

So, this “armor of God” metaphor. Where did that come from? We know that Ephesus was in a milieu that believed there were lots of demons and spirits around, and that a person’s security depended on having the protection of a powerful divine patron. Paul himself often used the /imagery/ of a cosmic battle, saying that although sin and death still hold dominion over us, Christ has conquered them and they can’t last. In the case of this passage, the writer is almost explicitly referring to an apocalyptic part of Isaiah 59:

¹⁵ Truth is lacking,
and whoever turns from evil is despoiled.

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.

¹⁶ He saw that there was no one,
and was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
so his own arm brought him victory,
and his righteousness upheld him.

¹⁷ He put on righteousness like a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle.

¹⁸ According to their deeds, so will he repay;
wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies;
to the coastlands he will render requital.

God looks around and sees that truth is lacking and there is no justice, so he goes to war against those who are untruthful and unjust. The phrases in Ephesians are so similar that we know the writer must have had them in mind, but in this case, it’s we, the church, who must put on the armor of God. Against what enemy? I suppose it’s untruth and injustice.

The juxtaposition of untruth and injustice is suggestive. One reinforces the other. To illustrate this, let me share with you some dialogue from “Inside Amy

Schumer” that I heard on “Fresh Air” recently.

PAUL GIAMATTI: (as God) This guy Bobby Skeltis(ph) ~~that you slept with...~~

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Oh god.

GIAMATTI: (as God) What are you doing?

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) I know. I know. I can do so much better. You're right.

GIAMATTI: (as God) Well, I didn't say that.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Oh.

GIAMATTI: (as God) You know, 70 percent of people who reach out to me are having a herpes scare.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Mm-hmm.

GIAMATTI: (as God) Why should I help you?

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) OK. That's a fair question.

GROSS: (as God) Yeah.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) OK. So I'm kind of like a public figure now.

GIAMATTI: (as God) Hmm.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Like a role model. So if some young girl saw me buying Valtrex or something, it would be like a thing.

GIAMATTI: (as God) Right. A thing. Hmm. Like that earthquake in Peru yesterday that killed 9,000 people.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Oh my god, I hope no one was hurt.

GIAMATTI: (as God) Oh gosh. I need to stop making so many white girls. Let me be honest with you, OK? You did get herpes. You already have it.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) No.

GIAMATTI: (as God) Yes. Now for me to undo your herpes, I have to create balance in the universe. You understand?

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Totally.

GIAMATTI: (as God) I'd have to kill off an entire village in Uzbekistan.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Yeah. Whatever you think is best, do it.

GIAMATTI: (as God) You'll also have to sacrifice something.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Oh my god, name it.

GIAMATTI: (as God) OK. You need to stop drinking.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) Pass.

GIAMATTI: (as God) How about you just call your mother a little bit more often?

That's an easy one.

GROSS: (as Amy Schumer) Hmmm. What is herpes, exactly? It's an outbreak like once a year?

GIAMATTI: (as God) Yeah.

SCHUMER: (as Amy Schumer) I don't know. I think I'll just take it.

GIAMATTI: (as God) OK. Fine. Fine. Herpes it is.

When I heard that God was going to be written into an Amy Schumer skit, I sort of rolled my eyes at how awful that would be. But here's the thing: in this sketch, God asks great questions. God is all about getting at the truth. The Amy Schumer character is selfish and self-deceptive, and all of God's questions and nudges are aimed at getting her to see more clearly and stop distorting reality in a way that's most favorable to her. The distortions she wants are self-indulgent and violent to other people. All God does is get her to listen to herself, and she's not transformed by any means, but she does decide that given the reality, she's not so bad off having herpes. But better yet, *we* listen to her, and it's because we recognize ourselves that the humor works. Most of us, of course, are not as self-serving as her character, and I'd have to say that God is also not quite so down on us, but this is comedy.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=304192876>

So, injustice and untruth, two peas in a pod. And you and I and everyone else here can resist them by putting on the armor of God, the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. The so-called weaponry here is almost all defensive except the sword. What do swords do? They penetrate. Or, as the words

of God in the Amy Schumer skit do, they expose. They shine light on things that want to be hidden. They expose and therefore *disempower* the evils of deceptiveness, selfishness, unawareness of others.

Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecuted them. This passage is not about cutting down people who are enemies; it's about getting out from under the power of enmity itself. In Taylor Branch's three-volume book *Parting the Waters*, a civil rights history, he has a picture taken at a Nashville lunch counter on May 28, 1963, of two white people sitting with an African American woman, all three being attacked by a mob. The mob is pouring ketchup and other condiments over them, and they're just sitting there, probably both stunned and afraid to move, but also probably not surprised, having taken their places deliberately. The white man's jaw is clenched; he looks like he's holding himself back from wading into the crowd and punching someone. But in the crowd there stands a young man who looks dismayed and a little lost. He seems to be someone who came in intending to be part of the mob, to join in the torment of these peaceful demonstrators for equal rights, but who finds himself horrified by the violence. If the protesters had fought back, it would have felt legitimate to throw a few punches—but because they were counting on the armor of God instead of brute force, this young man and thousands who saw similar events saw where the real violence lay, and the forces of evil and self-deception in them were disempowered.

Following Christ Jesus by praying for our enemies, turning the other cheek, forgiving endlessly, etc., is in many respects to live embattled. It is not to fight against other people. However, it does invite reprisals. Those who benefit from

innuendo and fearmongering will strike back. What Ephesians is telling us is to rely on the armor of God rather than any other weaponry we may have picked up in our travels. It is not our own strength but God's that conquers enmity and fear themselves.

Let us pray: Putting on your armor not to hide from the world but to enter the fray equipped to follow you into all the places we'd rather avoid--knowing when to don the protection you provide, laying ourselves open and vulnerable, God give us the wisdom and the grace to be equipped for every spiritual battle and the strength to follow wherever you lead. Amen.

