An embattled Paul portrays himself as both soldier and parent in 2 Cor 10–13. These metaphors assert Paul’s authority over the Corinthians, but at the same time undergo transformation in the light of the cross.

Conquest, Control, and the Cross

Paul’s Self-Portrayal in 2 Corinthians 10–13

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Paul had a difficult time with his congregation at Corinth. Paul sent 1 Corinthians, confident that it would clarify the issues and lay the troubles to rest, but the problems were not solved so quickly. In 2 Cor 10–13 Paul himself has become the focus of contention in Corinth, where his own apostolic practice has become the issue. Some see him and his performance as weak, and thus to be rejected.¹

With Paul and his ministry so much the object of complaint and criticism at Corinth, we would do well to examine his self-portrayal in 2 Cor 10–13. Along with “logos” (reasoned argument) and “pathos” (the stirring of emotions), “ethos” (self-presentation) was recognized by ancient rhetoricians as part of one’s attempt to persuade an audience. In rhetoric, “ethos” is the public presentation of oneself in ways that will convince the audience that the speaker is trustworthy, a person of fine moral character, deserving respect and appreciation.² A speaker’s use of images and metaphors in self-description draws the hearers into the communication event and calls for a response from them that is appropriate to those images. How will Paul portray himself to this congregation so that they will listen to what he has to say? What images can he use that will carry authority without alienating his hearers, and without denying his own message about the power of God in the weakness of the cross? What might this self-portrayal say to the church today, as it addresses critical issues of leadership and ministry?

We will look at only two of the images Paul uses to portray himself in 2 Cor 10–13: military conqueror, and parent of his converts. There are good reasons for
isolating these images: they are both used more than once in these chapters, and so we may be able to see how Paul modifies them as his argument progresses and as new rhetorical needs and opportunities arise. These images also raise problematic issues for the modern church concerned with the dangers of militarism and patriarchalism.

Conquest: Paul the soldier

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 contains the most extensive military imagery in Paul's letters.³ Paul presents himself as a conquering general at God's command. "Divine power" (dynata to theo) in v. 4 is best understood not as a phrase describing the quality of Paul's spiritual weapons, but as a dative of advantage describing the one on whose behalf they are used: Paul's weapons are mighty "in God's cause" (Jerusalem Bible). With this power, Paul will destroy "strongholds" (ochyroma), a term commonly used to describe military fortifications.⁴

. . . they sent a general against the Greeks and attacked them. Many of them were wounded and fell, and the Romans took captive their wives and children; they plundered them, conquered the land, tore down their strongholds (ochyroma), and enslaved them to this day (1 Macc 8:10).

These fortifications against the gospel, which Paul describes as "arguments" and "proud obstacles," he will tear down (kathaireō), again using a term common in descriptions of military conquest.

. . . you shall not bow down to their gods, or worship them, or follow their practices, but you shall utterly demolish (kathaireō) them and break their pillars in pieces (Exod 23:24).

. . . but their empire will be destroyed (kathaireō) by another king from the west, clad in bronze (Josephus, Antiquities, 10.209).⁵

The punishment that Paul threatens is also part of his military campaign (v. 6). "Ready to punish," one of three participles grammatically connected to "wage war" (v. 3), is a phrase used elsewhere to describe military preparedness (Polybius, Histories, 2.34.2).⁶ Moffatt's translation, then, is apt: "I am prepared to court-martial anyone who remains insubordinate, once your submission is complete" (10:6).

The use of such military imagery to portray oneself or one's hero was widespread in the ancient world. Epictetus understood himself as a soldier under God's command:

You make yourselves ridiculous by thinking that, if your general had stationed me at any post, I ought to hold and maintain it and choose rather to die ten thousand times than to desert it, but if God has stationed us in some place and in some manner of life we ought to desert that (1.9.24).⁷

The image is also common in Jewish sources.
One wise person went up against a city of warriors and brought down the stronghold (ochryōma) in which they trusted (Prov 21:22).

