



title: 2 Corinthians Believers Church Bible
Commentary
author: Shillington, V. G.
publisher: Herald Press
isbn10 | asin: 0836190734
print isbn13: 9780836190731
ebook isbn13: 9780585249490
language: English
subject Bible.--N.T.--Corinthians, 2nd--Commentaries.
publication date: 1998
lcc: BS2675.3.S47 1998eb
ddc: 227/.307
subject: Bible.--N.T.--Corinthians, 2nd--Commentaries.



**Believers Church
Bible Commentary**

Elmer A. Martens and Willard M. Swartley, Editors

EDITORIAL COUNCIL

David Baker
Brethren Church

Estella B. Horning
Church of the Brethren

Robert B. Ives
Brethren in Christ Church

Lydia Harder
General Conference Mennonite Church

Gordon H. Matties
Mennonite Brethren Church

Paul M. Zehr
Mennonite Church

OLD TESTAMENT EDITOR

Elmer A. Martens
*Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
Fresno, California*

Allen R. Guenther (for *Jeremiah*)
*Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
Fresno, California*

NEW TESTAMENT EDITORS

Willard M. Swartley
*Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary
Elkhart, Indiana*

Howard H. Charles (for *Matthew*)
*Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary
Elkhart, Indiana*



Believers Church Bible Commentary

2 Corinthians

V. George Shillington

HERALD PRESS
Scottdale, Pennsylvania
Waterloo, Ontario

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shillington, V. G. (V. George)

2 Corinthians / V. George Shillington.

p. cm. (Believers church Bible commentary)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8361-9073-4 (alk. paper)

1. Bible. N.T. Corinthians, 2nd Commentaries. I. Title.

II. Series.

BS2675.3.S47 1997

227'.307dc21

97-37900

Canadian Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Shillington, V. G. (Valentine George), 1937-

2 Corinthians

(Believers church Bible commentary)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8361-9073-4

1. Bible. N.T. Corinthians, 2nd Commentaries. 1. Title. II. Title: Second Corinthians. III. Title: Two Corinthians IV. Series.

BS2675.3.S54 1997

227'.307

C97-932021-6



The paper used in this publication is recycled and meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Credits for Bible quotations appear on page 6.

BELIEVERS CHURCH BIBLE COMMENTARY: 2 CORINTHIANS

Copyright © 1998 by Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa. 15683

Released simultaneously in Canada

by Herald Press, Waterloo, Ont. N2L 6H7. All rights reserved

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 97-37900

Canadiana Entry Number: C97-932021-6

International Standard Book Number: 0-8361-9073-4

Printed in the United States of America

Cover and charts by Merrill R. Miller

07060504030201 009998 1098765432 1

*To my sons,
Ralph and Brad*

BELIEVERS CHURCH BIBLE COMMENTARY

Old Testament

Genesis, by Eugene F. Roop
Jeremiah, by Elmer A. Martens
Ezekiel, by Millard C. Lind
Daniel, by Paul M. Lederach
Hosea, Amos, by Allen R. Guenther

New Testament

Matthew, by Richard B. Gardner
Acts, by Chalmer E. Faw
2 Corinthians, by V. George Shillington
Colossians, Philemon, by Ernest D. Martin
1 and 2 Thessalonians, by Jacob W. Elias

Credits for Bible Quotations

Scripture versions are used by permission, all rights reserved, and unless otherwise indicated are from the NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Other versions are used briefly in making comparisons: NAB, *New American Bible*; KJV, *King James Version*; NASB, *New American Standard Bible*; NEB, *New English Bible*; NIV, *New International Version*; Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*; RSV. *Revised Standard Version*; VGS, by the author.

