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An Armored Household: Isaiah 59 as the Key to Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and 6:10-17

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Abstract: The household codes of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and the following “Armor of God” passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 have long been regarded as self-contained. Scholars have seen practically no relationship between these two portions of the letter, reading the latter as a new train of thought for the author. In this study, I argue that, contrary to these scholars, there is indeed a relationship of the household codes to Ephesians 6:10-17. It is demonstrated that this crucial connection is found in the author’s use of Isaiah 59. With sensitivity to this intertext present in the passage, it will be argued that (1) the original context of the Isaianic passage illuminates the meaning of the Divine Warrior motif in Ephesians, (2) the image of the clothing of the Christian in God’s armor is significant precisely because it transfers the work of the Divine Warrior to the follower of Christ, and (3) the message of justice in Isaiah 59 helps to account for and make sense of the redefined roles of the household codes, and particularly in the Pauline understanding of ideal relationships among the family of God.

Key Words: Household codes, Isaiah 59, Armor, Divine Warrior, justice, family

Introduction

The latter part of the letter to the Ephesians is jammed-packed with memorable passages. Two of these have been the passionate focus of students, pastors, and scholars in their study, preaching, teaching, and writing. The household codes of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 constitute a clearly defined section of the letter, addressing directly members of the Christian household concerning their relationships with each other. On the heels of the household codes comes a pericope that has been familiar and deeply personal for a great number of Christians through the centuries, the “armor of God” passage of Ephesians 6:10-17. Distinguished from the previous passage by a significant section break and even a separate sub-heading in virtually all modern translations of the letter, this passage has most often been interpreted as one that introduces an entirely new and distinct train of thought for Paul.¹ Moreover, in the

1. The Pauline authorship of Ephesians has long been disputed. For the purposes of this paper, I

scholarly literature on the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-17, little is said about the surrounding context of the passage and how the context of the letter might affect its meaning. In fact, although most scholars do not word it in quite so stark a manner, at least one scholar has suggested that the two have nothing to do with each other:

With v. 10 the subject changes abruptly and one of the most original sections of the letter begins. No clear connection exists between the behavior of members of a household, all of whom are believers and who are not depicted as in conflict with one another, and a struggle between every believer and the superhuman powers.²

As one can tell, this commonly-held view – that the household codes of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and the passage that immediately follows have practically no relationship to each other – is based primarily on how one interprets the latter portion. In the case of Ernest Best, whom I have cited above, his sharp distinction between earthly relationships and supernatural powers necessarily leads him to see virtually no connection between these two passages.³

Although the household codes of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 and the armor of God passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 have previously been regarded as unrelated, in this paper I will challenge that view by examining the primary intertext used by Paul in 6:10-17 – Isaiah 59 – and then discussing how that intertext should inform our understanding of just what Paul is calling for when he “rallies the troops” in the Ephesian church. I will show that there is a crucial connection between the household codes and the “armor of God” passage, and that the interpretive key is found in the author’s use and application of the imagery of the Divine Warrior. With a sensitivity to these intertexts present in the passage, it will be argued that (1) the original context of the Isaianic passage illuminates the meaning of the Divine Warrior motif in Ephesians, (2) the message of justice in Isaiah 59 helps to account for and make sense of the redefined roles of the household codes, particularly in the Pauline understanding of ideal relationships among members of the family of God, and (3) the image of the clothing of the Christian in God’s armor is significant precisely because it transfers the work of the Divine Warrior to the follower of Christ within the social context of family.⁴

will refer to the author as “Paul,” without affirming or denying whether the apostle Paul penned the letter (Eph 1:1). For a thorough discussion concerning the authorship of Ephesians, see Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), lix-lxxiii.

2. Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 585.

3. I will revisit this issue of the relationship between the earthly and the supernatural in Ephesians later in the paper.