For the stronghold (ochryōma) which was built through persuasiveness of argument was built solely for the purpose of diverting and deflecting the mind from honoring God. And what greater sin against injustice could there be than this? But there stands ready armed for the destruction (kathairesis) of the stronghold the robber who despoils injustice and ever breathes slaughter against her (Philo, Conf Ling. 129–30).

Thus Paul draws on common military language and an image that was used in philosophical and religious texts to speak of those with authority. Paul is not interested in gaining the approval or admiration of the Corinthians for his ministry; as he said in 1 Cor 4:1–5, they have no right to judge Paul or his ministry. Rather, he desires their obedience to the gospel, and to him as its messenger. There is certainly an element of threat here, as Paul takes pains to remind the Corinthians with whom they are dealing (“I myself, Paul, I appeal to you,” v. 1), and then portrays himself as a military figure who comes with God’s power: This military image, and the threat it brings, sets the tone at the beginning of Paul’s argument in 2 Cor 10–13.

Is Paul overbearing here, trying to stifle the criticisms against him by brute force and authoritarian threat? Perhaps. Paul begins, however, with the reminder that although he does not wage battle according to the flesh, he lives in the flesh. Just how true that is will become painfully clear when Paul lists the struggles that attend his apostolic ministry (11:23b–29; 12:10). Even at the beginning, we find the paradox that will be central to Paul’s argument: God’s power is found working in and through human weakness. Paul the conqueror is also the one who comes with the “meekness and gentleness of Christ,” who shares in Christ’s humiliation (4:1).

Moreover, although Paul considers “tearing down” to be a part of his apostolic ministry (10:4), he is not eager to do this to his people in Corinth. Unwilling to march over them, he is instead waiting for and expecting their obedience. By speaking of punishing disobedience when their obedience is complete, Paul makes clear that they are not the enemy. Paul thus rhetorically separates the Corinthian church from the interlopers. The threat to the Corinthians remains, of course, should they fail to act in obedience to Paul. But he has no need to use his power against them in order to prove he is strong or victorious. Indeed, he is willing to forego such action, even if some will continue to regard him as weak, as long as the Corinthians will do what is right (13:7). His hope is that he will be allowed to “build up” in Corinth (10:8; 13:10; cf. Jer 1:9–10). Paul’s military action ultimately has a constructive purpose.

The second use of military imagery in 2 Cor 10–13 comes in 11:7–11. The humiliation Paul has mentioned in 10:1 is picked up in 11:7. His humiliation is seen in his practice of working to support himself. The military imagery here is more subtle than in chapter 10. In 11:8 Paul says that he “robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve” Corinth. “Robbed” (sylaō) does not describe general thievery but carrying off the spoils of battle. Paul describes
financial support from others as his "plundering" those churches to further his campaign in Corinth, and he describes the "support" (v. 8) he has received as a soldier's wage (opsonion, v. 8; cf. Luke 3:14; 1 Mace 14:32).\(^\text{12}\)

Paul again has used an image that carries tones of violence. Yet Paul will humiliate himself with manual labor because he refuses to "plunder" Corinth as he has others. The reason for his refusal: there are those who are accepting Corinthian money, claiming to have an authority in Corinth equal to Paul's (v. 12). Paul will not act like them, and so he will maintain a clear distinction for the Corinthians.

The final use of military imagery in these chapters occurs in 11:30-33. This is the beginning of Paul's "boasting in weakness" (11:30). Since 11:21 he has been boasting "as a fool" and "according to the flesh" (11:18). The sufferings that fill 11:23b-29 are not "weaknesses" according to the world's standards. The opponents at Corinth, who are fools themselves (11:19) and boast according to the flesh (11:18), are claiming similar experiences as evidence of their validity and dedication (note the comparative words in 11:23b). Speakers, teachers, and philosophers were expected to do just this.