CONTENTS

Abbreviations and Cross-References	8
Series Foreword	9
Author's Preface	11
Introduction to 2 Corinthians	13
LETTER OF RECONCILIATION	
Right Relationship in Ministry, 1:19:15	
Variation 1: Solidarity in Affliction and Joy, 1:12:13	28
The Salutation, 1:1-2	30
Thanksgiving: The Afflicted Consoled, 1:3-7	33
The Sentence of Death and the Witness of Conscience, 1:8-14	39
God's Unequivocal "Yes," 1:15-22	43
Heart Truth: As God Is My Witness, 1:23:4	48
An Offender Forgiven, 2:5-11	53
Looking for Titus in Macedonia, 2:12-13	58
Variation 2: New Ministry in the Light of Christ, 2:147:4	59
The New Operation of God's Spirit, 2:143:18	61
Renewal of Human Life, 4:15:10	88
The Reconciling of the World to God, 5:117:4	117
Titus's Positive Report: Retrospect and Prospect, 7:5-16	158

Variation 3: Equity Through a Financial "Gift of Blessing" 8 19 :15	170
Collection Encouraged, Collectors Commended, 8:1-24	172
A Second Appeal for the Collection, 9:1-15	190
LETTER OF DEFENSE	
Response to Betrayal in Ministry, 10: 113:13	
Variation 4: Weak Minister, Strong God, 10:113:13	202
God's Minister Under Fire: Boasting Ridiculed, 10:1-18	204
Forced to Boast as a Fool, 11:112:13	214
Warning, Conclusion. Projected Third Visit, 12:1413:10	239
Closure , 13 :11 -1 3	252
Outline of 2 Corinthians	256
Essays	260
Map of the New Testament World	283
Bibliography	284
Selected Resources	299
Index of Ancient Sources	301
The Author	309

Abbreviations and Cross-References

(Barrett, 1973:56ff.) Sample reference to Bibliography:
as needed,

author's name, date, volume and page numbers

e.g. for example

lit. literally

LXX Greek Old Testament, Septuagint

ABD/ME/MM/TDNT See Bibliography

notes Explanatory Notes for each section

NRSV Sample acronym for Bible version: see
copyright page

NT/OT New Testament/Old Testament

[Opponents, p. 000] Sample reference to essay at back
of book

TBC Text in Biblical Context, after notes in each
section

TLC Text in the Life of the Church, after TBC in
each section

SERIES FOREWORD

The Believers Church Bible Commentary Series makes available a new tool for basic Bible study. It is published for all who seek more fully to understand the original message of Scripture and its meaning for today. Sunday school teachers, members of Bible study groups, students, pastors, and other seekers. The series is based on the conviction that God is still speaking to all who will listen, and that the Holy Spirit makes the Word a living and authoritative guide for all who want to know and do God's will.

The desire to help as wide a range of readers as possible has determined the approach of the writers. Since no blocks of biblical text are provided, readers may continue to use the translation with which they are most familiar. The writers of the series use the *New Revised Standard Version*, the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, and the *New American Standard Bible* on a comparative basis. They indicate which text they follow most closely, as well as where they make their own translations. The writers have not worked alone, but in consultation with select counselors, the series' editors, and the Editorial Council.

Every volume illuminates the Scriptures; provides necessary theological, sociological, and ethical meanings; and in general, makes "the rough places plain." Critical issues are not avoided, but neither are they moved into the foreground as debates among scholars. Each section offers explanatory notes, followed by focused articles, "The Text in Biblical Context" and "The Text in the Life of the Church."

The writers have done the basic work for each commentary, but not operating alone, since "no . . . Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20; cf. 1 Cor. 14:29). They have consulted

with select counselors during the writing process, worked with the editors for the series, and received feedback from another biblical scholar. In addition, the Editorial Council, representing six believers church denominations, reads the manuscripts carefully, gives churchly responses, and makes suggestions for changes. The writer considers all this counsel and processes it into the manuscript, which the Editorial Council finally approves for publication. Thus these commentaries combine the individual writers' own good work and the church's voice. As such, they represent a hermeneutical community's efforts in interpreting the biblical text, as led by the Spirit.

The term *believers church* has often been used in the history of the church. Since the sixteenth century, it has frequently been applied to the Anabaptists and later the Mennonites, as well as to the Church of the Brethren and similar groups. As a descriptive term, it includes more than Mennonites and Brethren. *Believers church* now represents specific theological understandings, such as believers baptism, commitment to the Rule of Christ in Matthew 18:15-20 as crucial for church membership, belief in the power of love in all relationships, and willingness to follow Christ in the way of the cross. The writers chosen for the series stand in this tradition.