4. As the discussion of non-resistance and pacifism has resurfaced with a vengeance in the last few decades, so has a reading of Eph 6:10-17 with this lens become a rather influential way of interpreting the passage. Although interesting and helpful, this is simply not the avenue that I will be pursuing in this paper. Rather than focusing on exactly *how* a Christian should interact with earthly and supernatural enemies, this paper will concentrate on exactly *who* should be the ones reflecting the attributes that Paul calls for in this passage and *who* should be the recipients of the benefits of those

Isaiah 59

The motif of the Divine Warrior in the Old Testament is a fairly pervasive one, which makes sense in light of the history of the Israelites and their belief in a God who championed them against their enemies.⁵ Not only is God presented as the Warrior who fights on their behalf, but there are also passages which describe how God functions metaphorically as the armor of his people.⁶ Perhaps nowhere is this Divine Warrior motif more present than in Isaiah, where God reminds his people that (a) he is strong enough to not only withstand, but to control their enemies, and (b) he has not abandoned them and chosen another group through which to work.⁷

These emphases are particularly acute in Isaiah 59, where God answers the accusation (or lament) that he is too weak to save his people by arming and clothing himself for battle. The first part of the chapter describes the very bleak scenario that God's people have created for themselves. The appearance of God's absence can be explained by their continual insistence to commit atrocities that are selfishly motivated (59:1-2). Isaiah goes into a detailed account of just how desperate things have become: there is murder, lying, cheating, and violence (59:3-6). In a particularly vivid verse, Isaiah describes the enthusiasm with which the people are pursuing injustice, contrasting it with the way of peace that God has prepared for his people mentioned previously in Isaiah:⁸

Their feet run to evil,
and they rush to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,
desolation and destruction are in their highways.
The way of peace they do not know,
and there is no justice in their paths.
Their roads they have made crooked;
no one who walks in them knows peace (59:7-8).⁹

In typical Isaianic fashion, the perpetrators of these crimes appear to be both insiders and outsiders (he switches personal pronouns throughout the chapter), resulting in

attributes. See Gerald Janzen, "Divine Warfare and Nonresistance" *Direction* 32/1 (2003): 21-31, for discussion on this passage and nonresistance. This is his ultimate concern, and thus his thesis statement: "It is the thesis of this article that Paul proclaimed the divine Warrior of the Isaianic texts to be contending against enemies on behalf of his people, the Church, in the NT setting just as Isaiah so proclaimed for Israel. If that is the case, then the victory won by Jesus at the cross and in the resurrection has closed the era in which God's people engage in secular warfare" (22).

5. See Exod 15; Deut 32-33; Judges 5; 2 Sam 22/Ps 18; Ps 35, 68, 77, and Hab 3.

6. See Gen 15:1; Ps 3:3; 18:2; 2 Sam 22:3, 31.

7. Isa 1:24-26; 5:25; 9:8-10:11; 13:3-5; 19:1-5; 29:3-10; 30:27-28; 40:15; 41:1, 5; 42:13; 51.

8. See Isa 40:3-5.

9. All citations of scripture will come from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

a sense of overwhelming injustice from both within and without.¹⁰ (Note that God punishes both the community as well as those outside of it. There is a seeming paradox in Isaiah 59 in terms of the location of the injustice. On the one hand, it is depicted in Israel (Isa 59:9-59:15a). On the other hand, God responds with punishment upon the nations.) In other words, some members of God's own people are abusing those within their community, and these make up part of Isaiah's audience.¹¹ Thus, Isaiah can talk about those kinds of traits that are expected of God's people being absent from life as they know it – *Justice* is rejected, *Righteousness* can't come near, *Truth* can't stand in the public square and is therefore lacking, and *Uprightness* is outlawed¹² (59:14-15).

As God witnesses these atrocities, he looks around for someone to stand up and take action, but no one does, so he himself intervenes on behalf of the oppressed (56:16).¹³ Remember, Zion was meant to be a place of refuge for the marginalized and disenfranchised – a setting which is clearly absent from report of Isaiah 59! He dons the very characteristics that are expected of his people and are absent as clothing – *Righteousness* as a breastplate and *Salvation* as a helmet (59:17a). He also adds some “clothing” that is his to wear as deity – *Vengeance* for garments and *Fury* as a mantle (59:17b).¹⁴ It is with these that he “repays” the oppressors, resulting in the expansion