From the discussion of our own person we shall secure goodwill by praising our services without arrogance and revealing also our past conduct toward the republic, or toward our parents, friends, or the audience . . . ; likewise setting forth our disabilities, need, loneliness and misfortune (Cicero, Ad Her. 1.5.8).\(^\text{13}\)

Here Paul is playing the fool because he is playing the opponents' game, and showing that he can outdo them.

At 11:30, Paul's argument turns a corner. All the boasting in the flesh has been foolishness; now Paul is ready to move on to "boast in the Lord" (10:17), which Paul will show means boasting in weakness. He has been accused of being weak (10:10; 11:21); now he is ready to embrace that description, because such weakness will reveal divine power. The foolish comparison with the intruders at Corinth is now dropped, and a new kind of boasting begins (11:31-33).

This major turn in Paul's argumentation also brings a transformed image, a modification of the military ethos that Paul had built in the earlier part of the letter. Paul's recounting of his ignoble retreat from Damascus seems to be a deliberate parody of a military award, the "Wall Crown" (corona muralis), a highly prized award given to the first soldier to scale the enemy's wall.\(^\text{14}\)

To the first man to mount the wall at the assault on a city, [the general] gives a crown of gold (Polybius, Histories, 6.39.5).

Although [Scipio] owed everything to everybody, the special distinction of a mural crown belonged to the man who had been the first to climb the wall (Livy, History, 26.48.5).\(^\text{15}\)

While awards were given to the first one up the wall, Paul tells how he came down a wall—secretly, in a basket, to escape. Rather than the conquering hero, Paul appears
here as the battlefield coward. The military image that Paul had established earlier in the letter is now being radically modified. The Corinthians will have to rethink their image of Paul and of power. In the first two uses of military imagery the language of weakness and humiliation tempers the impression, but now weakness has become the center of attention and the object of Paul's confidence. In what the world would judge as weakness and failure, God's power for salvation is at work. This new military image is the first step in this section of the letter, which will find its climax in the crucial statement: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). By God's grace Paul's weakness has been transformed into the vehicle of God's power; the powerful military image which the world would recognize, and which Paul hopes caught the Corinthians' attention earlier in the letter, has also been transformed.

Control: Paul the parent

Familial language fills Paul's letters. He prefers to address his churches as "brothers and sisters" (adelphoi). As in many times and places since, the early church experienced the painful truth that faith in Christ could mean the fracturing of families, the losing of "house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children" (Mark 10:29; cf. Luke 12:51–53). The community of the church became, in this age, the gift of a new family: "houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children" (Mark 10:30).

Adelphoi as an address is used 64 times in the undisputed Pauline epistles, and appears in every one of those letters. In a letter as long as 2 Corinthians, it is remarkable that the recipients are addressed as adelphoi only three times, and only once in the section we are examining (13:11). After the repeated address to "brothers and sisters" in 1 Corinthians, the scarcity of this form of address in 2 Corinthians is startling. The concentration of parental language is also striking. Paul speaks of himself as the father of the recipients, or as the parent without specifying which parental role, only five times (1 Thess 2:11; 1 Cor 4:14–15; 2 Cor 6:11–13; 11:2; 12:14). Four of these five uses are directed at the church in Corinth. The relative lack of sibling language and the relative stress on paternal and parental language in 2 Corinthians may well be a result of strained relationships and an appeal to the immense authority connected with the figure of the father in the Greco-Roman world.

Parental imagery was common in the Greco-Roman world, and applied to a wide range of figures. Teachers were understood as holding the position of parents:

Let [the teacher] therefore adopt a parental attitude to his pupils, and regard himself as the representative of those who have committed their children to his charge" (Quintilian, 2.2.5).

The image was current in philosophical circles as well; Epictetus was addressed as "father" by his students.
The Cynic has made all mankind his children; the men among them he has as sons, the women as daughters; in that spirit he approaches them all and cares for them all. Or do you fancy that it is in the spirit of idle impertinence he reviles those he meets? It is as a father he does it, as a brother, and as a servant of Zeus, who is Father of us all (Epictetus, Disc., 3.22.82).