Believers church people have always been known for their emphasis on obedience to the simple meaning of Scripture. Because of this, they do not have a long history of deep historical-critical biblical scholarship. This series attempts to be faithful to the Scriptures while also taking archaeology and current biblical studies seriously. Doing this means that at many points the writers will not differ greatly from interpretations which can be found in many other good commentaries. Yet these writers share basic convictions about Christ, the church and its mission, God and history, human nature, the Christian life, and other doctrines. These presuppositions do shape a writer's interpretation of Scripture. Thus this series, like all other commentaries, stands within a specific historical church tradition.

Many in this stream of the church have expressed a need for help in Bible study. This is justification enough to produce the Believers Church Bible Commentary. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is not bound to any tradition. May this series be an instrument in breaking down walls between Christians in North America and around the world, bringing new joy in obedience through a fuller understanding of the Word.

THE EDITORIAL COUNCIL

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Numerous efforts have been made to grasp the mind of Paul, to know his motives and his world mission. The efforts have borne much fruit, but the end of the search is not yet. Paul's thought and life is as elusive as it is illuminating. This quality of the Pauline literature draws interpreters to the text like bees to nectar. And I am no exception.

After completing a doctoral dissertation in the early 1980s on Paul's thought, under the rigorous supervision of Professor E. P. Sanders, I felt as though my adventure with Paul had only begun. What a delight in 1992 to be invited to write a commentary on 2 Corinthians for the Believers Church Bible Commentary series! I accepted without a moment's hesitation and soon began to make plans to carry out serious research, specifically related to this puzzling document in the Pauline corpus.

Concord College graciously granted me a full-year sabbatical study leave for the calendar year of 1994. I gladly record my sincere gratitude to Concord College administration for financial and moral support during my research and writing.

Most of 1994 was spent in New College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland. New College accepted me into their faculty as a visiting scholar, which gave me all the privileges necessary for my work on 2 Corinthians. The substantial library resources in New College related to my research provided most of what I needed to complete the project. Library personnel at New College demonstrated the best in library assistance and deserve well-earned recognition.

To the New Testament editor of the series, Professor Willard M. Swartley, I offer heartfelt thanks for his careful reading of the manu-

script and for his insightful comments along the way. Likewise, I owe much to the editorial council of the series for their suggestions on how to make the manuscript sufficiently readable to a wide audience.

Herald Press has earned my vote of confidence for their prompt publication of the manuscript and for the concerted promotion of this volume in the series.

Part of the procedure for writing in this series requires several consultants to read each major section once completed. These readers spent many hours perusing the manuscript in progress. To them I acknowledge an immense debt of gratitude. Professor Gordon Zerbe filled the role of peer consultant. He is an acknowledged Pauline scholar. Cheryl Pauls was the reader for gender and cultural awareness. Cheryl was herself working on her Doctor of Musical Arts at the time of reading my manuscript. Elfrieda and David Duerksen were the lay readers. Their perspective and constant encouragement added an important dimension to the finished product. To all of these I say. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

In no small way I recognize my wife, Grace, for her patience and encouragement at every phase of the work. Grace was obliged to explore the beautiful city of Edinburgh on her own, for the most part, while I spent my days and several nights of the week in the library of New College. Her support behind this work is greatly appreciated.

V. GEORGE SHILLINGTON
WINNIPEG
JULY 1996

INTRODUCTION TO 2 CORINTHIANS

The Thought World of 2 Corinthians

Of all the letters of Paul in the New Testament (NT), none reveals the emotional side of his Christian character more boldly than 2 Corinthians. The letter was written out of personal conflict with the church at Corinth. This language of 2 Corinthians exhibits deep feelings of hurt and grief in the heart of this foremost Christian missionary of the first century.

At the same time, Paul's painful experiences are offset by the grace of Jesus Christ that filled his being. His vision of the Messiah (Christ) past, present, and yet to come guides his thought throughout the multifaceted script of this letter. Whether he is arguing against the charges of opponents, exhorting the congregation to piety, or interpreting the Scriptures for the new cultural situation, a single dynamic center pervades his thought from beginning to end: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:2; 13:13).