10. What is the relationship between the two? Matthew J. Lynch, “Zion's Warrior and the Nations: Isaiah 59:15b-63:6 in Isaiah's Zion Traditions” (*CBQ* 70, 2008): 244-63, argues that, “... Israel's display of, or inability to display, justice is intrinsically related to whether or not there is justice in the world (cf. Isa 10:12)” (250). Thus, implicitly involved in the restoration of his people (a particular concern of Isaiah's in this section of his book) is the confrontation of injustice among the nations before redemption is offered to Israel (251). Note also that this restoration comes to those who repent, rather than to the whole of Zion (Isa 59:20). So, “The implicit suggestion of 59:20, then, is that the divine warrior campaigns not only against the distant nations, as 59:18 and 63:6 indicate, but also against Zion, which offers no refuge for ‘the wicked’ (57:21)” (253). This is consistent with the first part of Isa 59.

11. Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *Put on the Armour of God: The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians* (LNTS 140; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 22. On the other hand, he argues that throughout these verses, there is an allegory where these characteristics are Yahweh's messengers who are being persecuted (32). According to Neufeld, then, these *traits* are the victims, not primarily humans, although humans feel the absence of judgment and salvation. Thus, he sees in this passage the motif of the persecuted messenger of God, which includes such other figures as Wisdom, Jesus, *Sophia*, and *Logos*: “Indeed, it appears that the author of Isaiah 59 has adapted the scenario of the faithful servant who is abused by faithless people to the fate of Yahweh's virtues at the hands of those who have turned against their God” (35). Ultimately, he argues that the humans in Isa 59 are not primarily the victims, but the victimizers. This may, however, be more abstract than is typical of Isaiah. Yes, God is interested in justice, but not for Justice's sake. Rather, it is on behalf of the people, as evidenced by the larger context of restoration in Isa 40-66.

12. See the NLT, which is more vivid than the NRSV's “cannot enter.” The emphasis of the phrase is on the active banning of this characteristic (*lō'-tūkal lābō'*; אֲנִי־בָל לְבוֹת־אֵל).

13. Lynch, “Zion's Warrior,” 248-250, argues that Zion had a role as a “symbol of Yhwh's world-ordering justice.” If that is the case, then Jerusalem's failure (particularly by its leadership) to function in this way regarding its internal oppressors and to even to join them in their injustice is even more condemning.

14. Neufeld, *Armour*, 27-28, notes that the only other place where God might be seen to clothe himself in armor in order to go into battle is Isa 11:5. In that text, it is a kinglier reference, rather

of his reputation and glory to the west and the east and the redemption and renewal of the covenant for his people (59:18-21).¹⁵

Ephesians 5-6

Scholars of Ephesians agree that the author is writing to a group of Christians who have been carried away by their social context, conflating a first-century Greco-Roman view of wisdom and knowledge with that of knowledge in Christ.¹⁶ Although he does use the familiar terminology of that time, Paul takes great care to redefine what it means to truly be wise in Christ. Thus, a Christian is indeed involved in experiencing heavenly knowledge, but it is not an exclusive right of passage that should result in a higher social status than others in the community.¹⁷ Since the Ephesians (both Christians and non-Christians) seem to have been interested in the relationship between what happens down on earth and what happens in the realm of the supernatural, so also does Paul want to connect the Christian experience in Christ with both the earthly and supernatural.¹⁸ Key to this argument is the place of groups within the community, first Jewish and Gentile Christians, and then later, the members of families, discussed specifically in the household codes of Ephesians 5-6. Paul's household codes is a Christian adaptation of the kind that were circulating in the Greco-Roman world at the time, and thus is not an entirely new creation of his own. Aristotle, Epictetus, the writer of 4 Maccabees, Philo, and even Josephus each included household codes in their work.¹⁹ Not only that, but these codes seem

than a warrior image, but does demonstrate the correlation between judgment (king) and warfare (warrior). The distinction between this passage and Isa 59 is that the one being clothed in Isa 11 is actually the king who *represents* Yahweh. Neufeld sees Isa 59 as an allusion to Isa 11, indicating that because there was "no man" (i.e., "king" as in Isa 11), Yahweh steps in to save. If this connection can be made, it serves as a comment on the lack of royal leadership. It is difficult, however, to determine for certain that this is the case, since there are no other royal references in Isa 59.

