

## Book Review

*1-2 Corinthians* [The New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Ben Witherington III, gen. ed.]  
Craig S. Keener,

Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 297 pages.

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Readers will find this commentary a delight to use in their study of the Pauline letters to Corinth. Although only four volumes are completed (others are forthcoming), the *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* series (NCBC) is an updated revision of the older *CBC* series from the 1960s. Employing excellent scholars from both sides of the Atlantic who use current exegetical techniques, this series holds great promise for pastoral use. Keener's volume is exceptionally user-friendly, easy to read and comparable to William Barclay's *The Daily Study Bible* commentaries published in the twentieth century, though far better. The publisher aptly notes, "This commentary explains *1 and 2 Corinthians* [*sic*] passage by passage, following Paul's argument. It uses a variety of ancient sources to show how Paul's argument would have made sense to first-century readers, drawing from ancient letter-writing, speaking, and social conventions."

Let me list a number of valuable assets this book contains. Not often does one find both Corinthian letters together in a one-volume commentary, and both by the same author. (See, however, Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids, MI: W.B.

Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995]). This means much of Paul's life and ministry in Corinth is readily available to the student.

This book is at once scholarly and down-to-earth. With a grasp of both primary and secondary sources, Keener usually furnishes such an abundance of bibliographical sources the reader is overwhelmed. However, here he supplies primary (original language writings) resources he has not supplied in other places in such a way as to maintain commentary's usefulness without overweighting it. Where he thinks necessary, he refers the reader to other sources for fuller listings. He brings to bear upon every paragraph a number of first century social-cultural factors. As usual, he deals delicately and kindly with all views and arrives at solid conclusions

His knowledge and command of secondary sources (what others say) is extraordinary. He places bibliographical material in front of the commentary section—note the categories he supplies for *1 Corinthians*: Paul and Philosophy, Rhetoric and *1 Corinthians*, Politics and *1 Corinthians*, Social Setting of *1 Corinthians*, Primary Sources for Corinth, Studies of the Local Situation in Corinth or Its Church, Ancient Letters,

Paul and Jewish Tradition, Theology, Major Scholarly Commentaries, Serious Academic Commentaries, More Popular or Application-oriented Commentaries with Academic Interest, and Sample Articles and Monographs (these in some ten pages).

In the back of the commentary, he has an Author Index (with page numbers), Scripture and Apocrypha index (pages where he refers to these books), Index of Extrabiblical [*sic*] Jewish and Christian Sources (Church Fathers, Jewish sources: Pseudepigrapha and Talmud), Other Greco-Roman Sources, and a Subject Index. Readers can check out the references in the commentary and expand their understanding.

The commentary itself contains various sections. Foremost, the biblical text (NRSV) of the passage under consideration is given, followed by elucidation of that passage. The passages follow the flow of Paul's logic (book outline) and each is given a descriptive title. Special features occur as well, like a focused discussion on some aspect needing further attention (called "A Closer Look") and special sections on application (titled "Bridging the Horizons").

For Pentecostals and Charismatics, this book is much welcomed. Written by someone who is a passionate and experienced insider of the Pentecostal tradition, the book provides rich material on such themes as the Spirit and His gifts. Anyone's library will be enhanced by adding this volume to existing Pentecostal commentaries, such as Gordon Fee's *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987). By

contrast, Keener's work provides a deeper social and historical background. As is typical of Keener, he uses a host of sources, cited or not, to bring Paul in Corinth alive for the reader.

Here are two examples to give a flavor to the commentary. The first comes from the "Bridging the Horizons" section (120). On 1 Corinthians 12-14, Keener says, "Paul allows that inspired prayer in a tongue is a useful gift for private devotion. Defense mechanisms like rationalism and projection may obstruct cognitive prayer by deflecting admission of the genuine need; affective prayer with one's spirit, interpreted only afterward (14:15), might surmount such obstacles."

In another "Bridging the Horizons" section (139) on the collection in 1 Corinthians 16:1-12, he writes: "Early Christian references to tithing are rare and usually backward-looking (Matt 23:23; Lk 11:42; Heb 7:5-9). Apostolic teaching on possessions is in fact much more demanding than a tithe; the Gospels demand complete sacrifice, arguing that Jesus' followers should live like people matter more than possessions." Keener himself lives this kind of life.

For both private devotional life and for teaching and preaching material, Keener's commentary on the Corinthian epistles is a gold mine.