In Judaism too, sages could speak as fathers (Prov 1:8; 4:1), and leaders at Qumran were described with paternal imagery.

Thou hast made me a father to the sons of grace, and as a foster-father to men of marvel; they have opened their mouths like little babes . . . like a child playing in the lap of its nurse (1QH 7.20–22).

[The Priest] shall love them as a father loves his children, and shall carry them in all their distress like a shepherd his sheep (Damascus Rule).

When an individual was a dominant force in founding or saving the state, he could assume a paternal role. Romulus was called “a god and a god’s son, the King and Father of the Roman City” (Livy, 1.16.3). The Athenians were called the “fathers” of the Ionian colonies (Herodotus, 7.51, 8.22). Military leaders were described, or described themselves, as fathers to their troops. When the general Pelopidas was killed, the Thebans eulogized him as “their father and savior and teacher of the greatest and fairest blessings” (Plutarch, Lives, “Pelopidas” 33). When Xenophon was criticized for his leadership (as Paul was being criticized for his in Corinth), he reminded the people of what he had done for them: “Then you called me ‘father,’ and you promised to keep me forever in memory as a benefactor” (Anabasis, 7.6.38). Political leaders too were called “father.” Caesar had experimented with the title “Father of the Country”; in 2 BCE Augustus formally adopted it as his self-designation. Patrons also called themselves fathers to their clients.

Paul portrays himself as the father of the bride, which is the church at Corinth (11:2). Just as Paul can speak of himself as their father because he was the one who first proclaimed the gospel to them (1 Cor 4:15), so too he can speak of that initial proclamation as his commitment to “marry” his daughter church at Corinth to Christ. Now is the time of engagement; Paul looks ahead to the consummation of the marriage at Christ’s coming. By portraying himself as the father of the bride, Paul draws on a traditional figure with immense authority. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, fathers had the power and responsibility to arrange the marriages of their daughters (and occasionally of their sons). Women in first-century Rome generally had more power and autonomy than women in the eastern part of the empire. The old style patriarchalism of the republic was eroding. Augustus’s marriage laws, for instance, made it illegal for a father to prevent his daughter or son from getting married. Ordinarily, a young woman would not marry without the consent of her father, but she could appeal in court against any refusal she saw as unreasonable. In Rome of the first century a betrothal was treated less seriously than in the east. By the second century BCE, engagement
promises were no longer legally binding. An engagement was an informal understanding, and could be easily renounced by either party.

The assumptions behind the image in 2 Cor 11:2 lie in the culture of the eastern Mediterranean, and particularly in Jewish tradition, in which the father's authority was more unyielding and the nature of betrothal more binding than in Rome. Betrothal carried legal ramifications. Deuteronomy treats a man who rapes a betrothed virgin as one who has "violated his neighbor's wife" (22:24). Mary is registered with Joseph because they are engaged (Luke 2:5). It is the responsibility of parents to safeguard their daughter's virginity until the wedding day. Both father and mother may present evidence of their daughter's virginity when she is falsely accused (Deut 22:13–19). But the father's role in safeguarding the daughter's virginity is particularly stressed.

A daughter is a secret anxiety to her father, and worry over her robs him of sleep; when she is young, for fear she may not marry, or if married, for fear she may be disliked; while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced and become pregnant in her father's house (Sir 42:9–10).

Paul fears that the bride, his daughter church at Corinth, may be seduced before the wedding day by new suitors who bring "another Jesus" (11:4), not the "one husband" to whom they have been promised. That seduction has not yet happened and Paul hopes that he can persuade them to remain faithful, but the danger is real. Paul therefore feels a "divine jealousy" (11:2). Literally, Paul says that he is "jealous with the jealousy of God." We would expect the groom to feel jealous when another suitor enters the picture. Yahweh would not tolerate Israel's unfaithfulness. In Christ, the church has likewise been bound to God. Here Paul, as the bride's father, shares God's own passionate and unrelenting desire for this union.