15. According to Neufeld, *Armour*, 28, Yahweh's action in equipping himself for battle is like *Enuma Elish*, where Marduk clothes himself for battle against Tiamat. The difference is that the weapons Marduk uses do not represent virtues as do the ones in Isa 59 or Eph 6. This is therefore an important innovation of Isa 59 which Paul follows in Ephesians.

How does the armor function in this passage? It is clearly is used by God to right previous wrongs (he replaces the very traits that were missing before he intervenes), as well as to defend those who are oppressed within the community. Thus, there is both an offensive and defensive (but defensive on behalf of *others*) function taking place here. I agree here with Neufeld, *Armour*, 28. Underscoring the offensive dynamic of the Divine Warrior is the function of armor in its historical context, as it was used not only to physically protect the person who wore it, but to impress and intimidate in order to give that warrior an advantage on the battlefield (Neufeld, *Armour*, 29). He uses the example of Marduk's clothing to illustrate his point. "It represented the character and strength of the warrior, and symbolized his past and present actions."

16. Although scholars tend to agree on this basic premise, consensus is lacking on more specific issues such as provenance, historical situation, etc.

17. See the inclusive language of Paul's prayer in Eph 1:15-23, for example.

18. Eph 2:3-10.

19. See Aristotle, *Pol.*, 1.1253, 1259; Epictetus, *Diatr.*, 17.31; 4 Macc 2:10-3; Philo, *Hypoth.*, 7.3;

to have been regarded as a reflection of what this important social unit should look like. Although each differs in small ways on the details, all emphasize a hierarchical structure that begins with the father, or *paterfamilias*, and works its way down the social ladder to the less important members of the household.²⁰ The hierarchical nature and function of the household code genre is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Augustus' use of the *paterfamilias* rhetoric to describe his role in the Empire and the "inclusion" of foreign "children" to justify Roman invasion and oppression of other nations.²¹

A study of Paul's own household codes in their social context with an eye toward comparison and contrast is extremely important for understanding what he is doing (and not doing) in his letter to the Ephesians. For instance, like Philo, Paul seems to be influenced by the Decalogue, particularly in the use of imperatives, rather than writing a description of "what is," which is more akin to the Stoics.²² Whereas the Stoics emphasized the duty of the individual to act rightly (a more internal focus on responsibility), the household codes in Ephesians encourages certain behaviors because of their effect on others (reciprocal). Of great importance is the fact that Paul addresses both partners of a social pairing (rather than just one), and addresses the socially inferior partner first. His words to the children and *fathers* can be contrasted with Philo and Josephus' emphasis on the parental rights of the father rather than on any obligations he might have in his behavior toward his children.²³ Note too that Paul devotes the most space to instructions for the head of the household, implying that he has certain obligations to his wife and is held to a standard that is not socially expected in the first century.

Immediately after the household codes comes the "armor of God" passage.²⁴ Paul calls his readers to don certain character traits and spiritual tools as if they

and Josephus, *C. Ap.*, 2.24.199. See Thorsten Moritz, *A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians* (Novum Testamentum Supp 85; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 159-161 for a more detailed comparison of Philo's household codes with others.

20. Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 165, argues that, because Augustus made use of the concept of the household code in his propaganda (particularly by applying paternal language to himself as the *paterfamilias* of the people), it "presupposes that by the time Christianity arrived, the household concept had long reached paramount importance as a foundational social unit of society."

21. See Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), for a detailed study on the family and family language in the Roman Empire under Augustus.

22. See Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 159-161.

23. Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 167, deems this to be the most important difference.

