CHAPTER NINE

ANTISTHENES AND ODYSSEUS, AND PAUL AT WAR*

Paul’s use of military imagery in 2 Cor 10:3–6 deserves closer attention than it has received. Moffatt’s translation vividly reflects the descriptions of ancient sieges that underlie Paul’s statements:

I do live in the flesh, but I do not make war as the flesh does; the weapons of my warfare are not weapons of the flesh, but divinely strong to demolish fortresses—I demolish theories and any rampart thrown up to resist the knowledge of God, I take every project prisoner to make it obey Christ, I am prepared to court-martial anyone who remains insubordinate, once your submission is complete.

Most commentators have been content to list parallel expressions, but have rarely examined at any depth the literary or philosophical traditions that may have influenced Paul.1

PROVERBS, PHILO, AND PAUL

Proverbs 21:22 LXX, “A wise man assaults fortified cities, and demolishes the fortification in which the ungodly trusted” (πόλεις ὀχυρὰς ἐπέβη σοφὸς καὶ καθεῖλεν τὸ ὀχύρωμα, ἐφ‘ ὃ ἐπεποίθεισαν οἱ ἀσεβεῖς), is frequently simply cited,2 suggested as a passage to which Paul alludes,3 or claimed to be the

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1 Albrecht Oepke’s article on “ὅπλον” (TDNT 5 [1968]: 292–294) and Otto Bauernfeind’s on “στρατεύομαι” (TDNT 7 [1971]: 701–713) are singularly unhelpful. The Stoic parallels to the Pauline use of the military metaphor, especially those in Seneca, have frequently been noted. See Jan N. Sevenster, Paul and Seneca (NovTSup 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961), 156 n. 2. But 2 Cor 10:3–6 is usually neglected or entirely omitted from discussion. Sevenster approaches the subject from the virtue of bravery and denies that Paul has anything in common with Seneca.
3 Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (ICC 34; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 276; Hans Windisch, Der zweite Korintherbrief (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924), 297; Werner G. Kümmel
basis of his thought. Paul’s reference to confidence (τῇ πεποιθήσει) in v. 2 and his claim to demolish fortresses (καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων) in v. 4 have strengthened the suspicion that this passage loomed large in his thinking. Paul and Proverbs do both have in mind a fortified city that is attacked, but sieges were so common in antiquity, and the terminology of siegecraft so widespread, that the sharing of these few words hardly constitutes proof of dependence.

Paul’s description of his attack is much more detailed than that of Proverbs. In addition to the general statement that he has weapons to demolish fortifications (πρὸς καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων), he views his attack as part of a campaign (στρατευόμεθα, στρατεία), refers to the special nature of his weapons, draws attention to a particular defensive measure—a rampart that is thrown up (ὑψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον)—threatens to take every thought (νόημα) captive, and claims that he is prepared (ἐν ἑτοίμῳ ἔχοντες) to punish every disobedience. Certain of these details call for special comment. This is the only place where ὀχύρωμα appears in the NT. Its non-literal use in the LXX (cf. Lam 2:2), especially in Prov 21:22, has led scholars to surmise that the OT provided Paul with the image. The word was widely used, however, for military fortifications, so that an appeal to the OT must be supported by other evidence. Paul’s description of one feature of the defensive fortification as a “raised rampart” (ὑψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον) also belongs to the military science of siegecraft. Chrysostom identified ὑψωμα with πύργωμα, a defensive tower, but it has been objected that ὑψωμα with this meaning cannot be found in Greek usage. The word ὕψος for a tall defensive structure, however, is frequently found, for example, in the directions of Aeneas Tacticus (32.2) to “throw up in opposition wooden towers or other high structures” (ἀνταείρεσθαι πύργους ξυλίνους ἢ...