The danger to this betrothal brings to Paul's mind the figure of Eve. Just as the cunning serpent had deceived Eve (apataō, Gen 3:13), so Paul is afraid that these ministers of Satan (11:15) will deceive (exapataō) the church at Corinth with their cunning (11:3). The traditions about Eve's deception had undergone considerable development by the time of Paul. Often, that deception took on sexual connotations.

The mother of the seven sons expressed also these principles to her children: "I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house; but I guarded the rib from which woman was made. No seducer corrupted me on a desert plain, nor did the destroyer, the deceitful (apatês) serpent, defile the purity of my virginity (4 Macc 18:6–8).

Paul, however, does not emphasize a sexual aspect in this story. Although the imagery Paul has invoked, that of the attempted seduction of an engaged virgin, would lend itself easily to such themes, Paul does not imagine Eve's deception as sexual. In Paul's fears, it is the "thoughts" (noëmata) of the Corinthians that may be corrupted and led astray from fidelity to Christ, just as Paul takes thoughts (noëma) captive to the obedience of Christ through proclamation (10:5). The serpent
brought corruption through deceptive words; Paul fears the same thing is now happening in Corinth through the words of these “super-apostles” (11:5). Their speech is not “contemptible” like Paul’s (10:10), but they are in fact “false apostles, deceitful workers” and servants of Satan who use eloquent words to deceive (11:13–15). Moreover, Paul does not use Eve to symbolize women. There was a strong tendency in other writings to assign blame to Eve, and thus to all women.

From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die (Sir 25:24).

The devil entered paradise, and corrupted Eve. But Adam he did not contact (2 Enoch 31:6).33

Why does the serpent speak to the woman and not to the man? . . . woman is more accustomed to be deceived than man (Philo, Questions on Genesis, 1.33).

The Eve tradition is used to assign blame to women in the deuto-Pauline material (1 Tim 2:13–14), the only other mention of Eve in the New Testament: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and she became a transgressor.” The difference between these two New Testament uses of the Eve tradition is worth noting. In 2 Cor 11, Eve is not the archetype of all women; rather, she symbolizes all the people in the Corinthian church. It is very much like Paul’s use of Adam as an archetype of all people—men and women—revealing the universal experience of sin (1 Cor 15:22).

We may be pleased that Paul does not join others in placing the blame for sin on Eve or on women in general. Nevertheless, Paul’s self-presentation in this section remains one of control and authority, the authority of a father in a decidedly patriarchal system. Paul portrays himself as the guardian against a deception of cosmic and mythic proportions, comparable to the deception in Eden. In comparing the Corinthians to the deceived Eve, and in portraying them as a virgin being seduced before her wedding, Paul uses elements of shame to gain a hearing from his daughter church at Corinth. Together with the military image employed at the beginning of chapter 10, the image of Paul as father highlights his authority and power over the church at Corinth.

Just as Paul modified the military image after his “fool’s speech,” he modifies the image of parent. Parental imagery appears again in 12:14–15, as Paul returns to the thorny issue of refusing financial support from the Corinthians. This time, rather than dealing with it by means of a military image (11:7–11), Paul presents himself as a parent and reminds the Corinthians of the proper parent-child relationship.

Ancient philosophers discussed the parent-child relationship within the basic framework of patrons and clients. Parents were and would always remain the patrons and benefactors of their children, giving more than they received.

Then, too, the situation of parents is very different; for to those to whom they have already given they none the less give, and will continue to give, benefits, nor is there
any danger of their making false claims about having given them. In the case of other benefactors there must be the question not only of whether they have received a return, but also of whether they have actually given, while in the case of parents their services are unquestionable (Seneca, De Beneficiis, 3 11 2)

After discussing parents’ obligation to give guidance and correction, sometimes even against their children’s wishes, Seneca concludes “so the greatest of all benefits are those that, while we are either unaware or unwilling, we receive from our parents” (De Beneficiis, 6 24 1–2) Paul will continue to play this parental role with the Corinthians, even though they may be unaware of the love that stands behind his actions (12 15, cf 11 11)

