

Ephesians 6:18-24¹

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.*

This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed above and the notes given below.

3. Take the last pieces of armor ([6:17-20](#))

¹⁷Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. ¹⁹And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. ²⁰I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

Notes

[6:17](#)

Put on salvation as your helmet.—Salvation here is not initial salvation, for he is addressing believers. Rather, it is an awareness of the fact of salvation, which affords confidence of deliverance from the assaults of the evil one.

[6:18](#)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion.—This is a good rendering of the Greek text, literally, “through every prayer and petition praying at every opportunity in the Spirit.”

[6:19](#)

so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike.—The Greek text simply states “to boldly make known God's secret plan of the Good News.”

[6:20](#)

I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador.—The NLT's rendering could imply that Paul was speaking the gospel message boldly, but in context, the object of his speaking is the secret plan—namely, that the believing Jews and Gentiles are united into one body.

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 130-135.

Commentary

This section is delineated by Paul's use of the imperative "take," which is not parallel to the preceding participles in [6:14-16](#) but to the imperative "stand" in [6:14a](#). The connective conjunction *kai* [^{TG}<G2532>, ^{ZG}2779] (and) indicates that this is not really a new sentence, as most translations suggest, but a continuation of the sentence begun in [verse 14](#) (as suggested by the high point that punctuates [verse 16](#) in most editions of the Greek text—equivalent to an English semicolon).

In physical warfare, the helmet and sword are the last two pieces a soldier takes up. During Claudius's reign (AD 37-41), the helmet was made of bronze fitted over an iron skullcap lined with leather or cloth. It covered the back of the neck, fitting slightly over the shoulder. A brow ridge fitted above the face protected the nose and eyes, and hinged cheek pieces fastened by a chin band protected the face. The helmet, hot and uncomfortable, would be put on by a soldier only when he faced impending danger. The believers having made all the preparations by putting on the other pieces of armor, Paul exhorted them now to take the helmet of salvation ([6:17a](#)). Most likely this does not refer to salvation in the objective sense but a conscious possession of it and its ability to afford safety in the midst of the onslaughts of the evil one. With the head protected, soldiers felt safe in the midst of battle. Likewise, believers' possession of salvation gives them confidence of ultimate safety during the assaults of the devil.

The last thing the soldier grabs is the sword, his only active, offensive weapon. The sword (*machaira* [^{TG}<G3162>, ^{ZG}3479]) used by Roman soldiers had a double-edged blade approximately two inches wide and two feet long and was very suitable as a cut-and-thrust weapon for close combat. The "sword of the Spirit," which is the word of God, is to be grabbed just before the attacks of the devil and his cohorts ([6:17b](#)). The phrase "sword of the Spirit" most likely refers to its source or origin. Thus, in accordance with the offensive nature of this weapon, it portrays the offensive empowerment of the Holy Spirit necessary in a spiritual battle ([6:12](#)). This sword of the Spirit is further described as the *rhēma* [^{TG}<G4487>, ^{ZG}4839] (word) of God. As mentioned in the commentary on [5:26](#), *rhēma* means "the spoken or proclaimed word." Briefly then, the sword of the Spirit is the offensive weapon, the spoken word of God, to be used against the spiritual wickedness of the devil. In his encounter with the devil, Christ used the written word against him ([Matt 4:11](#); [Luke 4:1-13](#)). For instance, in reply to the devil's first temptation, Jesus quoted [Deuteronomy 8:3](#), stating, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word (*rhēma* [^{TG}<G4487>, ^{ZG}4839]) that comes from the mouth of God" ([Matt 4:4](#)). This is not preaching the gospel but speaking God's word against his foes. It should be noted, however, that God's word is not to be recited as a magic formula. On the contrary, it is speaking the words of God in Christ's name, which is being empowered by God's Spirit. Although it is the only offensive weapon listed among the pieces of the armor, in the present context it is not used to make advances by preaching the gospel but to enable believers to stand firmly so that the devil will not gain new territory in Christ's Kingdom or rob believers of their spiritual blessings in Christ. With this piece, the description of the armor comes to an end.

The entire armor is absolutely necessary in spiritual warfare against the devil and his angels. As in other parts of this book, the exhortation is directed both to the individual and the corporate body. This is in keeping with the dominant theme of the book: the unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in one body. Thus, the church, the body of believers, is in this warfare together. As Roman soldiers did not fight alone, so also believers as a body, united under their commander-in-chief, stand against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.