24. There has been some discussion of function of this section for the letter as a whole – is it a summary of the entire letter, or is it rounding out the ethical section that begins in Ephesians 4? Donna R. Reinhard, "Ephesians 6:10-18: A Call to Personal Piety or Another Way of Describing Union with Christ?" *JETS* 48/3 (Sept 2005): 521-32, argues that this section is a summary of the entire letter by underscoring overlapping themes and emphases between this pericope and rest of Ephesians. Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 178-181, also makes much of the relationship between 6:10-17 and rest of Ephesian, but does not, ironically, include any discussion of the relationship between this section and the immediately preceding material!

were clothing themselves for battle – Truth and Righteousness (6:14), Peaceful Proclamation of the gospel (6:15), Faith (6:16), and Salvation and the Word (6:18).²⁵ Two of these come directly from Isaiah 59 – the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. As the opening line of this section makes clear, Paul sees this armor as a tool that will enable his readers to be empowered with the type of strength that God possesses (6:10). The Ephesians are elsewhere called to imitate God (5:1). Paul also uses the language of power to describe both God’s actions in Christ (1:19) and to petition for the ability of his followers to comprehend those actions (3:16-20).²⁶ This also has echoes of Isaiah 59, which describes God’s possession of these tools and his application of them in defense of the oppressed in the community.

With Isaiah 59 having such a significant influence on Paul’s armor metaphor here in Ephesians 6, it’s a wonder that so many scholars have failed to move beyond a casual observation of its use here to a more in-depth consideration of the *significance* of it for the meaning of its new context. Paul is urging his audience to be, in essence, the Divine Warrior – to take on those characteristics and to use them as God would use them.²⁷ However, it is crucial to be clear on which elements of Isaiah 59 are adopted in Paul’s imagery here and which are not. Completely absent from the Christian armory are the garments of vengeance and the mantle of fury, which God wears along with the breastplate and helmet (59:17b).²⁸ Thus, the Ephesians are called to don God’s characteristics of righteousness and salvation, but not to clothe themselves in vengeance or fury.

So, against whom are the Ephesians supposed to be preparing for battle? This passage has traditionally been read as a reflection of Paul’s concern for his individual readers to make sure they are protected from “the devil” (6:11), and this has surely been the predominant message in our contemporary faith communities. In other words, Ephesians 6:10-17 is most often read as scripture that can help a believer to battle the supernatural forces that oppose God on his/her *own behalf* – a purely self-interested enterprise. It is commonly taught that, by having the right Godly traits

25. I would argue that the shift from direct address in the household codes to the genitive in 6:10 (*Tou loipou*) is due the change in genre (v. 10 is not part of the household code proper), rather than indicating a wholly new subject matter.

26. Neufeld, *Armour*, 117, argues, “The combination of power terminology in 6:10 is thus not unique to Ephesians...Its matrix is the attribution of power to God. Even in such texts where the people are depicted as participants in warfare, this vocabulary is reserved for the purpose of ascribing power to God alone... (the) power is God’s, and God’s to exercise.” Reinhard, “Personal Piety,” 530, concludes that Paul’s similar language of “putting on Christ” and putting on spiritual armor suggests that this is the primary exhortation in Ephesians 6:10-17 – to put on Christ. Although I imagine that Paul would not see this armoring for battle as antithetical to the putting on of Christ, the presence of Isaiah 59 suggests that Reinhard’s conclusion is too general. What does it mean to put on Christ, and how must these characteristics be displayed in order to do battle? This seems to me to be the thrust of Paul’s exhortations here.

27. See also Neufeld, *Armour*, 117.

28. This is different than the way Wisdom 5:17-20 incorporates the material, where “creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes.”

(much like possessing the “Fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23), the Christian can make sure that he/she is well-guarded from the influences of Satan/sin. I argue, however, that the influence of Isaiah 59 and its juxtaposition with the household codes suggests something else entirely.

A Contextual Reading of Isaiah 59 in Ephesians 6

The key to understanding what Paul is calling for in the armor of God passage is found, I would argue, in the relationship between the audience’s function as “Divine Warriors” in Ephesians 6:10-17 and the redefinition of social expectations within the community that is communicated in the household codes of Ephesians 5:21-6:9. We have seen that God’s function as Divine Warrior in Isaiah 59 only comes about when there is no other human who would stand against the injustice that is taking place within the community, both from insiders and outsiders (59:16). So, he arms himself with certain characteristics that allow him to function in a way that provides restoration and redemption.