Paul's new vision of God's Messiah corresponds aptly with his recent experience of the call of God into Gentile world mission. The Corinthian congregation(s) of Christians are part of the result of that mission. Paul's correspondence with them in 2 Corinthians provides a window through which to view the kaleidoscope of *Christ-at-work in-the-world* as transforming agent of the Redeemer-God. The view includes the following:

- The Messiah of God, crucified and raised, present in the Spirit, has become the lens through which to interpret the Scriptures (3:7-18).
- The glory of this Christ surpasses even that of Moses, the great mediator of the law of the Lord to Israel (3:7-11).
- The Spirit of the resurrected Christ renews the human spirit (4:13-18).
- The same Spirit guarantees the final glory of believers (5:5; 1:22).
- The new creation through the resurrected Messiah of God ensures the transformation of the mortal body into a body eternal (5:1-17).
- Christ acts as equalizer between different groups, as evidenced in the collection of money from Gentile Christians in Corinth for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (8:19:15).
- Paul's experience of Christ answers the question of suffering in mission, and of the place of human "weakness" in the plan of God to save the world (10:112:13).

Reading the Rhetoric of 2 Corinthians

Unlike the dogmatic array of ideas given above, Paul clothes the sweep of his Christian thought in argument. Argument is not a clear-cut setting forth of truth. Argument aims at persuading readers to adopt a point of view by using the literary instrument of rhetoric. Ancient and modern orators employ the rules of rhetoric to convince their audiences to think differently. In this century Martin Luther King Jr., for example, mastered the use of social rhetoric to persuade the American people of the need for equal rights for all ethnic groups, particularly African-Americans in the United States. In his time Paul likewise employed the rules of rhetoric currently in use among the educated people of the Mediterranean world.

There were schools of rhetoric from the time of Aristotle of Athens into the Latin period (as shown, for example, in the works of Cicero and Quintilian). Paul was himself an educated man living in Greek culture. He certainly knew the rules of rhetoric, if not from studying in a school, then from observing rhetoric at work in the speeches and writings of his day. Whatever his formal education in the art of rhetorical address, Paul's argumentation in 2 Corinthians is marked by forms of writing intended to affect the Corinthian audience. He wanted to redirect their thinking from its present course.

Among the many elements of ancient rhetoric, a few stand out in

2 Corinthians, especially in the second main part, chapters 10-13. Paul uses irony, sarcasm, and parody to defuse his opponents' criticisms of him among the Corinthians, and to win back the confidence of his friends at Corinth. For example, in the section often called "the fool's speech" (11:112:13), Paul plays the part of the fool to make his rival apostles at Corinth look like the real fools, and himself the genuine apostle of Christ. In response to the charge from the Corinthians that his refusal of financial support is an insult to them and a mark of weakness in Paul himself, he responds sarcastically, *Forgive me this wrong!* (12:13). The form of address is biting throughout the last four chapters (10-13) and may thus be called a rhetoric of denunciation.

While the tone of language in chapters 8 and 9 is less sharp, it is no less forceful. The Corinthians have neglected their commitment to complete the collection for Jerusalem. In chapters 8 and 9, Paul seeks to persuade them to keep their word and to collect the money. He uses the example of the generous gift from the Macedonians who are poorer than the Corinthians; he cites the incarnation of Christ in economic terms: *He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor* (8:9). By this and other rhetorical means, Paul writes *affectively*. He fills the language of his argument in such a way as to make his readers feel that they need to change their thinking and acting to become more equitable. The language of chapters 8 and 9 may thus be called a rhetoric of equalization.

The persuasive speech in the first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians is more conciliatory. The language of reconciliation occurs variously at several points. Paul takes some responsibility for causing pain to the Corinthians, and thus his rhetoric takes a different turn. The tone and texture of the arguments are more tender and more empathetic than that of the last four chapters. The readers are persuaded to join Paul rather than to judge him, to accept him rather than to accuse him. The arguments of these early chapters thus manifest a rhetoric of reconciliation.

This variety of rhetoric in 2 Corinthians, together with the differences in subject matter from one part to the next, has prompted many questions pertaining to the interpretation of the various texts. The more pertinent of these questions are focused in the Essays at the end of the commentary. For purposes of this introduction, a few other considerations may facilitate the reading of the commentary.