With armor donned and helmets and swords in place ready for an imminent attack, the believer's state of mind must now be readied. Paul declared that believers must be in a constant state of prayer and alertness ([6:18-20](#)). Prayer is not another piece of armor, for Paul does not mention any specific piece of armor representing prayer. Rather, the two Greek participles, "praying" and "keeping alert," express the manner in which believers are to take up their helmet of salvation and sword of the Spirit. Paul states,

“Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion,” which indicates that, in readiness for enemy attacks, believers are to pray with thoroughness and intensity at every opportunity (or critical time) in the power of the Spirit. This is spiritual warfare, so it must be fought by spiritual means. This was vividly illustrated in Christ’s last hours in the garden of Gethsemane. Not only are believers to pray, they are to pray for the purpose of keeping alert individually and collectively against the devil’s tricky strategies, realizing that all believers are involved with the struggle against the evil powers. Individual Christians join together to form an entire army that collectively battles against the enemy. It is noteworthy that prayer and petition are mentioned four times in this verse, suggesting the absolute urgency of prayer. The adjectives “every” and “all” are also mentioned four times with their same purpose: to emphasize the vital importance of prayer for every believer on every occasion.

Nuclear wars cannot be won with rifles. Likewise, satanic wars cannot be won by human strength or strategy. In light of this, Paul warned the saints to constantly pray and remain alert, even as they don the helmet of salvation and grasp the sword of the Spirit in order to do battle at a moment’s notice.

Having instructed believers to pray for all Christians, Paul mentions two specific requests (indicated twice by the word *hina* [^{TG} <G2443>, ^{ZG} 2671]) for prayer on his behalf. The first request is that God would give him utterance when he opens his mouth (as he did for the prophets of the OT) to make known the mystery of the gospel. This does not refer to preaching the gospel in an evangelistic sense as an offensive advance. Rather, since the context is discussing a defensive stand, rather than an offensive advance, it is better to understand that Paul was asking to be given the right words to speak boldly in order to explain the secret plan (mystery) of the Good News while under attack by the evil one. More specifically, it may well refer to his trial before Caesar in Rome (when and if the Jewish accusers would make charges against him). The Roman government viewed Christians as a sect of the Jews, whereas the Jews considered them a heretical group. In his trial before Caesar, Paul needed to make it clear that Christians are neither a Jewish sect nor a heretical group but an entirely new entity, the church, the body of Christ, composed of Jewish and Gentile believers.

In [6:20](#) Paul gives two further details about himself in relationship to boldly explaining the secret plan of the Good News. First, he was an ambassador in chains for the mystery. In other words, Paul was not imprisoned for the gospel per se but rather for speaking about the “mystery of the gospel”—that is, the union of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body. Paul, an ambassador in chains, was an incongruity, for normally the position of ambassador commands respect and provides immunity from imprisonment by those to whom he is sent. Instead, Paul, commissioned by the mightiest of all sovereigns, had been incarcerated. Nevertheless, diplomatic immunity or no, Paul was determined to speak boldly on behalf of the sovereign whom he represented. In light of this, the second detail in this verse is that he might speak just as boldly about the mystery. Paul was rightfully concerned about defending the mystery of the gospel against the assaults of the wicked one, who would want to confuse the issue by having the Roman tribunal dismiss the trial on the grounds of mistakenly thinking that Paul’s message simply led to the formation of another sect of the Jews. As an ambassador for the Lord, Paul urgently desired to fulfill his mission by making clear the mystery of the gospel, the union of Jews and Gentiles into one body.

As discussed in the Introduction, there are some who deny Pauline authorship of Ephesians. However, if this epistle had been written in the last two decades of the first century, as some claim, then this call for prayer on behalf of the imprisoned Paul would have been rather pointless. Why would the author ask for prayer for Paul if he was already deceased? Furthermore, why would he ask for prayer for Paul when the readers would have known that Paul was already deceased and also would have known the outcome of that for which he requested prayer? It makes much more sense to see this as truly Paul asking his readers for prayer in a most difficult situation, in prison and facing a possible tribunal before Caesar.

G. Conclusion ([6:21-24](#))

²¹To bring you up to date, Tychicus will give you a full report about what I am doing and how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord's work. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose—to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you.