If we take seriously the influence of the context of the intertext (the old context) in its new context, and we recognize that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation found in Isaiah 59 have now been transferred to the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 6, then the question becomes: What injustice has occurred or is occurring that needs to be addressed, and who are the recipients of that injustice? For that, we need look no further than the previous passage, the household codes. We’ve already noted how Paul has challenged the social expectations of family dynamics and the roles that each member of the household should fill, by addressing both members of each major pair of relationships (wife/husband, children/father, slave/master), and by making demands on the “superior” members of the household who were accustomed to treating their “inferiors” in any manner they deemed appropriate. Paul argues that, within the community, those members who have the power to oppress should love, avoid provocation, and devote their actions toward their “inferiors” to the Lord, rather than do what society allows them to do.²⁹ Thus, in an environment where oppression and selfishness is expected, justified, and encouraged, Paul calls the Ephesian Christians to stand against the norm and pursue justice in their relationships. He is looking for someone to stand up (Isaiah 59:16; Ephesians 6:11), and that “standing up” starts within the family.³⁰

How does this relate to Paul’s assertion that the armor enables Christians to “stand against” the devil (Ephesians 6:11)? Doesn’t he say that the struggle isn’t

29. Note Paul’s preference to use character traits in his household codes as well, such as submissiveness, love, and obedience.

30. Moritz, *Profound Mystery*, 191, also points out the parallel situations of the communities of Isaiah and the Ephesian church, where both are communities of disorder, and where God desires to restore peace through righteousness (Eph 2:13-17).

against “enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic power of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12)? Is it really human behavior that is the problem, or is it a supernatural one?

This seems to me to be a false dichotomy, particularly in Ephesians. Paul addresses the relationship between human life and supernatural powers several times in Ephesians, and he doesn’t see them as unrelated at all. In fact, for Paul, the two are inherently intertwined. In several chapters, Paul uses both human and supernatural language to describe the opposition against Christians (Ephesians 2:1-3; 3:10; 4:27). In Eph 6:12, the supernatural powers use *human* agents as well as cosmic ones (“rulers” [ἄρχαί,³¹ *archas*] and “authorities” [ἐξουσία,³² *exousias*]). It seems that Paul is intentionally drawing a contrast between these human agents of the devil (6:11) with God’s own human agents who should display his godly characteristics (6:10).

Moreover, he spends quite a bit of energy throughout the letter trying to correct Ephesian misunderstandings about the relationship between the physical and the spiritual – where they are apt to see a dichotomy between the two, he underscores their impact on each other. This is especially evident in his discussion of “the heavenlies” (for example, see 1:3 and 2:6). τὰς want to compartmentalize the physical and the spiritual, Paul states that Christians are somehow interacting with both in their present circumstances.

Similarly, Isaiah 59 – the primary intertext that Paul uses in this passage – has a human and cosmic element to it – God looks for humans to function as they should in restoring justice, but he finds none, so he does it himself. The two worlds (human and cosmic) interact here, and it is no different in Paul’s letter.³³ And it is not coincidental that, in perhaps his strongest language of reconciliation among believers (Ephesians 2:11-22), Paul reminds his audience that their inclusion in God’s household has been accomplished through Christ’s death, which has “broken down the dividing wall” of “hostility” among believers, and that this rebuilding of God’s people results in a spiritual Temple.

Paul is not calling for Christians to arm themselves against each other, but to clothe themselves with the very characteristics of God that will result in the kind of community that he desires for his people – a community free from oppression and defined by selfless behavior.³⁴ Behavior that goes against this expectation has behind it God’s opposition, which has cosmic and supernatural implications, but also has

31. Luke is particularly fond of using the term to refer to Jewish and Gentile leaders and officials (for example: Luke 8:41; 18:18; 23:13, 35; 24:20; Acts 14:2; 23:5; 16:19), but it shows up in other Pauline texts as well (Romans 13:3; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8; Titus 1:9).

