

Reflections

reading notes

FEBRUARY 2006—*The Value of Sequels*

N. T. Wright, in his book *Jesus and the Victory of God*, argues, “The understanding of any event is not only bound to involve, but may well be enhanced by, the understanding of its sequel” (p. 109). He applies this to the relationship that exists between the Gospel accounts and the book of Acts. Acts may clear up whatever question a person may have about Jesus, His work, His mission, or His teachings.

For example, there is no debating the fact that the subject of baptism has stirred up conflict for modern churches. Questioning whether it is for the remission of sins or not is the issue.

An article appeared in our local paper, written by the preacher for a mega-church in the area, titled, “Many try to cloud the water by adding to Gospel.” The writer equates baptism to “legalism,” “salvation by works,” and adding a “man-made regulation to the grace of God.” I agree with the writer when he affirms that salvation is by grace and not by law, or works (Rom 4:1ff), but by the blood Jesus shed on the cross. What I disagree with is placing baptism in diametric opposition to God’s grace. The writers of Scripture do no such thing.

If it is the case that, “The understanding of any event is not only bound to involve, but may well be enhanced by, the understanding of its sequel,” let’s look at the commission Jesus gave His apostles in light of the book of Acts, its sequel. While space does not allow an exhaustive treatment of the matters, we can at least provide a beginning point.

Jesus commissioned his apostles to “...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Acts Two reports the events that inaugurated the church. Peter preaches the gospel—the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He concludes, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified” (2:36). He accuses the audience of murdering the Son of God. They respond by crying out, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said, “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). Read the entire book of Acts to see for yourself that Luke nowhere writes of baptism as ever being opposed to God’s grace, and never is it referred to as a work of law. It is a work of faith. No writer in the New Testament treats the matter otherwise. I encourage you to read the book of Acts keeping in mind that it is a sequel, in particular, to Luke, but historically to all four gospel accounts. Take note of how the church carried out the commission Jesus gave the apostles to see if it sheds any light on the commission itself.

Steven Lloyd