²³Peace be with you, dear brothers and sisters, and may God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you love with faithfulness. ²⁴May God's grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notes

[6:21-22](#)

It is interesting to note that a total of 32 words of these two verses in the Greek text are in verbatim agreement with [Col 4:7-8](#), except the addition of two words (*ti prassō* [^{TG}<G5101>/<G4238>, ^{ZG}5515/4556] “how I am getting along”) in [6:21](#) and two Greek words *kai sundoulos* [^{TG}<G2532>/<G4889>, ^{ZG}2779/5281] (and fellow servant) in [Col 4:7](#). This suggests that the one document was copied from the other. Very likely Paul still had the first letter while he was penning the second, and both letters were taken by Tychicus to Asia Minor.

Commentary

The major part of the letter to the Ephesians dealt with the calling and conduct of the church. The last four verses, however, contain personal matters. Paul began by informing them that Tychicus would tell them more about his circumstances. According to [Colossians 4:7](#), Paul considered Tychicus a much-loved brother who was a faithful helper in serving the Lord with him. Tychicus and Trophimus were the two Asians who accompanied Paul immediately after the Ephesian riot ([Acts 20:4](#)). Later, in his second Roman imprisonment, Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus to relieve Timothy in order for Timothy to come to Paul ([2 Tim 4:12](#)). He was a beloved, faithful, and trusted brother. Ephesian believers would have anxiously awaited his report concerning Paul's welfare since it was Paul's ministry to the Gentiles that caused his imprisonment. He had been arrested for proclaiming the mystery of the gospel, the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body ([2:11-3:13](#)). But Tychicus was not only to inform the Ephesian believers about Paul's situation but was also to encourage them. If Paul, as some suggest, was not the author of Ephesians, then why would the congregation want to know of Paul's situation when he was already dead? Were they to pray for the dead? Also, this would have implicated Tychicus in the fraud along with the pseudonymous author. It is more logical to accept the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and to accept that it was Paul who sent Tychicus to Ephesus to give an oral report of his situation.

Paul closed this letter with a salutation ([6:23](#)) and benediction ([6:24](#)). In the Greek text, the words “peace” and “grace” introduce [6:23](#) and [24](#) respectively, and both of these words are found in the prologue of this letter ([1:2](#)) but in reverse order. The order in these concluding verses is unusual, and it is unlikely that an imitator would have deviated from the normal Pauline order. Also, “peace” is directed toward the “dear brothers and sisters,” which is unique among Paul's epistles, for normally Paul addressed believers directly in the second person, “you.” Again, an imitator most likely would not have deviated from the normal Pauline style. It is more likely that Paul himself diverted from his normal style since this letter was an encyclical and would include those believers with whom he had no personal acquaintance. Paul also enjoined them to love with faith. In fact, it was love combined with faith in God for which they were well known ([1:15](#)). This peace and love had their source in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Grace” concludes this letter, just as it introduced it in [1:2](#). Paul pronounced grace toward only those who unceasingly love our Lord Jesus Christ. This unusual expression is difficult to decipher in regards to its meaning and to what it is connected. The Greek term *aphtharsia* [^{TG} <G861>, ^{ZG}914] means “incorruptibility” or “immortality,” indicating a continuous state or process not interrupted by death and hence has the sense of “unceasing, always, eternally, undying.” Some suggest that this word is connected to the immediately preceding words “our Lord Jesus Christ,” who is immortal (Dibelius 1953:100), while others think it is connected to “grace” mentioned in the first part of the verse, thereby signifying that the grace conferred by God on believers is immortal or indestructible (Schnackenburg 1991:291; Lincoln 1990:467-468). Most think that it is connected to “love,” indicating a love that is not corrupted by death, hence referring to “those who unceasingly love our Lord Jesus Christ” (Abbott 1897:191; Robinson 1903:138, 220; Best 1998:620). Unfortunately, some Ephesian believers later left or neglected their love and were reprimanded accordingly ([Rev 2:4](#)). However, in the present context, Paul was able to give a benediction of grace to them because of their unceasing love for their Lord Jesus Christ. This is a very appropriate ending to the epistle.

The conclusion of this letter ([6:21-24](#)) illustrates to believers the kind of love and unity that Paul had been advocating throughout the book. Although imprisoned in Rome, his thoughts were for the welfare of the Ephesian believers. In light of this, he sent Tychicus to them to report on his situation. His purpose was to comfort them. This epistle began with Paul’s salutation of grace and peace ([1:2](#)), and ends with a benediction that also includes grace and peace.