Children could expect this patron-client aspect to mark the relationship with their parents throughout life, the debt to their parents could not be eliminated. The parents would remain benefactors, and the children would remain recipients

Remember that it was of your parents you were born, how can you repay what they have given to you? (Sir 7 28)

For a debtor ought to pay what he owes, but nothing that a son can do comes up to the benefits he has received, so that a son is always in his father’s debt (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 8 14 4)

Our parents almost always outdo us (Seneca, De Beneficiis, 5 5 2)

Appropriate repayment was expected, however, from one’s children. The importance of reciprocity was pervasive in Greco-Roman society, and shaped the understanding even of family relationships. At times this repayment took the form of financial support, especially in the parents’ old age. What children owed to their parents, however, was not primarily financial repayment, since children would never be able to repay with money or property what they owed to their parents. The goal of any relationship was balance, which would be maintained if the children responded with a lifetime of love and honor

the friendship between parents and children will be enduring and equitable, when the children render to the parents the services due to the authors of one’s being, and the parents to the children those due to one’s offspring. The affection rendered in these various unequal friendships should also be proportionate: the better of the two parties should receive more affection than he bestows, this produces equality in a sense between the parties (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 8 7 2)

Not to love one’s parents is to be unfilial, not to recognize them is to be mad! (Seneca, De Beneficiis, 3 1 5)

Paul asks, with pain and irony, whether he will be loved less because he loves more (12 15), the more he invests in this relationship, the less loving toward him the Corinthians become. Paul ignores traditions that mention financial support from children, and stresses that the parent remains the benefactor. Paul wishes the
Corinthians would take their proper role as his children. If Paul's self-presentation convinces the Corinthians, they will agree that what they owe Paul is not money, but love and loyalty.

Paul's use of parental imagery has undergone a transition similar to that in military imagery. An element of authority and control remains, for Paul portrays himself as parent to stop the Corinthians' unacceptable behavior. But Paul does not present himself as a father with all the corresponding weight of traditional authority. Here Paul presents himself simply as a parent, without defining which parental role that might be. In chapter 11 the paternal image focuses on Paul's authority over the church in Corinth, but in chapter 12 the parental image focuses on Paul's self-giving for the Corinthians, and on a proper relationship of love between them.

The parental imagery is potent. Paul has found a metaphor that does something the military imagery could not do: it stresses Paul's unique role in the church at Corinth. They may have many guardians, and even many generals; but they have only one father (or mother) in Christ (1 Cor 4:14–15). Thus the parental metaphor will carry more weight than the military metaphor. It not only shows Paul as an authority figure, but also recalls his unparalleled part in the formation of this community; they owe their very life as the church to him. It is a creative picture: the Word was spoken by Paul, and something new has been brought into the world.

With power comes the possibility of abuse. When one invokes the image of father, there is an inherent tension regarding the proper response from the children. Tradition calls children to recognize the power and authority of the father, and also to return love. The paternal image creates social distance by lifting the one party above the other in power and honor; at the same time, it suggests a strong mutual bond between the parties, since life itself is given and owed.38

The danger of paternalism is real. We have known too much of it as the church has worked to bring the gospel into different cultures; we have known too much of it in our own church bodies and congregations. Our dilemma is that love for someone can become confused with a desire to control them under the guise of care and protection. We may deny them a more mature role because we want to maintain our own control. That may be how the Corinthians perceived Paul's actions.39

Paul depicts the situation differently. His role as parent to the Corinthians is rooted in his first proclamation of the gospel among them. He certainly uses this role to maintain his right to correct and even punish these children if necessary; the fact that the Corinthians may no longer recognize the benefits Paul has given nor their own responsibility toward him does not remove this relationship. Yet Paul is looking not simply for respect and authority, but love. He will not be a tyrant; if he must punish his children, it will cause him distress and sorrow (2 Cor 2:1–4; 10:6, 8; 12:19–21; 13:10; 1 Cor 4:21).40 This is no romanticized picture of love; the lists of Paul's sufferings display its harsh realities. Paul will empty himself for his children as a good parent does.
The cross and self-portrayal

