselves in some difficulty.

Now, I must add that it's not wrong to pray in sticky situations, and it may even be true that God puts us in some of these situations to get us to pray. But, what Paul's saying when he commands us to pray always is that all situations in life should bring forth prayer from us. If we're happy, we should express our happiness to God. If we're sad, we should pray about that. We should pray in work situations. We should pray on vacation. We should pray when we are with friends and when we deal with enemies. There should be no situation in life where prayers to God are absent.

But, because of the context in which Paul exhorts us to pray, we need to understand that there is a link between prayer and the Christian's armor. Paul calls truth a belt to be buckled around our waist. What's going to keep that belt in place if not prayer? Heresies will work to pull us away from God's truth, and we are always susceptible to the devil's subtle doubts. We must ask God to keep us girded with truth constantly. What about righteousness? We're so prone to sin and will certainly sin and fall farther and farther away from God's righteousness unless God upholds us. Remember, Jesus prayed that He might uphold Peter. Prayer will keep us close to God and keep us from sinning.

If having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace means that we're always to be ready to give an defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is within you (1 Ptr 3:15), it's only prayer that will keep us ready. Otherwise, we'll be distracted in other concerns and miss our opportunities. We'll not show faith in God in trials unless we are standing close to God in prayer. We will not be properly protected by our helmet of salvation, nor will we be effective in the use of the Word of God, our sword—unless we're praying. It's in all situations—on all occasions—that we are to be prayer warriors.

The 2nd thing Paul says about prayer is that we are to pray with all prayer and supplication. What does that mean? Well, some may think that these two words are redundant but are they? No, as one term includes the other but this is not true of the reverse. Prayer includes supplication, but supplication doesn't exhaust prayer. There are many kinds of prayers that we should know about and use effectively. There's adoration, which is simply praising God. Without praise, without allowing our minds be stretched by the thought of who it is we're praying to and what resources our God has placed at our disposal, we'll never really be aware of God's presence and thus, never really pray. Prayer will just be a little ritual we go through in which nothing will have happened to us or to anyone else.

There's the prayer of confession, which is important, for having come into the presence of the holy God and having bowed down to Him, it's inevitable that past sinful thoughts and deeds will come to mind and require confession. It's inevitable because once we begin to see God for who He truly is; then we'll begin to see ourselves for who we truly are. We must deal with these things. Our prayers and supplications won't get far if we're still harboring sin in our hearts and clinging to trespasses (Isa 59:1-2; Ps 66:18).

Thanksgiving is another kind of prayer. We're always ready to ask for things, but like the 9 healed lepers, we often forget to thank God for what He's already done for us. We should always be especially thankful for the forgiveness and cleansing He gives in response to our confession of sin (1 Jn 1:9). Finally, there's supplication. Our prayer life will be poor if this is all we do, but it will also be less than it can be if we don't ask God for what we want and lay our needs before him. Jesus taught us to make requests, saying, Give us this day our daily bread (Mt 6:11). If we come to God as He

intends and pray for those things that are according to His will and please Him, we can be confident that we will receive those things we ask (1 Jn 3:21-22).

The 3rd all is found in the phrase calling believers to be alert with all perseverance. Alertness is required because of the spiritual nature of our existence, with the unseen threats of spiritual warfare. Just as a Roman soldier was expected to keep his wits about him in the midst of combat, so we must persistently be aware of what's happening around us and to us. The regular posture of prayer is the perfect companion to this necessary alertness. As the spiritual warfare unfolds in unpredictable ways, the believer brings all things to the Lord in prayer. This means that prayer is to be a natural and consistent part of our lives. It's not to be regulated just to special seasons or special days. We're to be people of prayer.

The devil tries many different tactics to get us to stop praying. One of the most effective tactics is when he tells us that while prayer is good for other people (great prayer warriors) you or I just do not have the "gift" for it. Have you ever thought like that? Have you ever thought that real prayer is probably for other people, not for you? If you go and study all the gifts of the Spirit listed in the Bible, and there are at least 19, you will notice that prayer's not one of them. Why? Is it because prayer's not important? No. It is because prayer is not a gift. Prayer is a responsibility, an obligation. This means that we're to pray always regardless of what our other spiritual gift or gifts may be. So, regardless of what Satan says to you, be a person of prayer. Bathe your life, your family, your friends, your church, and every other concern in prayer, and see how God will honor your prayers and provide blessing.

The next thing Paul says about the Christian warrior's prayer is that it is for all the saints. How many saints do you suppose that is? I don't think there's a list. It would be much harder to number the saints than it would be to number the hairs on one's head, which Jesus Himself said was difficult. There are millions of saints in hundreds of this world's countries and most couldn't even name or number the countries. How are we to pray for all these people?

Clearly, we can't pray for all these Christians by name. But we can pray generally (when we don't know who they are) and we can pray specifically

(when we do know who they are). To pray even generally will mean more work in preparation for prayer and in prayer than most of us are accustomed to. How about Christians in China? If we're to pray for them, we must know something about the state of Christianity in that country and something about the problems and opportunities they face. How about Christians in North Africa? There is quite a different situation there. We must know what it is if we are to pray intelligently and effectively. So it is for many other groups of believers: suffering Christians, Christians in positions of power, isolated Christians, Christians in the East and in the West, Christians of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Even in general terms the list is extensive.

How can we pray for them effectively? We must make an effort to familiarize ourselves with their needs and then be faithful to present them to the Lord. How do we do this? Well, you aren't going to find this while perusing social media, unless you are connected to a profile that informs you of these things. The news media won't be much help (typical) and you won't hear much of this in movies or on television programming. But, good information can be gleaned from different sources; it just takes the will to pursue it and the will to pray.

The last thing Paul says about effective prayer is that it should be done in the Spirit. Does this refer to some special type of prayer in which believers are specially prompted or empowered to pray? Not likely, since this wouldn't go with the idea of praying always. Remember, Paul's advocating common prayer in this passage. To understand Paul's intention, we should take note of the connection to the previous verse where the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. We can see that the Spirit's role in each verse is complementary. In [6:17](#), the Spirit is the means by which God speaks to us (through His Word). In our text ([18](#)), the Spirit is the means by which we speak to God.

In this sense, the Spirit represents a 2-way mediator of communication between God and His people. This view fits best with the common prayer understanding of praying always as indicating a consistent posture of prayer. All effective prayer is only possible through and with the Spirit's mediation. This also falls perfectly in line with other references to the spirit that Paul has made throughout his letter. Believers who are united in their access to the Father through the Spirit ([2:22](#)) and who are built into God's dwelling place in the Spirit ([2:22](#)) and who are filled with (by) the Spirit ([5:18](#))

can and should pray constantly to the Father in and through this same Spirit.

Paul has a few more things to say about prayer but we need to meditate on what we have learned so far. In order to properly stand and effectively fight our spiritual battles, we need to be people of prayer and we should employ every kind of prayer we can think of: group prayer, personal prayer, silent prayer, shouting prayer, walking prayer, kneeling prayer, eloquent prayer, groaning prayer, constant prayer, fervent prayer – just pray! It is through prayer that spiritual strength and the armor of God go to work. In theory, the prayerless Christian can be strong and wearing all the armor but still never accomplish anything because they fail to prepare for the battle through prayer.

Our prayers are to be guided and directed by our alert observation of our spiritual surroundings. We need to stay alert to what the enemy is doing so that we will have the knowledge and ability to counter. Stay informed and pray; not just for yourself but for all saints. We can battle spiritually on behalf of others. 😊