32. Paul uses the term to refer to the governing (human) authorities over Roman Christians in Romans 13:1-3; Titus 3:1.

33. Janzen, *Divine Warfare*, also makes this observation throughout his article.

34. The community that Isaiah addresses is particularly defined by their selfish behavior, which motivates all of the travesties that he lists in Isaiah 59.

very real, tangible earthly effects, as evidenced by the fact that some of the “powers” listed in Ephesians 6:12 actually appear to be human agents (“the rulers” and “the authorities”).³⁵ Thus, I would argue *against* the interpretation that Best proposes (and that I cited at the beginning of this paper) – that the struggle to which Paul refers is devoid of human participation, but is a purely supernatural one. Those supernatural forces that oppose God are the ones who use humans as the vehicles for their war. This can affect the Christian community as well as the family dynamic, which is why Paul addresses both social groups in Ephesians.

Additionally, the selective nature of Paul’s intertextual application here is important, if the primary context which he has in mind is the social dynamic of the family. The equipment borrowed from Isaiah 59 in Ephesians is essentially *defensive* (he leaves out “vengeance” and “fury”) and the audience is ordered to stand firm (6:11). Despite the pressures for the father to behave according to the societal expectations of the *paterfamilias*, for example, his job is to love and protect his family, putting their needs and desires before his own. In its own way, this is both a defensive and offensive stance. They are tasked with the responsibility to institute change in their own spheres of power. For Christians to take care of their “own house” will result in a community devoid of oppression and injustice – the very state that required God’s intervention both against and on behalf of Israel. If the Ephesians do as Paul urges, God will have no need to wait in futility for someone to “intervene” (Isaiah 59:16). And just as God was victorious over his enemies, so also does Paul anticipate that Christians will be victorious over theirs, but the clean-up starts from within.³⁶

Conclusion

To summarize, in order for us to understand exactly what Paul is calling for in Ephesians 6:10-17, it must be understood in the context of its key intertext, Isaiah 59. There, God intervenes when no one else will on behalf of the oppressed to rid his

35. Along with Neufeld, *Armour*, 122-125. In many ways, Neufeld stops just short of my argument. He describes the battle as one that is being fought *on behalf of* blood and flesh (but against the spiritual forces). Yet he does not recognize a connection between that concept and the very tangible areas where this can take place – the ones that Paul has just mentioned in the household codes. However, that he earlier seems to want to hold on to a human/supernatural dichotomy, although this may be motivated by his observation that Wisdom 5 refers to Isa 59 in order to emphasize divine warfare against humans.

36. In addition to the linking of the contexts of Isa 59 and the household codes and the armor of God passage, there are other connections in the letter which suggest an interpretive relationship between the two passages in Ephesians. First, there is a link between the tones of the introduction of the household codes and that of Eph 6:18-20, which immediately follows the armor passage. Both the introduction to the household codes and the introduction to the final section of Ephesians encourage the audience to have the right attitude toward prayer, which involves mutual solidarity. Neufeld, *Armour*, 145-50, argues that this also serves to continue the Divine Warrior image. This bracketing suggests that there is more going on here than just two discussions of separate issues (the household and supernatural battle). Ultimately, Eph 5:18-6:18 as a whole demonstrates the need for the members of the community to look after one another and be alert (as if in battle).

people of those who seek injustice. What does that tell us about the nature of this armor and the Christian's role in bearing it? First, Paul is calling the Ephesian Christians to put on the armor that God had previously donned on behalf of the oppressed. Who would qualify as the oppressed in Paul's social context and in the immediate context of the passage? The household code provides that context, as it exhorts those who have the power in the societal structure of the family to live in subversion of the cultural norms of the day in their treatment of those who are deemed the weaker partner. Ultimately, this passage should not be read primarily as Paul's concern for the Ephesian Christians to guard themselves (individually) against the opposition, but to "stand up" for those who cannot defend themselves.

In his social context, then, Paul is calling for something radical. He is demanding Christians to protect and fight for those who cannot do it themselves. But what might surprise his audience is that the battle is closer than they might realize: their standing firm begins at home and with their own behavior toward each other. No longer is domination and superiority the behavioral expectation of the *paterfamilias*. Rather, he should act as Christ did, in love, patience, respect, and mutual solidarity with "the other" who is right under his nose. Paul, in citing Isaiah 59, calls his audience to be the advocate for those who have none, just as God has done for his people in the past. When that happens, the effects of their fight will reach well beyond their own family to the Family of God, with earthly and supernatural ramifications.