We have examined two images with which Paul portrays himself to one of his churches. They are not all that Paul has to say about himself and his role as apostle; they need to be balanced by Paul’s self-presentation as brother, mother, servant, and ambassador. These military and parental images, however, play a particularly important role in 2 Cor 10–13. Each is used to distinguish Paul from the interlopers at Corinth, and to draw the Corinthians to Paul’s side. The “super-apostles” had not been ordered onto this battlefield, and Paul is authorized and equipped to punish their disobedience. Nor are they the Corinthians’ father as Paul is. Paul draws on the authority and power inherent in each image early in his argument in order to gain a hearing from his church in Corinth.

As Paul’s argument progresses, though, both of these images are refracted through the cross. Thus it is necessary for us to notice not only what Paul says, but also at what point in the argument and for what purpose he says it. Paul’s “fool’s boast” (11:16–29) is a watershed in this argumentation. When Paul emerges on the other side of this foolishness, he is ready to boast in his weakness, which is proper boasting in the Lord (10:17), because in Paul’s weakness dwells the power of Christ (12:9–10). Paul’s military figure, striding onto the battlefield, becomes one who escapes down the wall, humiliated and defeated in the eyes of the world; but by God’s grace he is not seized by the powers of the world. The father who is responsible for guarding the virgin bride also shows himself to be the one who, like his Lord, will empty himself for the sake of his children (cf. Phil 2:7).

These military and parental images brought with them powerful expectations. Paul uses these societal stereotypes to gain his congregation’s attention. Yet the images do not remain unaltered. Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians will not be built on society’s models for power and authority. It is not on such authority, any more than it is on Paul’s eloquence, that his ministry of the gospel depends. These military and parental images are transformed in the light of the cross. This guards against manipulative misuse of the roles Paul invokes. He will continue to live out these roles in the weakness of the cross. This weakness is the power of the gospel, the power of Christ, the power of love poured out for the sake of the other. The cross has shaped Paul’s rhetoric in this letter; it has also shaped his relationship with the church at Corinth. As for the Corinthians, their proper response to the images Paul has presented is neither money nor simple submission, but love.

Hearing how Paul presents himself to his congregation in Corinth may help us reflect on our own ministries. In what ways do we envision and express the authority of ministry? It is easy for the church to adopt models from society—from corporation to volunteer organization. Paul would remind us that such images borrowed from society must not remain unchanged. The goal of ministry is not to turn a profit, or to let people do whatever they find personally fulfilling. The goal of ministry is to embody the cross for this community, to stubbornly live that relationship of self-giving love that is the power of God in the weakness of the cross. Paul’s
goal was to convince his readers to abandon views of ministry and church that were based on society's criteria of power, and to adopt instead a cruciform model. Though Paul uses images of social power to present himself as one with authority to the Corinthians, these images—which are potentially abusive and manipulative—are transformed by the cross. How willing are we to allow our own self-presentations and relationships to be shaped by such foolishness, in order that the word of the Crucified might be conveyed and lived?

NOTES


2. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, 1.2.3–4; Quintilian 6.2.8–19.


5. See also Philo, *Conf. Leg.* 130; idem, *Agr.* 86; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.2.5; 4.4.13; 5.1.35; Thucydides 1.4, 77; Polybius, *Histories*, 23.7.6; *Barnabas* 16.4.


7. Note also Socrates' use of military imagery to express his self-understanding in *Apology* 28D–29A.


9. The rhetorical use of threats is discussed in Quintilian 4.1.20–22.

10. It is not clear just how Paul would punish the intruders after the Corinthians returned to obedience, since presumably they would have been driven from town. Nevertheless, it is better to understand Paul's primary threat of punishment to be against the intruders rather than the Corinthians. So Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 464; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 306–07; C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 253–54; against Frederick Danker, *II Corinthians*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 153; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 439.