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6:18. Because the proper attitude in battle is just as important as the proper equipment, Paul reminded the Ephesians of the need for prayer and watchfulness in this spiritual conflict. Prayer must be "in the Spirit" or "in the sphere of the Holy Spirit" in order to be effective. "Praying" comes from a more general word for prayer. It speaks of the necessity of always being in an attitude of prayer, of having a consistent prayer life. "Supplication" comes from a Greek term which relates to special times of need. If Christians truly practice prayer as a way of life, when the special times of need come they will be prepared for them.

"Watching" (*agrupnountes*) translated literally means "to be awake or alert." Having the proper attitude in this spiritual warfare cannot be overemphasized. It is dangerous to take a flippant attitude about something this serious. The conflict is a real one, the enemies are spiritual forces that are not limited to the physical realm, but God has provided sufficient necessary equipment for believers to be victorious in the battle.

6:19. Because Paul practiced what he preached, he asked the Ephesians to pray that God would help him proclaim the gospel, even though he was in chains. The apostle's request teaches an important lesson about the purpose of prayer. While there is no doubt that Paul also prayed for his own needs, the main emphasis of this prayer request was that God would give him the enablement to present the gospel message with boldness. This is consistent with Jesus' words to His disciples that His children should seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, and depend upon Him to supply their needs ([Matthew 6:33](#)). Perhaps Christians would receive more answers to prayer if they followed Paul's example and prayed more for the power to proclaim the gospel, rather than always asking God for things for self.

6:20. From the time of his conversion ([Acts 9](#)), Paul was consumed with one chief aim in life—proclaiming the gospel to the world. He considered himself a special appointee of Jesus Christ himself, much as a president of a country appoints an ambassador to represent him personally in another country. An ambassador does not speak for himself, but for the prominent person he represents. This gives a certain amount of boldness to the ambassador. How much more this should be true of a representative of Jesus Christ.

6:21, 22. [Verses 21](#) and [22](#) are almost identical with [Colossians 4:7-9](#). Tychicus was the "beloved brother" who took this letter to the Ephesians. The word for "brother" (*adelphos*) contains the idea of "coming from the same womb," and "minister" comes from the word *diakonos* from which we get *deacon*.

In our contemporary society where speedy travel from one part of the world to another is commonplace, it is hard to appreciate the importance of this comment. Tychicus traveled with Onesimus ([Colossians 4:9](#)) on this journey. Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his master, Philemon. Many slaves were killed for doing much less than Onesimus had done. By being with this slave, Tychicus was endangering his own life as well. Traveling the great distance from Rome to Asia Minor and placing his life in danger paled into insignificance when compared with his mission of reporting the welfare of Paul and his team and of encouraging the believers of Ephesus and the surrounding communities. The word "comfort" or "encourage" comes from the same Greek term (*parakaleō*) from which we get one of the names for the Holy Spirit—Paraclete.

2. Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library – Galatians-Philemon*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 173-179.

The word "our" in the verse may refer to some or all of the people Paul listed in the closing statements of his epistle to the Colossians (Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus called Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas). The Prison Epistles indicate that the apostle Paul normally had a sizable retinue of helpers with him or at least assisting him in some ways. He was a very secure man who was not threatened by other people. In fact, he seemed to enjoy elevating other people by referring to them at various times. Many of these younger and lesser-known associates received important recognition in the Christian world by the references of the apostle. The people of that day did not have an elaborate means of recommending people to congregations and to fellow Christians, so comments like Paul's concerning Tychicus and others were very important.

6:23. In his closing benediction there are some of the same terms Paul used to begin this classic letter. He wanted the Ephesians to enjoy the peace of God, that inner tranquility that is not disturbed by external circumstances. Furthermore, he emphasized the love of God that operates in a person through faith. In the Scriptures this word *agapē* consistently relates to the motivating force behind all that God does. As it operates in believers, whatever they do will have the same motivation ([1 Corinthians 13](#)). There is a relationship between faith and love. What many people call "love" really is not related to Biblical love. Unfortunately, an erotic substitute for Biblical love has become very prominent.

6:24. Paul's Prison Epistles place great emphasis upon the term "grace." The apostle was a "gracious" man because he was a recipient of God's grace, and one of his main desires was that other people would also receive this grace. Grace truly does come to "all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." When a person truly responds to the unmerited favor bestowed by God, how can he help but respond in sincere love?

The twin of "grace" is "gratitude." The two should be coupled in an inseparable manner in a Christian's life. They certainly were in Paul's. His constant praise from prison was an explicit manifestation of an important truth taught throughout the Bible: God's grace is not limited to our circumstances. When reading Ephesians, believers should not forget that Paul was in prison when he wrote it.