15. See also Livy 6.20.8; 10.46.3.

16. *Adelphi* as an address is used 20 times in 1 Corinthians, 10 times in Romans, 9 times in Galatians, 6 times in Philemon, 14 times in 1 Thessalonians, and twice in Philemon.
17 We should also note that three times Paul speaks of himself as a father to someone other than the recipient of the letter (Phil 2 22, 1 Cor 4 17, Phlm 10) Three times he describes himself as the mother of his readers, giving them birth and suckling them (1 Thess 2 7, Gal 4 19, 1 Cor 3 2) “Whose father I became” (hon egennêsa) in Phlm 10 could also be understood as a maternal image, “to whom I gave birth”

18 See Paul Barnett, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997) 83 n 9

19 For Epicurus and Pythagoras, see Abraham J Malherbe, “Exhortation in First Thessalonians,” NovT 25 (1983) 244 n 30


21 Ibid, 97 For paternal imagery in Judaism, see Anthony A Myrick, “‘Father’ Imagery in 2 Corinthians 1–9 and Jewish Paternal Tradition,” TynBul 47 (1996) 163–71

22 Michael Grant, History of Rome (New York Scribner’s, 1978) 259–60

23 Ibid, 260, Witherington, Conflict and Community, 167 n 145

24 We may compare this with Lucius, who following his initiation into the Isis cult addresses the priest Mithras as “my spiritual father” (Apuleius, The Golden Ass, 11 25)

25 It is this aspect which makes it necessary to understand Paul’s role here as the father of the bride, and not as the friend or “best man” to the groom, as suggested by Martin, 2 Corinthians, 332, and by Witherington, Conflict and Community, 445

26 The use of the marriage metaphor to describe the relationship between Israel and Yahweh is common in the prophetic material, see Isa 54 5, 62 5, Jer 2 2, Ezek 16 32, Hos 2 16–20 In the New Testament, this metaphor is used to describe the relationship between Christ and the church, see Matt 25 1–13, Mark 2 18–20, Luke 12 35–40, John 3 29–30, Eph 5 22–33, Rev 19 1–9, 21 1–2, 22 17

27 J P V D Balsdon, Roman Women (New York John Day, 1963) 177, Susan Treggiari, Roman Marriage Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian (Oxford Clarendon, 1991) 144 Women at times played an important role in arranging the marriages of their children Cicero finds that in his absence his wife has arranged the marriage of their daughter (Ad Att 6 6 1), Scipio arranges the marriage of his daughter, and on return home experiences the anger of his wife because she was not consulted (Livy 38 57 6–8) Such cases, however, are presented as exceptional

28 Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 147, cf Balsdon, Roman Women, 45

29 Balsdon, Roman Women, 176

30 Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 143–44

31 Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome (New Haven Yale University Press, 1940) 80, Balsdon, Roman Women, 177, Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 155–56 The ease and frequency with which betrothals were broken may be seen in Augustus’s attempt to legislate against the breaking of betrothals, the practice continued, and he was forced to give up enforcing such laws to their fullest (Suetonius, Augustus 54, Dio, Roman History 54 16)

32 See also Apocalypse of Abraham 23, Diognetus 12 7–8

33 Cited by Martin, 2 Corinthians, 333


35 Plato, Laws, 717C, Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 9 2 8, Mark 7 10–12

36 See Seneca, De Beneficiis, 5 4 1–5 5 4

37 See also Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 8 12 3, 8 14 2

38 See Stevenson, “Ideal Benefactor,” 421–36

39 On Paul as a spiritual father who attempts to lead his children to maturity, see Ernest Best, Paul and his Converts (Edinburgh T&T Clark, 1988)

40 See the comments on Moses’ correction and discipline of Israel as “a very kindly disposed father” in Philo, De Vita Moss, 1 328, cf Myrick, “‘Father’ Imagery,” 163–71

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